

Spirit Grooves Archive

Miscellaneous Writings — Book One 2026

Articles 1–100

By Michael Erlewine

SpiritGrooves.net



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Coming soon

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

October 27, 2023

This is Spirit Grooves.

“WAKE UP, WAKE UP FRIEND OWL”

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

October 27, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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It happens almost like clockwork, every few months, I realize that that I have strayed from the straight and narrow enough to need a wake-up call and finally (so it seems) I get it. I wake back up, usually thanks to some small shock or another.

And in the intervening time I have managed to wander off track and find myself in the weeds once again, so to speak.

It must be that my internal GPS is sputtering and intermittent, and there is of course the little ‘devil in my ear’ that encourages me to do what is not in my best interests. I should know better by now.

One clear signal is that my health begins to decrease, usually caused by what I call ‘snacking’ on my part. It seems that no matter how carefully I put up guard rails from eating things I shouldn’t, I am ingenious at finding new ways of rationalizing, new excuses to get around that watchfulness and defeat it. It’s always something.

And the result is the same: my workrooms get messy. I don’t put things away but allow everything to accumulate, and ignore, ignore, ignore, while waiting for the event I’m talking about right here, catching myself, and turning over a new leaf or something to that effect. And I find myself gaining weight.

These are all red flags, warning signals that should slow me down, but for some hard-to-understand reason, I am adept at ignoring them. I let the whole situation accumulate until... until there is a flash of insight like a thunderclap that turns the upset applecart back upright again.

And from that moment of insight, that thunderclap, everything begins to heal itself, to change, and the whole process is reversed. I clean up my mess, put things away, and stop snacking. And my weight moves back to normal.

And it’s not that I don’t understand the process. I do, but it seems I’m in a kind of waking sleep, a walking zombie that can kind of vaguely see the problem accumulating, but I’m frozen like in one of those dreams when you can’t seem to raise even a finger to do something about it.

As mentioned, it takes some kind of shock to wake me up, unfreeze what's frozen, and turn it all around. And it's not a slow pull out of it, but more like an instantaneous waking up, seeing of the problem, and immediately doing something about it. Welcome back, my wife tells me.

I'm once again on track and all the neglected areas are reforming, the snacking ceases, and I feel clean and healthy once again. Not exactly a vacation.

I know that I am not the Lone Ranger in all of this, and that many to most of you know of something similar in your own lives, which is why I write this.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

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Hitchhiking with Bob Dylan

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

October 27, 2023

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In the late 1950s and early 1960s I would hitchhike to New York City often. Back then unless you had some old junker of a car to borrow, you hitchhiked. Heading out of Ann Arbor, the bad places to get stuck hitchhiking were down by the prison in Dundee, Michigan or trying to get around Toledo, Ohio, that sharp left turn toward the east. Once you got past those areas, it went pretty smoothly, usually. And we would hang in the Village in New York City, sleeping on floors wherever we could.

I remember being there with Perry Lederman and Bob Dylan back in June of 1961. Lederman is how I met up with Dylan. They were already friends. Perry Lederman was a phenomenal instrumentalist on the guitar. If Dylan and I were in touch today, we would still marvel at what a player Lederman was.

Lederman played Travis-style, which we used to term “3-finger picking” and his playing was unmatched. Lederman was not a vocalist, and when he did sing it was not special, but he could play like no one I have ever heard. When Lederman took out a guitar, people would listen and marvel. Each song was like hearing a mini-symphony, with an overture, the main theme, variations, and an ending. It was crystal clear and drilled right into your brain.

I traveled with Lederman a number of times and later in 1964 spent time with him during the year I spent in Berkeley, California where both of us were living at the time. After that, I don’t believe I ever saw him again. He died some years ago now and, although there was a CD issued after his death, it was not of his early playing, but something made later and not representative, a shadow of himself, IMO.

Perry Lederman was also expert at finding and selling old Martin guitars, scavenging them out of attics and garages, fixing them up, and selling them. While traveling with Lederman, I have seen some of the best and rarest old guitars in the world, like double and triple-0 martins with intricate purfling around the edges, rosewood and ebony bridges, and intricate inlaid necks and headstocks, sometimes with the Tree-of-Life design. It would be hard to put a price of any kind on these guitars today. I had one for a while, an old Koa wood Hawaiian guitar. I wonder what I ever did with it? Anyway, back to New York City and the spring of 1961.

I have memories of Izzy Young proprietor of the Folklore Center on MacDougal Street in the village. We would hang out there because we had no place else to go and also because that is where you met other players and like minds. Back then, we all smoked all the time, Lederman, me, Dylan, everyone. Cigarettes, caffeine, and some alcohol. That was the thing. Not much alcohol back then.

I don't know how many days we were in the city on this trip, which was in June of 1961, but it was probably a while. We were hitchhiking and tended to spend at least a day or so at each main stop before moving on. Plus, Lederman's mom lived in Brooklyn. I remember visiting her one time and she served us matzo ball soup and I sat at a small kitchen table by a window looking out. I quietly ate my soup while Perry and his mom got caught up. I don't remember how we got out to Brooklyn or back to the city. It could have been by bus. Hitchhiking in the city was not so good.

What I do remember is one night during that trip is being at Gerde's Folk City on West 4th Street in the West Village with Dylan and Lederman. The three of us were all just hanging out. In those days we stayed up late, usually most of the night. Who knows where we would sleep, but it was not often comfortable, and we were in no hurry for bed. That particular night, I remember the guitar player Danny Kalb was playing at Gerdes. He was being featured that night or week. Kalb later became part of the group "The Blues Project."

I am sure Kalb was enjoying his prominence and I can remember him playing, the lights on him, and Dylan, Lederman, and I standing off toward the shadows. Perhaps it was packed, because I recall walking around in a crowd and there was not a lot of light. Bob Dylan was not happy about Kalb. I think we all felt that way because Kalb did have an air about him of 'better than thou', and who could blame him. He was the man of the hour that night at Gerdes Folk City. That was 'The' place.

I can't remember whether Dylan played a few songs later that night himself or perhaps he or Lederman played some tunes elsewhere. I don't recall. But I do recall his being irritated by Kalb, and dissing Kalb was not hard to do. As mentioned, he was just a little too full of himself at the time. After all, Gerdes was where all of the folkies wanted to play. And Dylan had played there with John Lee Hooker that previous April.

Thinking back, I don't think it was jealousy on Dylan's part with Kalb. He was not petty, as I recall. He was probably just itching to let all of us know he was Bob Dylan and wondered why nobody could see this right off. Back then (and it is not so different today), if you had something to sing or had worked on your stuff, you wanted a chance to play and show it off. Dylan was a nervous type and it showed.

Keep in mind that back then Bob Dylan was still trying to find out for himself who he was. This was just before he recorded his first album, that coming fall. I can remember another time, in Ann Arbor, about a year later, when Dylan came to town. He looked me up because we knew each other and I helped him put on a concert at the U-M Michigan Union, and they even spelled his name wrong on the poster.

Michigan Daily Sunday, April 22, 1962

Anyway, the next morning after the concert, Dylan and I were sitting in the MUG (Michigan Union Grill) at one of those little gray Formica tables for hours, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes while we waited for a review of the concert that Dylan had done the night before as part of the University of Michigan Folk Festival on Sunday April 22, 1962. As mentioned, I am told that I helped make that gig happen. I don't remember.

Yet I do remember that Dylan was very concerned about how it went over. That is most of what we talked about. He wanted to know how he was received. This was before he had the world at his feet.

When the paper finally came out and we got a copy, sure enough Dylan got a good review. With that he was soon at the edge of Ann Arbor, backpack on, guitar in hand, and hitchhiking to Chicago and the folk scene there. That was probably the last I ever saw of him.

Back then, there was an established route that folkies like Dylan and me travelled. It went from Cambridge to NYC to Ann Arbor (sometimes to Antioch and Oberlin) to the University of Chicago to Madison and on out to Berkley. It was the folk bloodstream that we all circulated on, either hitchhiking or commandeering some old car for the trip. Most of us hitchhiked.

Early folk stars like Joan Baez and the New Lost City Ramblers did not hitchhike, but they still sat around with us in the Michigan Union drinking coffee.

And another time I remember hitchhiking with Dylan and Lederman, heading out of New York City down the road to Boston and on up to Club 47 in Cambridge. Here was Dylan, standing on the side of the road with a big acoustic guitar strapped around his shoulder, playing, while I stuck out my thumb. I remember the song "Baby Let Me Follow You Down," in particular. Even though I did not know at the time that this was "Bob Dylan," it still was pretty cool. This is the life we all wanted to live back then. We were chasing the Beats and reviving folk music.

And Cambridge was another whole city and atmosphere. For some strange reason, I seem to remember the Horn & Hardart automat there, and trying to get food from it. Club 47, like "The Ark" in Ann Arbor, was one of the premier folk venues in the country, even back then. Today Club 47 is known as 'Club Passim' and my daughter, May Erlewine, a well-known singer/songwriter in the Midwest, plays there on her east-coast tours.

Cambridge was where we left Dylan that time. He was heading out west hitching along the interstate toward I believe it was Saratoga Springs or perhaps it was Schenectady, New York for a gig. Perry Lederman and I were hitchhiking on over to New Hampshire and Laconia to attend the annual motorcycle races there, which is another story. I don't know where we slept at the races. I remember it being just on the ground, but still kind of cold out at night, even in June.

And the motorcycle races were incredible. Large drunken crowds that, when the official races were not being run, would gather and part in the middle just enough to allow two motorcycles to run first gear while the crowd cheered.

The problem was that the crowd pressed in too close and every so often one of the cycles would veer into the crowd and their handlebars would tear someone's chest out. The ambulances were going non-stop way into the evening. And it seemed the crowd never learned. It was scary and very drunk out. I remember riding on the race track on the back of a big Norton motorcycle at almost 100 miles an hour, not something I would do today.

This all took place in mid-June of 1961. The Laconia, New Hampshire races were held from June 15 through the 18th that year. This would put us in Gerdes Folk city some days before that.

As to what kind of "person" Bob Dylan was, in all sincerity, he was a person like any of us back then, a player or (in my case) a would-be player. Dylan and

I are the same age, born a month or two apart. All of us were properly intense back then. I was 20 years old in 1961. So was Dylan. Imagine!

I vaguely remember Dylan telling me he was going to record an album or just had recorded one; it could have been the Harry Belafonte album where he played harmonica as a sideman on "Midnight Special," I don't know. I believe it was later that year that Dylan recorded his first album on Columbia. I don't remember seeing him much after that, other than a year later in Ann Arbor.

Something that I got a lot, mostly years ago, was the comment that Bob Dylan really can't sing. I addressed this in an article I wrote years ago, some of which appeared in the biography of jazz guitar great Grant Green in the book "Grant Green: Rediscovering the Forgotten Genius of Jazz Guitar by Sharony Andrews (Grant Greens daughter) and published by Backbeat Books. My full article is called "Groove and Blues in Jazz," which is at this link for those interested, and below is an excerpt:

"Groove and Blues in Jazz"

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/Groove%20and%20Blues%20in%20Jazz%20BOOK%20FIN.pdf>

Grant Green: THE Groove Master

"All that I can say about Grant Green is that he is the groove master. Numero uno. He is so deep in the groove that most people have no idea what's up with him. Players like Stanley Turrentine, Jimmy Smith, Kenny Burrell, and many other really great soul jazz artists are also groove masters. But the main man is Grant Green. He is so far in the groove that it will take decades for us to bring him out in full. He is just starting to be discovered.

To get your attention and make clear that I am saying something here, consider the singing voice of Bob Dylan. A lot of people used to say the guy can't sing. But it's not that simple. He is singing. The problem is that he is singing so far in the future that WE can't yet hear the music. Other artists can sing his tunes and we can hear that all right. Given enough time... enough years... that gravel-like voice will sound as sweet to our ears as any velvety-toned singer.

"Dylan's voice is all about microtones and inflection. For now, that voice is hidden from our ears in time so tight that there is no room (no time) yet to hear it. Some folks can hear it now. I, for one, can hear the music in his voice. I know many of you can too.

Someday everyone will be able to hear it, because the mind will unfold itself until even Dylan's voice is exposed for just what it is -- a pure music. But by then our idea of music will also have changed. Rap is changing it even now.

"Billie Holiday is another voice that is filled with microtones that emerge through time like an ever-blooming flower. You (or I) can't hear the end or root of her singing, not yet anyway. As we try to listen to Holiday (as we try to grasp that voice), we are knocked out by the deep information there.

We try to absorb it, and before we can get a handle on her voice (if we dare listen!), she entrances us into a delightful dream-like groove, and we are lost to criticism. Instead we groove on and reflect about this other dream that we have called life. All great musicians do this to us. Shakespeare was the master at this. You can't read him and remain conscious. He knocks you out with his depth.

"Grant Green's playing at its best is like this too. It is so recursive that instead of taking the obvious outs we are used to hearing, Green instead chooses to reinvest -- to go in farther and deepen the groove. He opens up a groove and then opens up a groove and then opens a groove, and so on. He never stops. He opens a groove and then works to widen that groove until we can see into the music, see through the music into ourselves.

"He puts everything back into the groove that he might otherwise get out of it, the opposite of ego. He knows that the groove is the thing and that time will see him out and his music will live long. That is what grooves are about and why Grant Green is the groove master.

© Michael Erlewine

[Michael Erlewine is an award-winning archivist of popular culture and the founder of All-Music Guide (allmusic.com), All-Movie Guide (allmovie.com), ClassicPosters.com, and other sites. An author of a many books on music and film, his most recent book is "Blues in Black and White: The Landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals," released in July of 2010 by the University of Michigan Press. He can be reached at Michael@Erlewine.net]

Note: If you would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are the links:

MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD: GUITAR HERO

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

October 28, 2023

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MICHAEL BLOOMFIELD: GUITAR HERO

By Michael Erlewine

The first Butterfield Album 1965

[Here is an article from my music background, about our relationship with Michael Bloomfield, the legendary guitar player for the 'Paul Butterfield Blues Band'.]

Back in the 1960s the musicians I really loved and looked up to were players like Muddy Waters, Junior Wells, Otis Rush, Little Walter, Magic Sam, Buddy Guy, and the list goes on, mostly the great Black blues players. And I had the chance to meet all these artists, interview each of them, and hang out, plus hear them playing live in clubs and other venues. I was a total fan of these folks. I am sometimes asked why I didn't spend more time listening to my own peers, groups like the Grateful Dead, Janice Joplin, The Band, and so on. My answer is simple. Their music didn't interest me, and this is why. If that sounds flip, it's not meant to. It was because those players who were my peers were people much like me. No matter how great they were, we all drank from the same cup. We were all derivative, all drawing inspiration from the same musical root-sources, those great rock, blues, and jazz players who came before us. It was not disrespect, but simple camaraderie with my peers. We all looked up to the great players who came before us. For example, I met and hung out with Janice Joplin at the Grande Ballroom, where we both played. She was cool, no doubt. But I had already heard the original "Take Another Little Piece of my Heart" by Erma Franklin and "Ball 'n Chain" by Big Mama

Thornton. I spent a whole late-night talking and drinking with Big Mama Thornton, so I know where Joplin was getting her stuff. Joplin was a popular singer, but she was no Big Mama Thornton. We both revered Big Mama Thornton. Joplin herself would be the first to say so. That's how it was. It was the same with the Rolling Stones. Of course, I like their tune "Time is On My Side," because that is an Irma Thomas song. What's not to like, but I like the original by Irma Thomas much better. Thomas is one of the greatest woman singers I have ever heard. Period.

I had the chance to have dinner with Irma Thomas and hang out some years ago and it was out of this world. Later that night at the gig, Irma Thomas changed her set list to include many of her early songs that I especially love, just for me. We are exactly the same age. I can't say enough about what a great artist Irma Thomas is. So, you get the idea. It is not that I was somehow too good for the music of my peers. It was because it wasn't their music and in almost all cases the original was better, and they knew it too. That's why they covered it in the first place. It's the same with the Grateful Dead. We were all studying the same root music. I remember jamming with Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead in West Park in Ann Arbor one sunny afternoon in the 1960s, August 13, 1967. It was fun, but we were both reading from the same playbook of those great artists that we revered, most of whom were still living. An exception would be Jimi Hendrix. Although he too had roots, he transformed those roots into something really new, IMO. Hendrix was unique in this way.

Michael Erlewine at the West Park Bandshell in Ann Arbor There is one other exception, only one group I can think of among my peers that I would acknowledge myself a "groupie" of, and that was the Paul Butterfield Blues Band." When the Butterfield band burst on the scene in late 1965, we were right there and we were spellbound.

Although Butterfield and his band made a number of albums, IMO none of those albums captured the experience of hearing that band live. And I should know. As a 'groupie' I heard them many, many times. We even played at the same venue with them.

'The Living End in Detroit 1966' And we hung out with the Butterfield band and even recorded them. In the spring of 1966, my brother Dan and I recorded an early version of the Butterfield band's landmark tune East-West in "Poor Richard's" club in Chicago, before it came out as an album. "East-West" is considered the first extended rock solo (13 minutes) ever issued on an album, and it served to fuel the future of any number of heavy-metal artists. Our recording of East-West is the first complete rendering of this tune

that is extant. If I remember right, we were sitting behind a black curtain on the stage recording this, but I could be wrong. My brother Dan Erlewine might remember. Anyway, the recording we made was issued on an album called "East-West Live" by the Butterfield keyboard player Mark Naftalin in 1996. I sent him the tapes. Here is the album for those interested. Our recording is the second cut. But I digress. http://www.amazon.com/East-West-Live-Paul-Butterfield/dp/B0000034D7/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1392441358&sr=8-1&keywords=east-west+live There were many reasons the Butterfield band's imprint on us was so profound. For one, they were just that good, and they were a racially mixed band as we sometimes were. That first Butterfield album stopped us in our tracks and our band was never the same again. That was probably the time we added the phrase "Blues Band" to our name, making it the "Prime Movers Blues Band." That first Butterfield album served as a wakeup call to an entire generation of White would-be blues musicians, a notice that we could go ahead and try to play the blues, "whiteness" and all, and so we did. Even to this day, Butterfield remains one of the only white harmonica players to develop his own style (another is William Clarke) -- one respected by black players. Butterfield has no real imitators. Like most Chicago-style amplified harmonica players, Butterfield played the instrument like a horn -- a trumpet. He tended to play single notes rather than bursts of chords. His harp playing is always intense, understated, concise, and serious -- IMO only Big Walter Horton has a better sense of note selection. You can tell from the notes Butterfield settled on, that he had really studied the blues. When I knew Butterfield (during those first three albums), he was always intense, somewhat remote, and even, on occasion, downright unfriendly. Although not much interested in other people, he was a compelling musician and a great harp player. But Butterfield liked to mess with your mind. Here is an example. I can remember one time Butterfield and I were in Chicago, sitting out in the back alley in our van, probably smoking something or other. He was explaining that he was left-handed and that only left-handed people would ever amount to anything in this world. The rest of us were shit-out-a-luck. That was Butterfield's humor. It is true that he held the harmonica opposite to the standard right-handed player who holds it in his left hand. Butterfield held it in his right hand, upside down, with the low notes to the right. Michael Bloomfield (lead guitar) and Mark Naftalin (keyboards) in the Butterfield band, also great players, were just the opposite -- always interested in the other guy. They went out of their way to inquire about you, even if you were a nobody like we were. Naftalin continues to this day to support blues projects and festivals. But it was Butterfield's lead-guitar player, Michael Bloomfield, who most stands out in my mind. Bloomfield actually was

our friend. He cared about us. We could feel it. Michael Bloomfield also played lead on Dylan's album "Highway 61 revisited."

Michael Bloomfield is one of the greatest guitarists I have ever heard, and I have heard a bunch. Bob Dylan thinks so too, as this quote from a Rolling Stone article (May 2009) shows: "The guy that I always miss, and I think he'd still be around if he stayed with me, was Mike Bloomfield. He could just flat-out play. He had so much soul. And he knew all the styles, and he could play them so incredibly well. He was an expert player and a real prodigy too. He could play like Robert Johnson way back then in the 1960s. He could play the pure style of country blues authentically." – Bob Dylan In my experience, Michael Bloomfield was always filled with light, positive, and interested in helping others into the future. If there are bodhisattvas wandering around in this world, Bloomfield has to be one of them. I am running out of space here, but let me give you just one example of Bloomfield's compassion that I personally experienced. For those of you who are too young, the "Summer of Love" was San Francisco and the Bay Area in 1967, when more than 100,000 hippies showed up at the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco wanting to hang out. I happened to be there that summer. In fact I made a point of it. My entire band and I drove all the way across the country (and back) in our 1966 Dodge Van. We had our band name (The Prime Movers) all over that van, but most people thought we were a just another moving company even though across the front of the van we had the slogan "Gonna Ring a Few Bells in your Ears" a quote by legendary New Orleans performer Jessie Hill from his song "Ooh Poo Pah Doo." Any of you remember that song? Here it is for those of you with open ears:

How we crammed all of our band equipment and the entire band (I think there were five of us), not to mention five suitcases into that Dodge van and managed to get it across the U.S. is beyond me. We just did it, took turns driving, and made it a non-stop trip.

I can remember waking up as we crossed the Continental Divide to find us moving at a snail's pace, surrounded on all sides by a huge flock of sheep. That moment was a long way from what we were going to find in San Francisco and Haight-Ashbury. And of course we had no money and no place to stay once we got there. We just went there cold because we knew it was happening. And here is my point: It was our friend Michael Bloomfield who cared enough about us to find us a free place to live for the summer, which turned out to be the Sausalito Heliport, where many music groups practiced, including his new group 'The Electric Flag'. We crashed on the floor. I remember some famous woman singer gave us \$5 at the heliport for food. It might have been Gale Garnet ("We'll Sing in the Sunshine"). As mentioned, we had zero money. In

fact we played blues outside on the pavement next to a local Sausalito Black rib-joint for food, just to have something to eat. We ate a lot of ribs that summer. The Sausalito Heliport was just across the San Francisco Bay Bridge to the north.

However, the band and I spent most of our time in San Francisco and Berkeley, where we auditioned and/or played at all the major Sixties clubs, places like the Avalon Ballroom, The Straight Theater, The Matrix, The Haight A, and even the Fillmore Auditorium. We also played in Berkeley at the New Orleans House and other places And there is more to my Bloomfield story. It was also thanks to Michael Bloomfield that we played the Fillmore Auditorium. Bloomfield not only found us a place to stay, but asked us to fill in for his band the "Electric Flag" when they could not make a gig, at the Fillmore itself.

It was August 29th of 1967 at the Fillmore Auditorium that we opened for Cream on what I believe was their first concert in the U.S. or at least in San Francisco. For those of you who don't know about Cream, it was the British rock supergroup featuring Eric Clapton on guitar, Jack Bruce on bass, and Ginger Baker on drums. Their songs included many classic blues tunes and, of course, their smash hit "Sunshine of Your Love." In fact I watched Cream (with needles in their arms) shoot up speed in the green room before the show. And I had a shouting match with Fillmore promoter Bill Graham at that time about how to mic our amplifiers. Graham wanted to run our sound directly through these giant walls of speakers, but I wanted them to mic our amps through their own speakers, so our particular (old Fender Concerts) amp sound would be preserved. I am sure I was wrong, but at the time it seemed so right. And shouting with Bill Graham was almost required in those days. Anyway, I wanted to share with you my history as a groupie and my undying respect for the compassion and genius of Michael Bloomfield, certainly someone worthy of my respect. At long last, there is a compilation of Bloomfield's guitar work called "From His Head to His Heart to His Hands." Even that title sounds like a bodhisattva to me. It is here: http://www.amazon.com/His-Head-Heart-Hands/dp/B00I1CRJN0/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1392445893&sr=8-1&keywords=michael+bloomfield Also, a bio I did on the Butterfield Blues Band here:

<http://michaelerlewine.com/viewtopic.php?f=148&t=53&sid=67fe8580b0baa8fe627efe1bf823d3c2> In putting this piece together, I took an opportunity to see what is on YouTube about Bloomfield and Butterfield since I last looked and there is a lot more information these days.

I also watched several worthy videos on Bloomfield and Butterfield, and in particular the parts about the end of their lives, and it broke my heart. Both of

these phenomenal musicians died from drug abuse, neglect, and a series of bad choices.

[A photo of me playing harmonica in the West Park band shell in 1967, probably the time I was playing and jamming with Jerry Garcia. Also, a poster of one of our gigs (and Butterfield's band in Detroit.)]

Note: If FB Friends are all taken, "FOLLOW" on FB does the same thing. If you would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are the links:

Groove and Blues in Jazz

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

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PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/634b99eb-27f4-47c8-9341-63c6c43ba792_1024x1024.png

Groove and Blues in Jazz by Michael Erlewine Music is good for the soul. It is one of the best medicines that I know of and the better the music, the better I feel. Hearing the good stuff makes all the difference. And that is what this article is all about -- how to locate the best blues music. Blues is so radical -- such a root music -- that it fuses with and gives rise to other music genres with ease. Jazz critics point out that the roots of jazz can be found in the blues. This article is about where in jazz blues lovers can hear and feel those roots -- the blues in jazz. A little background on where I am coming from: I have been a blues and jazz lover for over fifty years. In the late 1950s and very early 1960s there was a strong jazz scene in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where I grew up. This was before liquor by the glass became legal in 1963, after which a lot of the jazz scene moved into the clubs. Most any night of the week, but in particular on weekends, there was live jazz played in houses and apartments. Teenagers like myself were tolerated and we hung out. Players like Bob James, Ron Brooks, Bob Pozar, and Bob Detwiler were playing straight-up bop and exploring some cool jazz. The music and the parties often went on all night. On occasion, I heard Cannonball Adderley and others play in one of the many Detroit clubs like the Minor Key. Jazz records were big too. I can remember staying up all night listening to John Coltrane's "My Favorite Things" album over and over when it first came out. This was about 1960. I fell in with the folk scene in the early 1960s and managed to hitch-hike all over the country several times. A fantastic guitarist by the name of Perry Lederman, a young singer/songwriter by the name of Bob Dylan, and I hitched together for a stretch. Later I helped to put on the first Bob Dylan concert in Ann Arbor. During that time, I hung out with the New Lost City Ramblers, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, the Country Gentlemen, Joan Baez, and some other great folk artists that you may never have heard of. It was in those years that I got introduced to blues and gospel music. The {Swan Silvertones}, an a capella gospel group of infinite beauty had an enormous effect on me in 1964 when I first heard their records. I had also been listening to classical music for a number of years, but had no real guidance. I spent all of 1964 listening to and learning in depth about classical music from a real expert. Then in 1965 I helped to form a band called the {Prime Movers}. Although we never recorded, we were no

slouch. Iggy Pop was our drummer, avant-garde composer “Blue” Gene Tyranny our keyboardist, music columnist Dan Erlewine played lead Guitar, Jack Dawson (later in the Siegel-Schwall Blues Band) on bass, and I sang and played amplified harmonica. Sometime in 1965 we heard the {Paul Butterfield Blues Band} live. That changed my life. We got to know those guys and they introduced us to all of the blues we had not yet found out for ourselves. We became, in an instant, the {Prime Movers Blues Band}. That was a time. The net effect of all of this was that, during the 1960s, I listened to blues records day and night trying to learn to play the licks. And I just loved the music. In the mid-1960s, thanks to Bob Koester of Delmark Records, I heard players like Little Walter, Magic Sam, Junior Wells and many others live in the Chicago clubs. Later, working with various blues and jazz festivals, I had the good fortune to interview (audio and video) just about any blues player you could name that was around back then, and most of them still were. This article is about blues in jazz, and I am getting to that. My first love is the blues and it took me some time to get much into jazz. At first about the only way I could hear jazz was through a blues filter, so any jazz I got into had to have those blues elements. Now that I know my way around the jazz catalog, I know that it contains some real treasures for blues lovers. But don’t expect the standard 12-bar blues progression. Blue notes are found in jazz, but seldom in the form we are used to in blues recordings. It is the blues as a feeling, the soul-full experience of the blues and gospel elements that can be found in jazz. So, I am writing this for blues lovers who may want to explore jazz through the same blues doorway I went through. The jazz I love is the blues in jazz whether that means bluesy jazz, funky jazz, original funk, soul jazz -- terms which I will explain in due course. I tend not to like (very much) jazz that does not have some kind of blues or modal element in it. Swing and bop, to the degree that they lack the roots sound of blues and gospel, fail to hold my attention. I like my jazz with blues, please. Something I realized some time ago is that jazz (and most kinds of music) are either energizing or calming in their overall effect. If you are the kind of person who needs something to get you moving (to energize you), then you will be attracted to music that is agitating and energizing like: marches, Dixieland, bop, free jazz, and other forms of progressive jazz. It appeals to those who need that cup of coffee in life -- get a move on! It stirs you up. However, if you are a person (like me) who tends to be very active and sometimes even hyper, then you need music to relax and calm you like blues, original funk, soul jazz -- groove music. It helps to get you in a soothing groove that dissipates energy -- relief! Regardless of the fact that as a person we may (in general) be drawn to music that either stimulates or calms us, at times all of us may need some pick-me-up music and at other times some slow-me-down stuff. You will find that the above (admittedly

simplistic) concept works very well. Blues and the blues that is in jazz (for the most part) has to do with the release and expression of feelings. The effect is calming to the system. It is “get down” and relaxin’ music. Here is a brief tour of the bluesy stuff in jazz. An Abbreviated History of Blues in Jazz This is an abbreviated history because I want to just skip over the standard playing-the-blues-progression in jazz stuff. There is not much of it anyway. If you like blues, you all ready know that by now. For now, we will also pass on all of the old-time blues found in traditional jazz -- the early New Orleans jazz. There is plenty of great old blues and blues-like music to hear there and you will want to hear it someday. But it is just too much like the blues that you already know. The same goes for what few blues tunes came out of the swing and big-band era. You don’t need a guide to check swing blues tunes out because there are not that many of them. When you can find them, they are pretty much straight-ahead blues songs or tunes played with a big band. Further, the arranged feeling of the big band is not up to the impromptu kind of blues feeling you may be used to, so let’s pass on that too. When I speak of blues in jazz, I mean some get-down funky blues sounds in the jazz that you have not heard before, so let’s just get to that. If this history stuff bores you, skip over it and just read the recommended albums list. Start finding and listening to some of the picks. As mentioned, we will pass over the earlier forms of jazz including the New Orleans varieties, Dixieland, and swing. However, since a lot of the bluesier jazz that may interest you grew out of bop (bebop), you will need to know what bop is and how this music style came to be. We will start there. Bop (bebop) -- Bop distinguished itself from the popular big-band swing music out of which it emerged by that fact that it is most often played in small groups. You can hear each of the players as separate sounds. And while swing can have a groove that soothes you, bop is wake-me-up music. It’s faster tempos, more elaborate melodies, and complex harmonies do not tend to establish a groove. It is more frenetic, even frantic, than swing. In other words, this is not relaxin’ music. Bop has an attitude. Unlike the large swing bands, where there were a few featured soloists, most members of the small combo could and did solo -- democratic. In addition to an increase in improvisation and solo virtuosity, there was little dependence on arrangements. And fast tempos too. Bop is more energetic (read agitating) than swing, with the rhythm section keeping the time on the ride cymbal. Bop tunes can be very fast, often with elaborate harmonies and complex chord changes that take an expert player to negotiate. In fact, fluency in bop became the benchmark of the young musician. Bop is a sophisticated music that can be, for many, somewhat of an acquired taste. In this respect it resembles classical music. Here are some bop artists and a sample album of them at their best: Bop originators: Charlie Parker (just about any album; the

box sets are the best) Dizzy Gillespie, "Dizziest"/Bluebird Thelonious Monk, "Thelonious with John Coltrane"/OJC Bud Powell, "Genius of Powell Vol. 1"/Polygram Dexter Gordon, "Our Man in Paris"/Blue Note Miles Davis, "First Miles"/Savoy Fats Navarro, "The Fabulous Fats Navarro, Vol 1-2"/Blue Note Sonny Stitt, "Constellation"/Muse J.J. Johnson, "The Eminent Jay Jay Johnson Vol 1"/Blue Note Max Roach, "Freedom Now Suite"/Columbia Lucky Thompson, "Lucky Strikes!"/Prestige Tad Dameron, "Mating Call"/Prestige 1950s Bop Players: Sonny Rollins, "Newk's Time"/Blue Note Jackie McLean, "Let Freedom Ring"/Blue Note Oscar Peterson, "The Trio"/Pablo Clifford Brown, "Brownie"/Emarcy Phil Woods, "Pairin Off"/Prestige Kenny Dorham, "Una Mas"/Blue Note Barry Harris, "Live in Tokyo"/Xanadu Tommy Flanagan, "Thlonica"/Enja 1970-1980s Bop Revival: Richie Cole, "New York Afternoon-Alto Madness"/Muse Chris Hollyday, "Ho, Brother"/Jazzbeat Blues in Bop: Thelonious Monk, "The Thelonious Monk Trio"/Prestige Miles Davis & Milt Jackson, "Bag's Groove"/Prestige Miles Davis, "Walkin'"/Prestige Horace Silver, "Senor Blues"/Blue Note Hard Bop -- Hard bop was a reaction to the somewhat brittle and intellectual nature of straight bop. Hard bop distinguished itself from bop by its simple melodies, slower tempos, and avoidance of the (by then) cliched bop chord changes. The constant up-tempo frenetic quality of bop pieces is absent. Tunes are often in the minor mode, much slower paced, and often moody -- more feeling and thoughtful. Hard bop reaches into the blues and gospel tradition for substance to slow the up-tempo bop music down, stretch the time out, and imbue the music with more feeling. It was as if jazz had once again found its roots and was nourished. The public thought so too, because it was more approachable than bop. Hard bop is one big step toward establishing a groove, but it lacks what has come to be known as a groove, as in "groove" music. Blues lovers will appreciate the more bluesy nature of hard bop, but probably still yearn for more blues yet. Hard Bop Pioneers: Horace Silver, "Pieces of Silver"/Blue Note Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers, "Moanin"/Blue Note Cannonball Adderley Quintet, "Quintet at the Lighthouse"/Landmark Nat Adderley, "Work Song"/Riverside Art Farmer, "Meet the Jazztet"/Chess Crusaders, "Freedom Sounds"/Atlantic Lou Donaldson, "Blues Walk"/Blue Note Kenny Dorham, "Trumpet Toccata"/Blue Note Donald Byrd, "House of Byrd"/Prestige Coltrane-Influenced Hard Bop: Wayne Shorter, "Native Dancer"/Columbia Freddie Hubbard, "Hub-Tones"/Blue Note McCoy Tyner, "Sahara"/Milestone Herbie Hancock, "Maiden Voyage"/Blue Note Joe Henderson, "Page One"/Blue Note Weather Report (Joe Zawinul), "Mysterious Traveler"/Columbia Mainstream Hard Bop: Sonny Rollins, "Saxophone Colossus and More/OJC John Coltrane, "Blue Trane"/Blue Note Wynton Kelly, "Kelly Blue"/Riverside Clifford Jordan, "Glass Bead Game"/Strata-East Booker Ervin, "The Book Cooks"/Affinity

George Coleman, "Amsterdam After Dark"/Timeless Charlie Rouse, "Two Is One"/Strata-East Harold Land, "The Fox"/Contemporary Blue Mitchell, "The Thing to Do"/Blue Note Kenny Dorham, "Afro-Cuban"/Blue Note Oliver Nelson, "Soul Battle"/Prestige Hank Mobley, "Soul Station"/Blue Note Wes Montgomery, "Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery"/Riverside Funky Jazz -- Some hard-bop players like pianist Horace Silver began to include even more feeling in their playing by adding blues riffs and various elements from gospel music to their playing. Silver, considered by many to be the father of funk, describes funk: "Funky means earthy, blues-based. It may not be blues itself, but it has that down-home feel to it. Playing funky has nothing to do with style; it's an approach to playing... "Soul" is the same basically, but there's an added dimension of feeling and spirit to soul -- an in-depth-ness. A soulful player might be funky or he might not be." The hard bop jazz that they were playing became in Silver's hands still more earthy, bluesy or, as it was called, "funky". This was jazz, but with a funky flavor. It is quite easy to distinguish this funky jazz from the all out jazz funk described below. I really like funky jazz because it sometimes has a groove, but I love jazz funk better because in that music there is a total groove. Horace Silver, "Song for My Father"/Blue Note Cannonball Adderley "Somethin' Else"/Blue Note Nat Adderley "Work Song"/Riverside Bobby Timmons, "Moanin'"/Milestone The Blues Groove -- Groove Music The whole thing about groove music is that everything exists to establish and maintain the groove. Solos, egos, instruments -- what have you -- only exist to lay down the groove and to get in it. There is a steady constant beat that can become drone-like or trance-like. You get in a groove and you stay in the groove and that feels good. There are no absolute rules about what makes groove music. Anything can happen as long as the effect is to put you in and keep you in the groove. It often has a Hammond organ in the sound, but not always. It can have any number of instruments doing all kinds of solos and what-not as long as these things don't break the groove. Everything exists to create and maintain the groove. Blues lovers tend to like groove music because the blues is nothing but a groove. Groove music can be up-tempo or slow, bright or dark, but the net effect of getting in a groove is always to satisfy and relax. There is always a constant rhythm section driving the groove, invariably danceable. Grooves always have a funky, earthy flavor and blues and gospel elements are essential. All grooves are bluesy, by definition. It can be as funky and nasty as you want to be, but groove is not stir-it-up music. It is always cool-you-down music. If it is not relaxing, then it is not groove. Which is not to say that groove is not energetic or fast paced. It may sound wild, but the final effect is: a groove. Although I hesitate to characterize it this way, groove music is always a little trance-like. The result of the funkier, baddest piece of groove music is a bit of clear

sailing -- relaxation. Get in the groove! That's the place to BE. Original Funk/Soul Jazz -- The transformation of bop did not always stop with hard bop or even funkified jazz. Some players dove rather than dipped into the roots music and an even more bluesy music was born that came to be called funk or soul jazz. For the first time, we are talking real groove music. Funkified Jazz, also called soul jazz, jazz funk, original funk, or just plain funk is a form of jazz that originated in the mid-1950s -- a type of hard bop. It is often played by small groups -- trios led by a tenor or alto sax, pianist, guitar and the Hammond organ. Funk music is very physical, usually 'down and dirty'. Funk or soul jazz emerged as a reaction to the bop/cool jazz (cool, intellectualized) prevalent at the time. Funky music is everything that bop/cool jazz is not. It is hot, sweaty and never strays far from its blues roots. The term "soul" is a link to gospel roots; "funk" links to blues roots. This fusion of jazz with blues and gospel elements became known as "soul jazz" during the 1950s, partly through the promotion of the Cannonball Adderley Quintet as a "soul-jazz" group. Fast-paced funk pieces have a bright melodic phrasing set against a hard, percussive dance rhythm. Funk ballads are never more than a few steps from the blues. Above all, this is dynamic relaxin' music that is easy to listen to -- the groove. Those of you who like blues and R&B (and gospel), but find some jazz just a touch remote, may well like original funk. There is no better music to kick back to than this. Jazz funk is sometimes called "original funk" to distinguish it from the contemporary funk sound of the James Brown/George Clinton variety. Along with blues and gospel, original funk or soul jazz had some R&B (soul music) elements thrown into the mix and the resulting fusion was even more to the public's taste. Soul jazz has remained one of the most popular and successful forms of jazz to this very day. Bop is stir-it-up music while funk or soul jazz (no matter how up tempo or percussive) is at heart calm-you-down or groove music. Here are some classic funk albums: Eddie Lockjaw Davis, "Cookbook" vol. 1-3/OJC Gene Ammons, "Gene Ammons Story: Organ Combos"/Prestige Arnett Cobb, "Smooth Sailing"/OJC Red Holloway, "Cookin' Together"/OJC Willis Jackson, "Bar Wars"/Muse Ike Quebec, "Blue and Sentimental"/Blue Note Jimmy Forest, "All the Gin is Gone"/Delmark Bobby Timmons, "Soul Man"/Prestige Johnny Hammond Smith, "Breakout"/Kudu Harold Vick, "Steppin' Out"/Blue Note Harold Mabern, "Rakin' & Scrapin'"/Prestige Stanley Turrentine, "Comin' Your Way"/Blue Note Houston Person, "Soul Dance"/Prestige Grover Washington, "Mister Magic"/Motown Harold Maybern, "Rakin' and Scrapin'", OJC-330 Cornell Dupree, "Coast to Coast"/Antilles Les McCann, "Swiss Movement"/Atlantic (soul jazz) Organ Combos -- At the heart of original funk and soul jazz sits the Hammond Organ, 400 pounds of musical joy. This unwieldy piece of equipment can do it all -- work by itself, as a duo, trio, quartet, or with a full

band. It is a full band. More important is the fact that the Hammond-organ sound pretty much defines real funk. There is something about the percussive sound and the adjustable attack/decay effects that, coupled with the famed (rotating horns) Leslie speakers, epitomizes that music called funk. Whatever the reason, you will find a Hammond organ at the center (or as backup) of the majority of soul jazz recordings, not to mention contemporary funk and R&B recordings. Jimmy Smith is the man who tamed the great beast and turned the Hammond from a roller-rink calliope into a serious jazz instrument. The story is the Smith locked himself in a warehouse with a Hammond for almost a year and came out playing that sound we all love. And Smith is just the tip of the top. There are many great Hammond players that are every bit as great in their own way, names like Richard Groove Holmes, Jimmy McGriff, Shirley Scott, Charles Earland, John Patton, Larry Young, and others. Put a Hammond organ and some drums together with a tenor sax or guitar and you have all you need for some real funky music. This is groove music par excellence. Jimmy Smith, "Back at the Chicken Shack"/Blue Note Jimmy McGriff, "At the Appollo"/Collectables Jack McDuff, "Live!"/Prestige Richard Groove Holmes, "After Hours /Pacific Jazz Don Patterson, "Genius of the B-3"/Music John Patton, "Let em' Roll"/Blue Note Shirley Scott, "Blue Flames"/OJC Charles Earland, "Black Talk"/Prestige Charles Kynard, "Reelin' with the Feeling"/Prestige Larry Young, "The Complete Blue Note Larry Young"/Mosaic Joey DeFrancisco, "All of Me"/Columbia The Commercialization of Soul Jazz

Soul jazz sometime gets a not-so-great rap. Anything so potent and popular lends itself to misuse and a great many so-called soul jazz albums were recorded that had no "soul" -- bad commercial funk. On the theory that you never know what is enough until you have more than enough, artists sought to increase their popularity by making their music more and more commercial until, in the end, they lost touch with the roots of the music -- the soul. To make matters worse, the advent of bop and the various forms of progressive jazz that grew out of bop, gave birth to a somewhat elitist, conservative, and overly intellectualized attitude -- the jazz purist. This purist looks down on jazz that partakes too much of its blues and gospel roots, and any R&B influences are really frowned upon. These mainstream jazz purists used the overt commercialism aspect of soul jazz as grounds to dismiss the entire music off hand. Funk and soul jazz was somehow (in their opinion) not as worthy of respect as the bop or progressive jazz they admired. The fact that soul jazz is the most successful and popular form of jazz was cited as further proof of its commonness. This elitist attitude is now on the decline and soul jazz is beginning to take its place in the history of jazz as a legitimate form of the jazz. Soul jazz reissues are a hot item. It is a fact that most great jazz performers also have a funky or soul side and albums to prove it. Often very

little is written about the soul jazz side of these artists. Well, there you have a quick tour of the funkier side of jazz -- groove music. It is important to point out that soul jazz, although always popular with the people, has received short shrift from the jazz elite. The attitude is that groove music is something, like the blues, which should be kept in the closet -- keep back. That time has passed. Groove Masters We are coming out of a time when jazz has been measured by how outstanding the soloist is -- how high can they fly? Critics only seem to know how to rate what stands out. This won't work for groove music. In groove, the idea is to lay down a groove, get in it, and deepen it. Groove masters always take us deeper into the groove. These artists are our windows into the groove, and their hearts become the highway over which the groove can run. They reinvest. And we ride the groove. This is why jazz critics have either passed (never got it) over groove masters like Grant Green and Stanley Turrentine or heard something but did not know what to make of what they heard (and felt). If music is not viewed as such an intellectual thing (something to see) but more of a feeling kind of thing, then groove masters can be appreciated. You may not see the groove masters, but you sure can feel them. In groove, the solo (and all else) only exists if it adds to the groove. Witness Grant Green's incredible single-note repetitions. Who would ever think to do that? You wouldn't dare think of that. It is done by pure feeling. It feels good and you keep doing it. Nothing to think about. Stanley Turrentine has been laying down grooves for many a year for all to hear. I am surprised at how many books don't even mention him. Grant Green has received even shorter shrift. There have been a few voices crying in the wilderness of soul jazz criticism. Producer Bob Porter of Atlantic Records and Bob Rusch of Cadence Magazine have always known and told us about the groove. Recording engineer Rudy Van Gelder is another pre-eminent groove expert. More than half of all great soul jazz sessions were recorded by Van Gelder. The next time you hear some real groove music, in particular if there is a Hammond organ on it, just check the album for this engineer's name. Grant Green: THE Groove Master All that I can say about Grant Green is that he is the groove master. Numero uno. He is so deep in the groove that most people have no idea what's up with him. Players like Stanley Turrentine, Jimmy Smith, Kenny Burrell, and many other really great soul jazz artists are also groove masters. But the main man is Grant Green. He is so far in the groove that it will take decades for us to bring him out in full. He is just starting to be discovered. To get your attention and make clear that I am saying something here, consider the singing voice of Bob Dylan. A lot of people say the guy can't sing. But it's not that simple. He is singing. The problem is that he is singing so far in the future that we can't yet hear the music. Other artists can sing his tunes and we can hear that all right. Given enough time... enough years... that

gravel-like voice will sound as sweet to our ears as any velvet-toned singer. Dylan's voice is all about microtones and inflection. For now that voice is hidden from our ears in time so tight that there is no room (no time) yet to hear it. Some folks can hear it now. I, for one, can hear the music in his voice. I know many of you can too. Someday everyone will be able to hear it, because the mind will unfold itself until even Dylan's voice is exposed for just what it is -- a pure music. But by then our idea of music will also have changed. Rap is changing it even now. Billy Holiday is another voice that is filled with microtones that emerge through time like an ever-blooming flower. You (or I) can't hear the end or root of her singing, not yet anyway. As we try to listen to Holiday (as we try to grasp that voice), we are knocked out by the deep information there. We try to absorb it and before we can get a handle on her voice (if we dare listen!) she entrances us in a delightful dream-like groove and we are lost to criticism. Instead we groove on and reflect about this other dream that we have called life. All great musicians do this to us. Grant Green's playing at its best is like this too. It is so recursive that instead of taking the obvious outs we are used to hearing, Green instead chooses to reinvest -- to go in farther and deepen the groove. He opens up a groove and then opens up a groove and then opens a groove, and so on. He never stops. He opens a groove and then works to widen that groove until we can see into the music, see through the music into ourselves. He puts everything back into the groove that he might otherwise get out of it. He knows that the groove is the thing and that time will see him out and his music will live long. That is what grooves are about and why Grant Green is the groove master. I hope that some of what I have written here will help blues lovers push off from the island of blues out into the sea of jazz. You can always head back to the solid ground of blues if you can't get into the jazz. Blues and jazz are not mutually exclusive. Blues in jazz has been a thrilling ride (groove) for me and I have found a whole new music that satisfies much like the blues satisfy. I listen to groove music all the time. If you find some great groove tunes that I have not mentioned here, drop me a line. I want to hear them. Blues in Jazz and R&B

There are forms of blues in jazz other than the groove music presented above. Here are a few notes on some of the major styles: Blues Shouters and Singers-

- There are blues singers who tend toward jazz and almost all jazz singers sing some blues. This is not the place to point these out since they are more-or-less straight-ahead blues singers when they sing blues. The one exception, of course, is Billie Holiday. Holiday is probably the most seminal singer ever recorded. But is her music the blues? Everything she sings is way beyond blues and blues is supposed to be the root music. Holiday is the equivalent of Delta blues singer Robert Johnson in that she is seminal -- pure source. Period. If you have not listened to Billie Holiday and gotten into her music to the point

of real distraction (being moved!), then you have missed one of the premiere music experiences of a lifetime. Enough said. Bluesy Jazz -- There is also a style of blues-laden jazz that is not so much funky as downright bluesy. Kenny Burrell is perhaps the chief exponent of this style of jazz. Bluesy jazz has a slow or mid tempo and is easy to listen to -- relaxing. It makes great background or dinner music and yet is integral and stands on its own merits as a music. A lot of artists play bluesy jazz; some play it often. Much bluesy jazz can establish a groove. Kenny Burrell, "Midnight Blue"/Blue Note The Three Sounds (Gene Harris), "Introducing the Three Sounds"/Blue Note Ron Carter, "Jazz: My Romance"/Blue Note Grant Green, "Born to be Blue"/Blue Note Ray Bryant, "All Blues"/Pablo Red Garland, "Soul Junction"/Prestige Wynton Kelly, "Kelly Blue"/Riverside Blues/Funk Sax: Honkers, Screamers & Bar Walkers -- Although the emergence of blues sax can be traced all the way back to the great Ben Webster, the honkin', screaming tenor sax of the bar-walking variety originated with Illinois Jacquet and was carried to its logical conclusion with the R&B sax of King Curtis. The term "bar walkin'" came from the habit of emotionally driven sax players walking on the top of a bar among the customers playing at a frenzied pitch -- often in contests with another sax player walking from the other end of the bar. This honkin' blues-drenched sax style was as much performance bravado as sheer music. As Cannonball Adderley said about the funky big-toned sax, "Its the moan inside the tone." Since many of the main players in this style hailed from the Southwest, players in this style are often referred to as "Texas tenors." Some of the main artists in this style include Al Sears, Big Jay McNeely, Willis Jackson, Sill Austin, Lee Allen, Rusty Bryant, Hal Singer, and Sam "The Man" Taylor. Most of these players came out of the large swing bands and either formed their own groups or found work in various R&B settings. This raunchy honkin' music scratches that blues itch and satisfies. This is often groove material. Since many of these sax players can (and often had to) play it all -- blues, R&B, honkin' sax, soul jazz, straight jazz, etc. , they are listed here together. I have made some notes to guide you as to their main directions. If you can find the 3-CD called "Giants of the Blues and Funk Tenor Sax"/Prestige (3PCD-2302-2), you will get a superb 23 cut collection with many extended solos and liner notes by Bob Porter. Worth ordering or searching for. Sax: Blues, R&B, Funk: Honkers and Bar Walkers Lee Allen (R&B) "Walkin' with Mr. Lee"/Collectables (R&B) Gene Ammons (R&B, bop, soul jazz) "Boss Tenors -- Straight Ahead from Chicago 1961"/Verve Sil Austin (blues) "Slow Rock Rock"/Wing Earl Bostic (R&B) "Best of Earl Bostic"/Deluxe Rusty Bryant (R&B, soul jazz) "Rusty Bryant returns", OJC Arnett Cobb (blues, soul jazz) "Smooth Sailing", OJC-323 King Curtis (R&B, soul jazz) "Soul Meeting"/Prestige Hank Crawford (soul jazz) "Soul Survivors"/Milestone Eddie Lockjaw Davis (blues, soul jazz) "Cookbook, Vol. 1-

3"/OJC Jimmy Forrest (blues, bop, soul jazz) "Out of the Forrest"/Prestige Frank Foster (blues) "Soul Outing"/Prestige Johnny Griffin (bop, hard bop, blues) "Big Soul Band"/OJC Eddie Harris (soul jazz) "Best of"/Atlantic Coleman Hawkins (blues, hard bop) Red Holloway (soul jazz) "Cookin' Together"/Prestige Joe Houston R&B Honker (Honker, blues) Willis Jackson (R&B, funk) "Bar Wars"/Muse Illinois Jacquet (Honker, blues, R&B) "Blues: That's Me!"/OJC Big Jay McNeely R&B (Honker, blues) Wild Bill Moore (blues) (Look for him as a sideman) Oliver Nelson (blues, out) "Soul Battle"/OJC David Fathead Newman (R&B, soul jazz) "Lonely Avenue"/Atlantic Harold Ousley (blues, soul jazz) Sweet Double Hipness"/Muse Houston Person (soul jazz) "Goodness"/OJC-332 Ike Quebec (blues, soul jazz) "Blue and Sentimental"/Blue Note Al Sears (blues) "The Swingville All-Stars"/Swingville Hal Singer (blues) "Blue Stompin'/Prestige Sonny Stitt (bop, soul jazz) "Soul Summit"/Prestige Buddy Tate (blues) "Tate's Date"/Swingville Sam "The Man" Taylor (blues, R&B) Eddie Cleanhead Vinson (blues) "Kidney Stew"/Black & Blue Ernie Watts (blues, bop, soul jazz) "Ernie Watts Quartet"/JVC Blues in free jazz Blues in free jazz are present; the notes are there. The problem is that the constant beat is missing and thus the groove never gets laid down. More important, most free jazz is stir-it-up music rather than cool out. While this is great music, it is not groove music. Here are some outstanding examples of some blues in free jazz. Archie Shepp, "Attica Blues"/Impulse Oliver Nelson, "Screamin' the Blues"/New Jazz Charles Mingus, "Charles Mingus Presents Charles Mingus"/Candid John Coltrane, "Love Supreme"/Impulse Sun Ra, "The Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra"/ESP Ornette Coleman, "Tomorrow is the Question"/Contemporary Blues in Jazz Rock & Fusion The Same is true for most jazz rock as for free jazz. The notes occur but the energy is more agitating than not and the groove is seldom established. Crusaders, "Crusaders 1"/Blue Thumb David Sanborn, "Backstreet"/Warner Brothers Mahavishnu Orchestra, "The Inner Mounting Flame"/Columbia Miles Davis, "Star People"/Columbia [Preface to the bios and albums] The Groove Guide to Blues in Jazz Here is something that I wished I had when I first started to get into groove and blues jazz -- a quick guide to the best recordings. It can save you both time and money. These are some of the main jazz (and R&B) artists with a strong blues content. You will want to hear them out. In each case I have tried to point out key albums that are worth a listen from a blues or groove perspective. The albums are rated and reviewed, (where possible) to give you insight into why these might or might not interest you. A short biography is also included and sometimes additional notes on how to approach the artist from a blues perspective. We would need a whole book to do this right, and the All-Music Guide to Jazz (2nd edition) is available when you are. I am sorry to say that many of the albums listed below are not

available on CD. Some probably never will be. Although I love CDs, I have had to get back into vinyl to hear a lot of this music. Many of you will also -- back to the old record bins. It's worth it if the music is there. And it is. I hope you enjoy this short guide to groove music. Landmark Jazz Albums Putting aside the blues in jazz aspect, here is a list of landmark jazz albums that every jazz lover should hear. And this does not just represent my personal opinion. Any serious jazz listener would agree that these are classic albums that should be heard at least once. Whether you like them or not does not matter. It will show you the wide world of jazz and help you figure out what you do like, which directions to take, etc. One thing is certain: if you don't like these albums, it is not because they are lousy performances, but because it is not your kind of music. This list is admittedly weak in traditional, swing, big-band jazz, and fusion. Air, "Air Lore"/Arista Mose Allison, "I Don't worry About a Thing"/Rhino/Atlantic Louis Armstrong, "Hot Fives and Sevens Vol 1-3"/JSP Art Ensemble of Chicago, "Jackson in Your House"/Affinity 9 Count Basie, "The Original American Decca Recordings"/MCA Sidney Bechet, "The Bluebird Sessions"/Bluebird Art Blakey, "Jazz Messengers with Thelonious Monk"/Atlantic Anthony Braxton, "For Alto Saxophone"/Delmark Clifford Brown, "Jazz Immortal"/Pacific Jazz Dave Brubeck, "Take Five"/Columbia Ornette Coleman, "The Shape of Jazz To Come"/Atlantic John Coltrane, "A Love Supreme"/MCA Chick Corea, "My Spanish Heart"/Polydor Charlie Christian, "Solo Flight"/Columbia Miles Davis, "Kind of Blue"/Columbia Eric Dolphy, "Out to Lunch!"/Blue Note Duke Ellington, "Blanton-Webster Band"/Bluebird Bill Evans, "Sunday at the Village Vanguard"/OJC Keith Jarrett, "The Koln Concert"/ECM Erroll Garner, "Concert by the Sea"/Columbia Stan Getz, "Getz/Gilberto"/Verve Dizzy Gillespie, "In the Beginning"/Prestige Herbie Hancock, "Maiden Voyage"/Blue Note Billie Holiday, "The Quintessential Billie Holiday Vol. 1-9"/Columbia Milt Jackson "Bag's Groove"/Prestige Roland Kirk, "Rahsaan"/Mercury Shelly Manne, "At the Blackhawk"/OJ Charles Mingus, "Mingus at Antibes"/Atlantic Thelonious Monk, "Genius of Modern Music Vol. 1-2"/Blue Note Wes Montgomery, "Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery"/Riverside Fats Navarro, "The Fabulous Fats Navarro, Vol 1-2"/Blue Note Oliver Nelson, "Blues and the Abstract Truth"/Impulse Herbie Nichols, "The Art of Herbie Nichols"/Blue Note Oregon, "Out of the Woods"/Electra Charlie Parker, "The Charlie Parker Story"/Savoy Bud Powell, "The Amazing Bud Powell Vol. 1-2"/Blue Note Sonny Rollins, "Saxophone Colossus"/OJC Sun Ra, "The Heliocentric World of Sun Ra Vol 1"/ESP Cecil Taylor, "Unit Structures"/Blue Note McCoy Tyner, "The Real McCoy"/Blue Note

INTERVIEW WITH HOWLIN' WOLF

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

October 28, 2023

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Photo by Stanley Livingston August 2, 1969 Howlin' Wolf Interviewed by Michael Erlewine Here is an interview that I did with the legendary Howlin' Wolf. It was at the first 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival and there I was backstage talking with Wolf. It was just the two of us standing in the open sun and it was not your normal interview. John Sinclair, who I consider an expert in blues, said this is the best interview of Wolf he has even seen. I didn't have to say a word. It was all Wolf. And to prove it, Sinclair took this interview, put it into verse and music, made it a part of his blues program "John Sinclair and the Blues Scholars." I was happy to be part of the Blues Scholars band several times as a backup harmonica player. In fact, below is an audio clip of John doing the Wolf interview, with my playing amplified harmonica behind him, along with some of my kids and friends. And that 1969 date was not the first time I saw Howlin' Wolf. We saw him in Chicago playing music late at night, as this story tells. As I stood there in 1969 listening to this huge man, I flashed back to some years before when I had seen the Wolf performing live in a small bar at the north end of Chicago late one night. There was no one in the place, just Howlin' Wolf and his guitarist Hubert Sumlin. My brother Dan and I stood somewhere at the back of the place, and it was very dark. We found a seat. Wolf was way up to the front, with one small light playing on him. He was sitting on an old wooden straight-backed chair. It was all light and shadows. And Wolf was singing as only he can sing, and his music not only filled the room, it actually took over all sense of time I had as his laser-like voice penetrated deep into my brain. For a while, I lost all idea of who or where I was. And I was not high. The walls of the room just went transparent, as did my body, and I found myself suddenly thrust outside of time, beyond any sense of myself that I knew, somewhere out there on my own in this vast universe, just a mind floating there. This only ever happened once and was more than just

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be no hard feelings. He didn't come for no trouble, but he gonna' sure let you know that he are 'the man.' Supposed to be." "Just like a flower. You see, we're trampin' on this grass. We stay here a couple months and tramp right around here, we gonna' kill it. Just as soon as we stop trampin', the first warm sunshine, and then the grass gonna' start a growin' again." "You don't never learn it all. You just learn some portion of it, and be able to, you know, entertain. And I play a certain portion of harp and a certain portion of guitar. I'm not a smart man. You see, I got a little head and a big heart. That's all I need. You take people. When they got a big head, they don't make it far". "You're supposed to make it pleasin' to the peoples ears, then they don't mind listening to the tune." "I heard a negro, howlin' and moanin'. I said: I take it from you. He was an old man. I said: I'm gonna' take that someday and make something out of it. I took that howlin' and that yodelin' and put it together and made me a thing of my own." "You got to get in the right position to where you can control your voice. I'm not a smart man. You see I got a little head and a big heart. You got to know your keynote. You got to know your notes from staff to staff. If you don't know your notes from staff to staff, I can tell when you pick up your guitar, you really don't know what you're doin'." "I don't mean to be funny, but if you let me, I'll show you, and tell you, if you will accept it. But if you think because I'm a Negro, and you're not supposed to be told nothin', you understand, you're wrong. You're supposed to be told somethin' by anybody, when you're doin' wrong." "Take a learnin' from anybody. Somebody can always tell you something that fit you." "I hope I don't talk too much. No, I don't know. I'm just tryin. So, now that's a lotta' ground your covering, when you say you know better than me. I just know some of the things that are supposed to be done. When you say you know it, that covers the whole world." "Some people don't want to tell you how it is, but I'll tell ya." "If we were playin' in a key, tell me your tonic and I'll tell you what else you're supposed to do. All I want to know is your tonic. I'll build the rest of it. See, but you got to have your tonic. That's your startin' off. Without that tonic, when you get ready to stop, you stop somewhere else. Anytime you start on your tonic, when you end your song, you got to be right back on your tonic." "I don't have no education, see. Now you can take my sense and put it in a paper bag and it'll rattle like two nickels. But you see, understandin', that's all I need. Common sense, that's all a man needs now, common sense. Just get you some common sense and pass on by." "Some of the music is too loud today, because it knock the eardrums to your ear. Them high speakers, tall as that fence there, is blastin' your ear down, all the time. Boom. Bam. Bing. You know

what I mean?" "That's uncalled for. You hear that? I played on a show one night, and I went home and cut myself all up and down the back, because I heard that thing in my sleep. It's too loud. I'm sorry. Ain't no need in me tellin' you no lie. It's too loud. That go for the white boy, and the Negro boy, and any old Mexican, anybody! When it's too loud, it's nothin' but 'knockness.'" "Knockness, just some stuff comin' together, and you don't understand what it mean. That's what you call real garbage. That's the worst garbage in town. That's right, but the peoples eats it up. Just like the rabbit eatin' the carrot. What's up Doc?" "I don't dominize no musician. I hate to hear a man dominize a musician, but I will say: music is too loud. Whether you playin' good or whether you playin' bad, you know it's too loud." "Dominize, knockness. Some knockness. Something knockin' together. You know."

Photo by Stanley Livingston

August 2, 1969

Howlin' Wolf

Interviewed by Michael Erlewine

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As I stood there in 1969 listening to this huge man, I flashed back to some years before when I had seen the Wolf performing live in a small bar at the north end of Chicago late one night. There was no one in the place, just Howlin' Wolf and his guitarist Hubert Sumlin. My brother Dan and I stood somewhere at the back of the place, and it was very dark. We found a seat. Wolf was way up to the front, with one small light playing on him. He was sitting on an old wooden straight-backed chair. It was all light and shadows.

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HOWLIN' WOLF:

"Some of them said years ago. 'We will never make it to the moon.' I said: 'You never know.' Today, we settin' on the moon and got a flag up there. You understand? But they told me that we couldn't do that. Don't never say what we can't do."

"Next thing, I'm looking for a man walkin' down the street with no head on his body. And if they say they can't do it, I'm gonna' tell 'em, 'You're wrong.' He gonna' come down sooner or later. That's right. This is of the day. He will have no head and be all heart, just one big heart."

"Because these performers probably have the biggest hearts in the entertainment business, and there were thirty or forty thousand kids here trying to learn about heart, about understanding, about developing their hearts. Thousands of hippies, hipped up children, with great big heads and tiny hearts, trying to lose that big head and get that big heart. The big head and the hard heart of modern rock and roll and psychedelic music has gone as far as it will go. The heart just has to be developed and this, the first of all the blues festivals, promises much to cross the generation gap and bring the old and younger Americans closer than they have been for the last decade. Because blues performers have big hearts."

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"Well, now anytime anything is pushed back, sooner or later, they gonna' bring it to the front. They can't keep it hid always."

"I'll tell you. when people can't make or use you, they don't need you."

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"Just like a flower. You see, we're trampin' on this grass. We stay here a couple months and tramp right around here, we gonna' kill it. Just as soon as we stop trampin', the first warm sunshine, and then the grass gonna' start a growin' again."

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"You got to get in the right position to where you can control your voice. I'm not a smart man. You see I got a little head and a big heart. You got to know your keynote. You got to know your notes from staff to staff. If you don't know your notes from staff to staff, I can tell when you pick up your guitar, you really don't know what you're doin'."

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NOTE: Photos copyright by Stanley Livingston and may not be used without written permission. This interview also appears in the book “Blues in Black & White: The Landmark Ann Arbor Blues Festivals,” with the incredible photos of Stanley Livingston, graphic work by Tom Erlewine, and articles, interviews, and artist bios by me. The book is available on Amazon.com or quality bookstores near you. [Photo by Stanley Livingston of Michael Erlewine doing this interview with Howlin' Wolf in 1969 at the first Ann Arbor Blues Festival.] Michael Erlewine Interviewing Howlin' Wolf, photo by Stanley Livingston

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BRIEF BLUES BIOS AND ALBUM PICKS

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

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Muddy Waters

ANN ARBOR BLUES FESTIVALS

BRIEF BLUES BIOS AND ALBUM PICKS

By Michael Erlewine

There were many of the world's greatest blues players at those Ann Arbor Blues Festivals. I thought some of you might like a short introduction to a few of these players, so I put together a short bio on some of the blues artists who were at the Ann Arbor Blues Festivals in 1969 and 1970. These are just my thoughts and my album picks. I also include some basic information on birth and death dates and locations, FYI. I interviewed almost all of these players and many more.

Albert King

Born: 1923-04-25

Indianola, MS

Died: 1992-12-21

Memphis, TN

Guitar, Vocals

Albert King is a take-no-prisoners king of player and one of the three great bluesman named King, the others being B.B. and Freddie. Standing well over six feet tall, king was indeed an imposing figure that, coupled with his serious demeanor, made any performance something you would remember. Although well acquainted with Chicago and the style of blues played there, King's music was more shaped by his contract with Stax records which often used Booker T and The MG's as his backup band for recordings. King's song "Born Under a Bad Sign" is perhaps his signature tune and his blistering guitar playing the envy of all guitar players. My brother Dan, a world-famous guitar repairman, made a custom-made guitar for Albert King, with his name inlaid on the fingerboard.

Born Under a Bad Sign / Stax / 1967

Live wire / Blues Power / Stax / 1968

Laundromat Blues / Edsel / 1984

Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup

Born: 1905-08-24

Forest, MS

Died: 1974-03-28

Nassawadox, VA

Guitar, Vocals

Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup was one of those artists who really seemed bigger than life in person. Meeting him was an awesome experience. A powerful singer and songwriter, Elvis Presley covered no less than three of Crudup's songs, the most famous being "That's Alright Mama," the tune that really launched Presley's career. Crudup was one of those artists who was kind to everyone he met and meeting that kind of wisdom and kindness is never forgotten. I remember my brother Dan and I drinking Jack Daniels with Arthur Crudup one fine night when Crudup was housed at the Michigan League.

Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup / Fire / 1962

Give Me a 32-20 / Crown Prince / 1988

Mean Ol' Frisco / Charly / 1999

B.B. King

Born: 1925-09-16

Indianola, MS

Died: 2015-05-14

Las Vegas, NV

Guitar, Vocals

B.B. King really deserves his title "King of the Blues," both as singer, guitar player, and person. King's always gracious, gentlemanly style, carefully phrased lyrics, and superb guitar solos coupled with the fact that he always put on a great show, worked with a fantastic band, complete with horns, Hammond B-3 organ - the works. If it was B.B. King, then it was a real

experience you would have. I can well remember nights in Detroit, in a school gymnasium, perhaps the only white kids there with B.B. King, Bobby Forte on tenor sax, Duke Jethro on the organ and plenty of beer and fried chicken for sale. That was something.

Live at the Regal / ABC / MCA / 1965

The Blues / Crown / 1960

Live in Cook County Jail / MCA / 1971

Big Joe Turner

Born: 1911-05-18

Kansas City, MO

Died: 1985-11-24

Inglewood, CA

Vocals

The "Boss of the Blues," Big Joe Turner hails from Kansas City, which has its own take on the blues. Turner is a blues 'shouter' and has played everything from jazz and big band to rock n' roll. His 1954 hit "Shake, Rattle, and Roll" mad him a national celebrity. Turner, like B.B. King and Bobby 'Blue' Bland, is more uptown, used to a large audience, and puts on a real show.

Joe Turner Sings Kansas City Jazz / Decca / 1953

Boss of the Blues / Atlantic / 1956

Things I Used to Do / Pablo / 1977

Bobby Blue Bland

Born: 1930-01-27

Rosemark, TN

Died: 2013-06-23

Germantown, TN

Vocals

Bobby "Blue" Bland was one of the few blues singers who worked with a big-band sound to also make it with the gut-bucket blues crowd. He has a world of heartache in that voice and there are no credible imitators of his sound. Like B.B. King, Bland toured with a larger band and his performances were

carefully put together shows. His apologetic style of singing, which features heartbreak and love lost, endears him to almost all listeners. He is indeed one of the greats.

Blues Consolidate / Duke / 1958

Two Steps from the Blues / Duke / MCA / 1961

Touch of the Blues / Duke / 1967

Buddy Guy

Born: 1936-07-36

Lettsworth, LA

Guitar, Vocals

Chicago singer and blues guitarist Buddy Guy is world famous today, but in the late 1960s, his incredible guitar style was already the envy of all the younger players. His work on the Junior Wells album "Hoodoo Man Blues" sets the mark for a certain style of Chicago guitar and is a must-listen for lovers of city blues. Junior Wells and Buddy Guy are an unbeatable combination for pure inner-city blues and you can see it from the photos of the blues festival. I had the good fortune to have dinner with Buddy Guy some years ago.

I Left My Blues in San Francisco / Chess / 1967

Pleading the Blues / Evidence / 1979

Chess Masters / Chess / 1987

Charlie Musselwhite

Born: 1944-01-31

Kosciusko, MS

Harmonica, Vocals

Charlie Musselwhite, along with Paul Butterfield, is one of the few whites to have paid his blues dues early on and to appear on stage with the great performers at those early Ann Arbor blues festivals. "Memphis Charlie" as he was called, came more out of the country side of blues, but soon learned all the nuances of big-city Chicago blues. He was a student of the great harp master Big Walter Horton. Musselwhite started out in Chicago, but has since toured all over the country, in particular on the West Coast. He is still cookin'. I have seen and talked with Musselwhite a number of times over the years.

Stand Back / Vanguard / 1967

Tennessee Woman / Vanguard / 1969

In My Time / Alligator / 1991

Clifton Chenier

Born: 1925-06-25

Opelousas, LA

Died: 1987-12-12

Lafayette, LA

Accordion, Vocals

Creole-born accordion player Clifton Chenier is called the "King of Zydeco," and for good reason. He pretty much single-handedly showed the world what Cajun and Zydeco tunes should look and sound like. His flamboyant style of presenting himself (he wore a large crown and flashed his gold tooth) and that irresistible music had everyone out of their seats and dancing in the aisles for every performance. Chenier is the king!

Bayou Blues / Specialty / 1970

King of the Bayous / Arhoolie / 1970

Out West / Arhoolie / 1974

Dave Alexander

Born: 1938-03-10

Shreveport, LA

Died: 2012-01-08

Marshall, TX

Piano, Vocals, Bass, Trumpet

Dave Alexander, a very talented singer and pianist, was a very familiar figure in the Ann Arbor scene in the early 1970s, playing both solo and as a sideman. He was very approachable.

Boogie Woogie Riot! / Ace / Arhoolie / 1994

The Rattler / Arhoolie / 1972

The Dirt on the Ground / Arhoolie / 1973

Doctor Ross

Born: 1925-01-21

Tunica, MS

Died: 1993-0528

Flint, MI

Guitar, Harmonica, Vocals

In the tradition of the one-man band players like the West Coast's 'Lone-Cat' Jessie Fuller, Doctor Isaiah Ross plays guitar, harmonica, and sings in various combinations. Ross came out of Mississippi, where he appeared on radio and onto the Memphis scene, eventually working for Sun Records and playing a boogie style of guitar, voice, and harmonica. His sound is instantly recognizable, perhaps because he played the guitar left-handed and upside down and the harmonica backward, with the low notes to the right.

Call the Doctor / Testament / 1965

I'd Rather Be an Old woman's Baby / Fortune / 1971

Doctor Ross / the Harmonica Boss / Fortune / 1972

Eddie Vinson

Born: 1917-12-18

Houston, TX

Died: 1988-07-02

Los Angeles, CA

Sax, Vocals

Eddie 'Cleanhead' Vinson is a jazz saxophonist who wandered, to everyone's delight, into the blues and R&B format from time to time. Vinson can play the most down-and-out bar-walking sax you have ever heard, when he has a mind to. He also wrote a number of tunes for Miles Davis. 'Cleanhead' is a terror on the sax.

Clean Head's Back in Town / Charly / 1957

Cherry Red / One Way / 1967

Old Kidney Stew Is Fine / Delmark / 1969

Fred Below

Born: 1926-09-16

Chicago, IL

Died: 1988-08-14

Chicago, IL

Drums

Fred Below, one of the best-known of the Chicago blues drummers, is instantly recognizable by his signature black beret. Below, at first a jazz drummer, crossed over into blues and stayed there. He played with the "Three Aces," Junior Wells key band, and eventually after Wells left, with Little Walter as the "Four Aces" and then "Little Walter and the Jukes." Below played on almost all of Little Walter's greatest hits and also worked with just about every blues player on the scene. He was 'the Man' when it came to choosing a drummer for a sideman.

No solo albums, but Below played on many tunes by Little Walter, Sonny Boy Williamson, Muddy Waters, Jimmy Rogers, and Howlin' Wolf, Junior Wells, and others.

Freddie King

Born: 1934-09-03

Gilmer, TX

Died: 1976-12-28

Dallas, TX

Guitar, Vocals

The great guitar instrumentalist and singer Freddie King, the 'Texas Cannonball,' is perhaps most famous for the instrumental "Hideaway" and the song "You've Got to Love Her with a Feeling." Every aspiring guitar player studies King and covers his material, people like Stevie Ray Vaughn, Peter Green, and even Magic Sam. Not the Chicago sound, but the Texas sound. That is Freddie King.

Let's Hide Away and Dance Away with Freddie King / King / 1961

Gives You a Bonanza of Instrumentals / Crosscut / 1965

Hide Away / Starday / 1969

Fred McDowell

Born: 1904-01-12

Roseville, TN

Died: 1972-07-03

Memphis, TN

Guitar, Vocals

I first met Delta-style bluesman Mississippi Fred McDowell in a small room in the Michigan League at the University of Michigan, where he had arrived some days too early for the Ann Arbor Blues Festival. There he was alone in his room, soft spoken and gentle mannered. We hung out. McDowell was the real deal, a great slide player, with a wide repertoire that made that original Delta sound live again in the now.

My Home Is in the Delta / Testament / 1964

Amazing Grace / Testament / 1966

Mississippi Delta Blues / Vol. 2 / Arhoolie / 1966

Hound Dog Taylor

Born: 1915-04-12

Natchez, MS

Died: 1975-12-17

Chicago, IL

Guitar, Vocals

Slide guitarist and singer Hound Dog Taylor was always a force in the local Chicago blues scene. His band, the legendary House Rockers, contained only two players, himself and guitarist Brewer Phillips, but the two of them really did rock the house, sending folks to the dance floor and they sounded louder than a full band. Here is wild, up-tempo slide music.

Hound Dog Taylor and the Houserockers / Alligator / 1971

Natural Boogie / Alligator / 1973

Beware of the Dog / Alligator / 1975

Howlin' Wolf

Born: 1910-06-10

West Point, MS

Died: 1976-01-10

Hines, IL

Vocals, Harmonica, Guitar

Singer and harp player Howlin' Wolf was indeed an imposing figure. Physically he was huge, but when he started to sing his voice seemed to come from such a deep or faraway place in the mind that he actually would intimidate people. That voice could scare the dickens out of you, so serious could his music sound, and yet the next minute he would be crawling on his hands and knees across the stage clowning - a total ham. Almost every blues fan loves "The Wolf." I did an interview with Wolf that is like an acid trip.

Howlin' wolf / Chess / 1962

The Rockin' Chair Album / Vogue / 1962

Evil / Chess / 1969

J.B. Hutto

Born: 1926-04-26

Blackville, SC

Died: 1983-06-12

Harvey, IL

Guitar, Vocals

The great slide player J.B. Hutto, in the tradition of Elmore James, is known for his powerful voice, sometimes almost incomprehensible singing, and searing guitar work. Hutto and his band called "The Hawks" were among the first to go electric and push the amplified sound to the limit.

Hawk Squat / Delmark / 1968

Sidewinder / Delmark / 1973

Masters of Modern Blues / Testament / 1995

John Lee Hooker

Born: 1920-08-17

Clarksdale, MS

Died: 2001-06-21

Los Altos, CA

Guitar, Vocals

John Lee Hooker is the unrivalled groove master in the blues idiom and deserves his title as the "King of the Boogie." His recordings have an amazing uniformity of quality and his serious and soulful demeanor is matched only by that of the great Muddy Waters himself. Hooker grabs the audience from the first note and holds them transfixed until he stops. He was that good. I remember sitting with him in a tiny Green Room at the Chessmate in Detroit, which Jimmy Cotton was putting on a show out front. I think Cotton and his band lived with us for a week... something like that.

I'm John Lee Hooker / Shout Factory / 1960

Burnin' / Vee-Jay / 1962

The Great John Lee Hooker / Crown / 1964

Johnny Shines

Born: 1915-04-26

Frayser, TN

Died: 1992-04-20

Chicago, IL

Guitar, Vocals

Shines who traveled and studied with the legendary Robert Johnson played in the Delta style, using a lot of slide guitar. Settling in the Chicago area, his powerful voice and understated manner of singing always stayed a little on the country side of city, but that being said, Shines was a real force in modern Chicago-style blues. His performances on the album "Chicago, The Blues Today! Vol. 3" with his friend Big Walter Horton are masterpieces. Hanging out with Johnny Shines, who was very approachable, was a treat that I can never forget. That Chicago the Blues Today" album, below, with Big Walter Horton is one of the finest blues albums I have EV ER heard.

Johnny Shines with Big Walter Horton / Testament / 1969

Dust My Broom / Flyright / 1980

Chicago the Blues Today: Vol. 3 / Vanguard / 1967

Johnny Winter

Born: 1944-02-23

Beaumont, TX

Died: 2014-07-16

France

Guitar

Johnny Winter, blues guitarist and singer, was not on the festival schedule, but like many your white performers, he knew enough to want to be at that historic gathering. He sat in with a number of artists (like Luther Allison) and generally hung out and soaked in the sound.

Second Winter / Columbia / 1969

Johnny Winter And / DCC / 1970

White Hot & Blue / Blue Sky / 1978

Johnny Woods

Born: 1917-01-01

Looxahoma, MS

Died: 1990

Guitar, Vocals

Singer and harmonica player Johnny Woods played mostly post-war country-style music. He often travelled with Mississippi Fred McDowell, with whom he also recorded.

Mississippi Fred McDowell and Johnny Woods / Rounder / 1977

Johnny Young

Born: 1918-01-01

Mississippi

Died: 1974-04-18

Chicago, IL

Guitar, Mandalin, Vocals

Singer, guitar, and mandolin player, Johnny Young hailed from Mississippi and ended up a fixture of modern Chicago blues. Often busking on Maxwell Street with fellow player Johnny Williams, Young went on to record with Big Walter Horton, Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, and others. He was one of the few players who used the mandolin and has not received all the attention he deserves.

Johnny Young and His Chicago Blues Band / Arhoolie / 1966

Chicago The Blues Today: Vol. 3 / Vanguard / 1967

Fat Mandolin / Blue Horizon / 1970

Junior Wells

Born: 1934-12-09

Memphis, TN

Died: 1998-01-15

Chicago, IL

Harmonica, Vocals

Junior Wells is perhaps the paradigm of the inner-city Chicago bluesman. Just pick up a copy of his Delmark recording "Hoodoo Man Blues," which tells all. The singing and harmonica playing on that album is literally incredible and takes you to a place I will bet you have never been to and will never forget. Wells is the essence of what Chicago-style blues is all about.

Hoodoo Man Blues / Delmark / 1965

Blues Hits Big Town / Delmark / 1977

Come On in This House / Telarc / 1997

Juke Boy Bonner

Born: 1932-03-22

Bellville, TX

Died: 1978-06-29

Houston, TX

Guitar, Harmonica, Vocals

Juke Boy Bonner was perhaps best known as a singer and harmonica player, but he also played a lot of guitar. Bonner, who was mostly a solo act, often appeared as a one-man band, and sung of the harshness of urban existence

for a black man, with songs like "Going Back to the Country," "Life is a Nightmare," and "Struggle Here in Houston."

One Man Trio / Flyright / 1967

Going Back to the Country / Arhoolie / 1967

The Struggle / Arhoolie / 1968

Koko Taylor

Born: 1935-09-28

Memphis, TN

Died: 2009-06-04

Chicago

Vocals

Sometimes referred to as the "Queen of the Chicago Blues," singer Koko Taylor, like Big Mama Thornton and Bessie Smith before her, is a take-no-prisoners vocalist. When she sings her signature (Willie Dixon) tune, "Wang Dang Doodle," she brings down the house and sends dancers flooding onto the dance floor. All modern female blues singers have learned from Koko Taylor.

Koko Taylor / MCA / Chess / 1969

I Got what It Takes / Alligator / 1975

The Earthshaker / Alligator / 1978

Little Brother Montgomery

Born: 1906-04-18

Kentwood, LA

Died: 1985-09-06

Champaign, IL

Piano, Vocals

Chicago blues pianist Little Brother Montgomery was around when blues turned electric and was an integral part of the small club scene in the Windy City. With some roots in traditional jazz, Montgomery's piano blues are more refined than many, as his work with the great guitarist Otis Rush makes clear. He appeared at many folk and blues festivals over the years.

Tasty Blues / Prestige / 1960

Chicago: The Living Legends / Reverside / 1961

Goodbye Mister Blues / Delmark / 1973

Lucille Spann

Born: 1938-06-23

Bolton, MS

Died: 1994-08-02

Vicksburg, MO

Vocals

Lucille Spann, the wife of legendary blues pianist Otis Spann, sang both blues and gospel. She recorded with the likes of Muddy Waters and often toured with her husband Otis.

Bottom of the Blues / Bluesway / 1968

Cryin' Time / Vanguard / 1970

Last Call: Live at Boston Tea Party / Mr Cat / 2000

Luther Allison

Born: 1939-08-17

Widener, AR

Died: 1997-08-13

Madison, WI

Guitar, Vocals

Guitarist, singer Luther Allison was a mighty force at those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals. He was on fire. About thirty years of age at the time and at the top of his game, Allison (who was known by the older blues musicians) was himself a fan of these great blues masters and acted as an ambassador for the blues to the emerging white audience. Well-known in Ann Arbor, Allison performed frequently in the city and more or less hung out with the music crowd there. Everyone in Ann Arbor knew and loved Luther Allison.

Love Me Mama / Delmark / 1969

Luther's Blues / Mowtown / 1974

Serious / Blind Pig / 1987

Magic Sam

Born: 1937-02-14

Grenada, MS

Died: 1969-12-01

Chicago, IL

Guitar, Vocals

Magic Sam, who died within months of the 1969 festival was a phenomenon, certainly one of the bit hits of the festival. Magic Sam was for me the very essence of the electric Chicago sound, both as a guitarist and a singer. His album "West Side Soul" is one of the finest I have ever heard, with his swinging syncopated guitar and a voice like none other anywhere. Magic Sam was also kind and welcoming to all who came to know him. I first heard Magic Sam on Chicago's West Side, playing in a huge Chines-restaurant-style low ceiling room. It was packed, so that is was all I could do to slip in a press up with my back to the wall. And then I heard this incredible voice, like shimmering water, and the hair just stood up on the back of my neck. Sam was playing that night with "Shakey Jake" Harris, a harmonica player. If you want a blues player who can sing like no one else, and who is also an incredible guitar player, get the album "West Side Soul."

West Side Soul / Delmark / 1967

Magic Touch / Black Top / 1966

Black Magic / Delmark / 1968

Mance Lipscolm

Born: 1895-09-09

Navosta, TX

Died: 1976-01-30

Navosta, TX

Guitar, Vocals, Violin

Mance Lipscomb, the oldest artist at the festival (born in 1895), was in his mid seventies when he appeared at the Ann Arbor Blues festival. Gentle mannered and soft-spoken, Lipscomb harkened back to an earlier time and was more in

the tradition of folk blues, although he could play a wide variety of styles. Seeing him perform was a treasure.

Texas Songster / Vol. 3: Texas Songster in a Live Performance / Arhoolie / 1965

Texas Songster / Vol. 2: You Got to Reap What You Sow / Arhoolie / 1964

You'll Never Find Another Man Like Mance / Arhoolie / 1964

Mighty Joe Young

Born: 1927-09-23

Shreveport, LA

Died: 1999-03-27

Chicago, IL

Guitar, Vocals

Singer, guitarist Mighty Joe Young came from Milwaukee and settled in on Chicago's West side, eventually recording on the Delmark label in 1971. Young did not tour as much as some of the other Chicago blues player, but was well-known and respected around town. He was a permanent fixture on the Chicago scene, holding down steady gigs at various Chicago clubs over the years.

Chicken Heads / Ovation / 1974

Mighty Joe Young / Ovation / 1976

Mighty Man / Blind Pig / 1997

Muddy Waters

Born: 1915-04-04

Rolling Fort, MS

Died: 1983-04-30

Westmount, IL

Vocals, Guitar

If there is one "King" of the Chicago blues, it has to be Muddy Waters. First of all, he acts like a king, always dignified, almost reserved, actually "regal" is the word I am looking for, like a king. I always felt I had to be on my best behavior when I interviewed him or even was at a club where he was playing and I

could see that the blues players felt the same way. The Muddy Waters band, like Miles Davis, was the birthing place for all kinds of great blues players, like Junior Wells, Big Walter Horton, Little Walter, Jimmy Rogers, Otis Span, Willie Dixon, James Cotton, Mojo Buford, George Smith, Francis Clay, and many others. The Muddy Waters band always set the bar for comparison and there really was no comparison. Muddy Waters was the living spirit of the Delta sound.

At Newport / MCA / Chess / 1960

Folk Festival of the Blues / MCA / Chess / 1963

Muddy Waters / Chess / 1964

Papa Lightfoot

Born: 1924-03-02

Natchez, MS

Died: 1971-11-28

Natchez, MS

Harmonica, Vocals

Lost to the music world for years, harmonica player Papa Lightfoot was found again in the late 1960s and made an album for Vault Records in 1969. A born showman, Lightfoot loved to perform and is reminiscent of the style of Big Joe Turner.

Natchez Trace / Vault / 1969

Rural Blues / Vol. 2 / 1969

Goin' Back to the Natchez Trace / Ace / 1995

Pee Wee Crayton

Born: 1914-12-18

Rockdale, TX

Died: 1985-06-25

Los Angeles, CA

Guitar, Vocals

Texan Singer and blues guitarist Pee-Wee Crayton is in the tradition of blues-great T-Bone Walker in that his vocals are refined and sophisticated, but his aggressive guitar playing is distinct and instantly recognizable.

Pee Wee Crayton / Crown / 1959

Blue Guitar Genius / Vol. 1 / Ace / 1982

Blues After Dark / Charly / 1988

Robert Jr. Lockwood

Born: 1915-03-27

Marvell, AR

Died: 2006-11-21

Cleveland

Guitar, Vocals

Robert Lockwood, Jr. had the distinction of studying and traveling with two of the greatest bluesman, Sonny Boy Williamson (Rice Miller) and the legendary Robert Johnson (who lived with Lockwood's mother for some ten years). Lockwood was in demand in the Chicago area as a sideman, working with Little Walter, Sunnyland Slim, Eddie Boyd, and many others. For those of us learning blues back in the later 1960s, Lockwood obviously carried the tradition. You could see it in how he carried himself and hear it in his playing. And he was kind and approachable. We all loved to hang around Robert Jr. Lockwood.

Steady Rollin' Man / Delmark / 1970

Plays Robert and Robert / Evidence / 1982

I Got to Find Me a Woman / Verve / 1998

Robert Pete Williams

Born: 1914-03-14

Zachary, LA

Died: 1980-12-31

Rosedale, LA

Guitar, Vocals

Robert Pete Williams was actually discovered at Angola Prison in Louisiana, where he was serving time for murder. Williams is not a Chicago-style player, but is more country style, with intense songs of his life experience in and out of prison. He was featured at many festivals during the later sixties, often traveling with Mississippi Fred McDowell.

Angola Prisoner's Blues / Arhoolie / 1961

Louisiana Blues / Takoma / 1967

Rural Blues / Storyville / 1972

Roosevelt Sykes

Born: 1906-01-31

Elmar, AR

Died: 1983-07-17

New Orleans, LA

Piano, Vocals

Blues pianist Roosevelt Sykes was born in Louisiana, raised in Arkansaw, and relocated to Chicago in 1943, where he charted a number of songs, with his band "The Honeydrippers." He returned to New Orleans in the 1960s, where he remained. I cannot really find words for Roosevelt Sykes, who was of course an awesome pianist and singer, always upbeat and with a friendly word for all who came to know him. His incredible kindness and welcoming nature made him a true ambassador for not only the blues, but for humanity. Roosevelt and my father spent a couple days hanging out and drinking beer. That was a sight to see.

Honeydripper / Bluesville / 1961

Feel Like Blowin My Horn / Delmark / 1973

Hard Drivin' Blues / Delmark / 1975

Sam Lay

Born: 1935-03-20

Birmingham, AL

Drums, Vocals

Chicago-style drummer Sam Lay came up through the Howlin' Wolf band, playing with the Wolf for six years until he switched to the Paul Butterfield

Blues Band and immediately found prominence. He also backed up Bob Dylan at the historic 1965 Newport Folk Festival set when Dylan went electric. Lay taught the drummer of our blues band, a young Iggy Pop, how to do the double-shuffle. Iggy practiced for weeks to get it right, which he did.

Shuffle Master / Appaloosa / 1992

Stone Blues / Evidence / 1996

Live on Beale Street / Blue Moon / 2000

Son House

Born: 1902-03-21

Riverton, MS

Died: 1988-10-19

Detroit, MI

Guitar, Vocals

Hearing Son House live at the Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, one of the greatest of the Delta-style slide players, was like being back there and then where all that music came from. Here was a man who influenced and was revered by players like Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson, and everyone (and all they represent) playing music that would sear your soul and start you to thinking: what is this life all about. This is where the music came from.

Blues from the Mississippi Delta / Folkways / 1964

The Legendary Son House / Columbia / 1965

Son House / Folk Lyric / 1995

Sunnyland Slim

Born: 1907-09-05

Vance, MS

Died: 1995-03-17

Chicago, IL

Piano, Vocals

Blues pianist Sunnyland Slim was born in the Mississippi Delta and moved first to Memphis and finally to Chicago in 1928 where he became one of the most

sought-after and beloved blues players in that city. He has recorded dozens of albums and has appeared on hundreds of albums.

Midnight Jump / BGO / 1969

Slim's Shout / Prestige / 1969

She Got That Jive / Airway / 1977

Willie Dixon

Born: 1915-07-10

Vicksburg, MS

Died: 1992-01-29

Burbank, CA

Bass, Guitar, Vocals

Willie Dixon is central to the history of Chicago blues as a singer, a bassist, arranger, record producer, and above all as a songwriter. Dixon songs include Little Walter's "My Babe," "Evil" and "Spoonful" by Howlin' Wolf, and a host of other hits like: "Back Door Man," "I Just want to Make Love to You," "Wang Dang Doodle," and "Little Red Rooster."

I Am the Blues / Columbia / 1970

Catalyst / Ovation / 1973

Hidden Charms / Bug / 1988

Lightnin' Hopkins

Born: 1912-03-15

Centerville, TX

Died: 1982-01-30

Houston, TX

Guitar, Vocals

Texas guitarist and singer Lightnin' Sam Hopkins is without a doubt one of the most awesome performers I have ever experienced. It was more than just music we heard. Like the really great blues players, such as Muddy Waters, Lightnin' Hopkins literally created time as he went along and if you dared listen, you were caught up in it and his music could rearrange your mind for you. Hopkins was riveting.

Lightnin' Hopkins / Folkways / 1959

Sings the Blues / Crown / 1961

Mojo Hand / Collectables / 1962

Lazy Bill Lucas

Born: 1918-05-29

Wynee, AK

Died: 1982-12-11

Minneapolis, MN

Piano, Vocals

Chicago pianist Lazy Bill Lucas moved to Chicago in the early 1940s, hanging out and working with John Lee "Sonny Boy" Williamson and Big Joe Williams. Lester also played with Little Walter, Snooky Prior, and in the Howlin' Wolf Band. He was well known in Minneapolis for the "Lazy Bill Lester Show."

Lazy Bill Lucas / Philo

John Jackson

Born: 1924-02-25

Woodville, VA

Died: 2002-01-20

Fairfax Station, VA

Guitar, Vocals

Blues singer and guitarist John Jackson represents the East Coast Piedmont blues, in the songster tradition - a more country side of blues with an easy-going style.

John Jackson / Rounder / 1966

John Jackson Vol. 2 / Arhoolie / 1968

Don't Let Your Deal Go Down / Arhoolie / 1970

Lowell fulsom

Born: 1921-03-31

Tulsa, OK

Died: 1999-03-07

Inglewood, CA

Guitar, Vocals

West Coast blues singer, guitarist, and songwriter Lowell Fulson wrote such blues standards as "Everyday I Have the Blues" and "Reconsider Baby," a big hit that was later covered by no less than Elvis Presley. Fulson played a wide range of blues, with sideman such as Stanley Turrentine, David "Fathead" Newman, and other jazz greats.

Hung Down Head / MCA / Chess / 1954

Soul / United / 1966

Tramp / United / 1967

Carey Bell

Born: 1936-11-04

Macon, Mississippi

Died: 2007-05-06

Chicago

Harmonica, Vocals

Carey Bell was one of the top harp players in what we might call the second generation of Chicago amplified harmonica players. A student of both Little Walter and particularly Big Walter Horton, Bell cut his teeth working in the bands of Muddy Waters and Willie Dixon, and served as a sideman with many artists on harmonica and bass guitar.

Carey Bell's Blues Harp / Delmark / 1969

Deep Down / Alligator / 1995

Gettin' Up: Live at Boddy Guy's Legends Rosa's / Delmark / 2007

Jimmy Dawkins

Born: 1936-10-24

Tchula, MiS

Died:2013-04-10

Chicago, IL

Guitar, Vocals

Blues singer and guitarist Jimmy "Fast Fingers" Dawkins has been a blues fixture on the Chicago's West Side for many years, eventually recording on the Delmark label with his first solo album "Fast Fingers."

Fast Fingers / Delmark / 1969

All for Business / Delmark / 1971

Kan't Shake Dees Blues / Earwig / 1991

THE BLUES ARTISTS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 28, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/5f681c28-d342-42a0-9d97-c0220923581a_440x667.jpeg

I thought you might like to hear about the Ann Arbor Blues Festival and “The Blues” in general, right from the performers themselves. I did scores of personal interviews both with audio and later with video, as well. Here, in their own words, are the voices of some of the performers at these festivals. Let’s start with some comments about the festival itself.

Magic Sam (August 3, 1969)

This festival is like an all-star game.

Louis Myers

This blues festival is a big family reunion.

James Cotton (August 3, 1969)

I've never seen nothin' like this in my life. This is the beatifulest thing I ever seen in my life. This is so beautiful.

Luther Tucker (August 3, 1969)

As for the blues festival, I can dig it. I enjoyin' it.

Lightnin' Hopkins (August 3, 1969)

Well, I been looking forward for this for a long time. And I thought this would happen in the future and it did, so now I hope it lasts long. Fact of business is, I believe it will.

Sleepy John Estes (August 2, 1969)

When all the children get together, Oh that will be a day.

And I also asked many of these performers to tell me how they view the blues and what it means to them. Here are some responses:

Jim Connely (horn player for Otis Rush) -- (August 2, 1969)

Blues and jazz, they are one, yet still they are different, because to be able to play jazz, a musician has to be able to play the blues first. He's got to know the

blues, because blues is soul. It's what you feel, and jazz is just a step farther than the blues. I mean it's musically a step up.

You see, blues is just the common ground that you meet on, but jazz you get sophisticated and you move out a little more. But if you can't play the blues, then to me you can't play jazz.

You play the blues and then you go a little farther and you go into jazz. Blues is a simple thing that anybody can understand. Jazz, you have to keep hearin' it, over and over again to really adjust to it, where anybody can understand the blues.

Whereas blues is a story, a story usually of one's life or somebody's life. And jazz is what a man...it's his life, but it's also what he lives in a dream world. And it's also what he would like to do outside of his life. And he goes into this world of his own, but they are (blues and jazz) are still close together that it's hard to separate the two, like love and hate. You can't have one without the other.

You don't learn how to play the blues. Blues is something that comes natural. You don't go around studying the blues. It's something that comes as natural as a baby sucks his mam'a breast.

Blues is something that's gonna' come natural, anyhow, and the next step you go, you learn to play with rock and roll, and the next thing you know, you are trying to modernize it a little bit. You're tired of that old down feelin' of the blues, and the next thing you know, your gonna' be tryin' to play some jazz.

Blues is me. Blues is the black man. Blues is what we had. Then you move up a step farther, not what we have, but what we want that that's jazz -- this other world we would like to have, when we can set here and imagine what we want. Blues is the

most common thing that you have. It's a thing which will bring all people together, the common ground.

Roosevelt Sykes: (August 1, 1969)

Blues is a part of a man. It's the way he feels. Lot's of people have the wrong understandin'. They think a blues player have to be worried. Thinks the blues player have to been whipped or something, or worried, or troubled or something to sing the blues.

That's wrong. There's doctors. He has medicine. He ain't sick, but he makes stuff for the sick people. So blues players. He ain't worried and bothered, but he's got something for the worried people. With a doctor, your can see his

medicine. He can see his patient. Blues, you can't see the music; he can't see the patient, because it's the soul. So I work on the soul and the doctor works on the body. So something for your soul. Do something for your body. All is mixed in one. Two makes one.

I been goin' to Europe since 1960-1961. People all appreciated the blues everynight I played... eight, ten thousand people a night, in Europe, even in the small towns.

There, nobody could ever become graduated on it, that they can't learn no more music. You just get to think you're finished up and there is something brand new started that you didn't get. So, on and on. It's gonna' be that way.

The blues is a talent. You can't learn that. there's nobody teaches that. No schools for it. Nobody can teach it to you. God gives every man a talent. It don't come in schools. It's something you born with. It's a feelin'. Can't nobody give you that feelin'. You have to have it. You can't buy it and you can't give it away if you got it.

Blues is a part of a man. It's the way he feels. Lots of people have the wrong understandin'. They think that a blues player have to be worried.

Freddy King (August 3, 1969)

Jazz gets a little too way out. I can't understand it if it gets too way out. You understand what I mean by too way out? Away from the beaten track, the common ground or bond of all men. Away from the heart. Blues is the heart.

Fred Below (August 3, 1969)

Altogether different beat, difference in chord structure. Modern Jazz is a measured thing. Blues is not measured. There's as much different between blues and jazz as between night and day.

Louis Myers (August 3, 1969)

Blues is a whole lot different than jazz. I think blues is more so the soul bag than jazz. Jazz is modified from the blues. This [the blues festival] is a big family reunion.

James Madison (August 3, 1969)

Blues is like something that's happened to you. You feel it. You have the blues each and every day. jazz is more or less something you learn. You wake up and are worried about something, try to put it in music, it's blues.

Jack Myers (August 1, 1969)

Improvisation: I think jazz is limited, man. You got certain changes you gotta' make, while if you play the 12-bar blues, a cat can just express his self. Blues is something that is happening every day, that you can understand.

James Cotton (August 3, 1969)

(Blues festival) I've never seen nothin' like this in my life. This is the beatifulest thing I ever seen in my life. This is so beautiful.

Luther Tucker (August 3, 1969)

Everyday brings a little change. As for the blues festival, I can dig it. I enjoyin' it.

Charlie Musslewhite (August 3, 1969)

Blues is a thing by itself. You can express it through music. You can express it by talkin' or paintin' or just walking' down the street, you know. Blues is a thing, separate. Music is a medium for it. Music just happens to be a very comfortable way to express the blues. Jazz is just like takin' a tune, it's just messin with it. You take music and mess with it. takin' a chord and instead of playin' it real conventional, playin' it real crazy. Blues is a thing.

Jimmy Dawkins (August 1, 1969)

I feel like the blues is the truth, because when a guy sings the blues, he sings what happened. Jazz, you can adlib. You can do the little things you wanta' do to please the public. When you're doin' blues, that's the truth, that's the whole story of blues, tellin' the truth. If something happened to you that sets you back, that's the blues.

Blues is standard. Maybe the jazzman makes a little money, so he don't want to be in the bag anymore. So he try to move away from it, but he never leaves blues. He just try to play something else.

When a musician has not paid his dues, he sounds like somebody else. He does not sound like himself.

The blues festival gives breathing space for smaller bands to expand and achieve self-confidence and standing.

When you got the blues, you're always searchin' for happiness, and when I'm up there on the stage, I'm always searchin for something deeper and deeper all the time.

Fred McDowell (August 1, 1969)

You play with understanding. That's the way I play.

Lightnin' Hopkins (August 3, 1969)

Now I just have to tell ya'. I never knowed anything about no jazz, because jazz never affected my life. In my life, the blues always dwell with me. Now, here's what the blues is: that is a good man feelin' bad. You ever heard of that? Now, I'm gonna' show you and it is true. Now you can walk right here and have one dollar in your pocket. You going to the store. You loose that dollar, before you get there. then you walk on by and you turn around. Lord, what happened to me? And now what you got? You got nothin' but the blues.

[festival] Well, I been looking forward for this for a long time. And I thought this would happen in the future and it did, so now I hope it lasts long. Fact of business is, I believe it will.

Bob Koester (August 2, 1969) [Delmark Records]

What is Jazz? The element of improvisation has to be present, blues chord structure has to be present.

Blues is a vocal music and jazz is an instrumental music, and if you have an artist who is a great guitar player, and he does not sing well, he's eventually gonna' wind up in the jazz field, or somewhere else.

Jazz is the ability to get away from that chord structure and the 12-bar language. It's a matter of material. But also, I think it is the emphasis on the instrumental aspects of the music, rather than the vocal. Blues is not only vocal, it's verbal, where words mean a great deal.

Big Mama Thornton (August 3, 1969) [Hound Dog]

Jazz? I don't understand it in the first place. It don't have no endin. Here he is up there blowin' and maybe he blow till he get tired, then he just stop. What about rock and roll? Some folks say: It's nothin' but a hopped-up, fast-up blues. That's all it is.

I like to let my audience be close to me, you know what I man? And I want them to feel that they are close to me, anyway, because I wants to be close to them, because I want to express myself to let them know what I do and how I do it. And if they can do it, good luck to 'em, is all I can say.

Muddy Waters (August 2, 1969)

Blues. I lived them. I lived them musically and I lived them lifewise. Blues is the mother of jazz and all those things. A blues performer stays in blues, when he loves them like I do. To me, I'd rather remain with the blues and not try to

move into the jazz field. I didn't even have it on my mind to try a change, to do something else.

Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup (August 3, 1969) {Wrote Elvis's first song}

I'm this a way. If I go to work for you, and just whatever I promise you, that's what I will do. If I promise you that tomorrow afternoon, me and you gonna' fight, we gonna' fight. The reason we don't fight is that I don't meet you, and that's the way I am. I only have nothin' but my word. And through not nothin' being but my word, I have to do as I say. A man's word is his bond. And if a man's word ain't no good, he ain't no good. And I've learned that.

You know the life of a musician is only thirty-three years, if he live it. Somebody will either poison you; some woman will kill him, or some man will kill him. And if you go beyond that, you got to treat everybody nice.

Magic Sam (August 3, 1969)

This festival is like an all-star game.

The blues has been handed down from generation to generation. Blues came from spirituals. It developed and developed. Jazz is taken from the blues.

T-Bone Walker (August 3, 1969)

Without Blues, there wouldn't be no jazz. Blues is the basis of all jazz.

Clifton Chenier (August 2, 1969)

Blues gonna' forever be here. Jazz goes on and off. See? The blues always standard. Jazz is Ok for those who like it, you know.

Otis Rush (August 2, 1969)

Blues is the foundation of all music. They keep buildin' and buildin' on it, just like these cars. They didn't use to look like this, jazz is a thing like I'm saying. They just pep blues up. They speed it up. they cut it up, all kinds of ways and pieces. They got time to go by, nothin' but time, and they can cut it up all kinds of ways. This is what I mean by cutting it up.

Son House (August 3, 1969)

Yeah, Yeah. It's all right I think. Mostly all the old guys, they mostly all are gone. I think Willie Brown was about the last one.

FOLK REVIVAL TO ELECTRIC BLUES: A HISTORY

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 28, 2023

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FOLK REVIVAL TO ELECTRIC BLUES: A HISTORY

By Michael Erlewine

[I would like to take some time here on my Facebook blog to share some music history. I know, it may not be as exciting as some might like, but it is time I make sure some of you out there get to read this because, it is our history. And so, for the next few (or however many I need) blogs, I will share in quite some detail, information from my own experience about the transition from the folk revival of the 1950s to the emergence of city electric blues. My hope is that some few of you will appreciate hearing how this went down.]

The Ann Arbor Blues Festival

On a warm summer night in August of 1969 a music legacy was born. Several thousand blues lovers gathered in a small athletic field called Fuller Flats near the North Campus of the University of Michigan (a spot along the Huron River in Ann Arbor, Michigan) to witness the first “Ann Arbor Blues Festival.” By the time blues icon Sun House took the stage to close the show it was clear that something magical was happening in this southeast Michigan college town. Few present also knew that music history was being made, for the 1969 Ann Arbor Blues Festival was the first electric blues festival of its kind in North America.

When we look back at the roster of performers at those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, it is hard to imagine that all of this great talent managed to converge at one place and time, blues greats like Bobby ‘Blue’ Bland, Big Joe Turner, Buddy Guy, John Lee Hooker, B.B. King, Albert King, Freddy King, Lightnin’ Hopkins, Howlin’ Wolf, Magic Sam, Muddy Waters, Son House, T-Bone Walker, and Junior Wells, to name a few. And that is just the short list.

How I Happened to Be There

Before I begin, let me tell you something about why I happen to be writing this and how I got involved with these landmark festivals in the first place. It is

simple: those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals changed the course of my life forever.

Sometimes I think of myself as similar to the lead character in the movie “Forest Gump,” always on the edge of history, witnessing, but never quite front and center, never in exactly the right place at the right time. However, when it comes to those first two blues festivals in Ann Arbor, I was there AND then, one-hundred percent. Those festivals were life-altering events for me, a pivotal point in deciding who I was going to be and what I would do in my life. Let me give you a quick idea what I was about back then.

In 1968, when that first blues festival was being organized, I was part of the only blues band in the area. The “Prime Movers Blues Band” first came together in the summer of 1965, the same summer that the Grateful Dead formed in San Francisco. This was a time of real cultural change across the country. I was studying and learning to play Chicago-style blues 24x7. It was my passion.

We hooked up with the blues festival organizers pretty much by default: we were the only band in the area that knew anything about modern city blues. We had been to Chicago years before and seen all the blues greats live, not to mention: you couldn’t keep us out of that festival for the world. This festival was like a dream come true for me, a chance to see my idols, these great blues players up close and right here in my own home town. Who could ask for more?

My brother Dan and I volunteered (we probably forced ourselves on the organizers) and ended up being put in charge of feeding all the performers and making sure they had drinks. Trust me, providing drinks proved to be ‘key’ in gaining access to these players. The opportunity to meet our heroes was way beyond anything we could have imagined on our own.

And to put the icing on the cake, I ended up officially interviewing (on reel-to-reel tape) almost every blues artist and sideman at the festival - scores of them. Later in my life, the experience of putting all that interview information together led to my becoming something of an archivist of music data in general and I eventually founded and built the All-Music Guide (allmusic.com), which today is the largest database of music reviews, bios, tracks, and information on the planet. So, you can see what I mean when I say that these festivals were life-changing for me. They gave me direction. Now you know how I fit into all of this, so let’s move on.

In this writing, I have two stories to tell. One of course is the importance of those first two Ann Arbor blues festivals, how they came about, who was

involved, and the artists that played there – the music itself. The second story I want to share with you has more to do with my experience of how white America first became aware of electric-city blues music and, as you will see, the two are to some degree interdependent.

A Short History of Blues Festivals

To appreciate the uniqueness of those first Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, some historical context may be helpful. Blues as a genre did not always have festivals. Although some blues was included in many of the early folk festivals, it was almost exclusively of the acoustic ‘folk-blues’ variety, more of an add-on than a featured style at folk festivals like those held in Newport Rhode Island. It was the ‘folk’ in folk-blues that was what most people came to hear, not the blues. The “blues” was just a feeling that the folk-blues held for many of us and was not recognized as the genre it is today, at least not by folkies like me. Until the late ‘60s, modern, electric, citified blues was almost exclusively the province of black Americans, made available on black record labels or served up in hundreds of small clubs and bars across the land. White Americans didn’t go there. All that began to change with that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969, but let’s back up just a bit.

The Chitlin’ Circuit

Chitterlings or ‘Chitlins’ as they are called are the large intestines of pigs that have been specially cleaned, stewed, and then fried. The Chitlin’ Circuit as it was called consisted of hundreds of small venues (mostly in the South) where chitlins were served along with plenty of beer and music. These were the places where black musicians travelled to play the blues and where black audiences could congregate in a racially divided country and time. The chitlin’ circuit also included (on the high-end) some major black theaters like the Apollo Theater in Harlem, the Howard Theater in D.C., the Cotton Club in NYC, the Royal Theater in Baltimore, the Fox Theater in Detroit, the Uptown Theater in Philadelphia, and so on.

But for the most part, this kind of blues was played in the hundreds of small bars, clubs, and way-stops along the circuit. Many of the great blues musicians featured at those first Ann Arbor blues festivals knew the chitlin’ circuit only too well. For years, these performers had traveled the circuit playing the blues - one-night stands at roadside bars and clubs. To white America, the chitlin’ circuit was practically invisible. City blues at that time was black music played in black venues - music for blacks.

The Folk Festivals

By the 1950s, more and more young Americans became interested in their own indigenous music – American folk music. In the later '50s and early '60s, festivals and folklore societies became increasingly popular, in particular on college campuses and among more affluent white Americans. Along with the interest in folk music came the folklore societies. My first experience with these groups was the University of Michigan Folklore Society in Ann Arbor in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In 1957, freshman student Al Young (today a poet laureate of California) and Bill McAdoo founded the University of Michigan Folklore Society. Great players like Marc Silber, Perry Lederman, and others were part of that.

And of course there were the folk festivals, of which the one in Newport, Rhode Island is perhaps the most famous, if not the first. The Newport Folk Festival was established in 1959 by George Wein, the same man who in 1954 established the Newport Jazz Festival. The first Newport Folk Festival was held on July 11-12, 1959 and featured, among other acts, the Kingston Trio, a group that had exploded to national prominence only the year before. Flanking the Kingston Trio were classic folk singers like Odetta, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, and of course, the ubiquitous Pete Seeger. During a set by the singer/songwriter Bob Gibson at that first 1959 festival, a young Joan Baez made her national debut to a wildly enthusiastic audience of over 13,000 people. The Newport festival is still considered to be the granddaddy of all folk festivals, even though it has been reduced in size in recent years.

The folk scene in the early '60s was very active and organized enough to have a well-established set of venues (coffee houses, church sponsorships, etc.) and routes that stretched across the country and over which performing folk artists traveled, mostly by hitchhiking. By the early 1960s, folk enthusiasts everywhere were learning the rudiments of music research, at least to the point of tracing particular songs back through time to their roots or at least trying to. It was axiomatic at that time that the original version of a song was preferable to later versions, almost always enriching the listener's experience and enjoyment of the tune. "Sing Out! Magazine" was one of the main repositories of this research, our musical collective heritage.

It should be remembered that the folk-music revival emerged toward the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, a time when more and more young people were rejecting the culture of the 1950s (the flattop haircuts and what they felt was a cookie-cutter mentality) and thirsting for something a little more authentic. It is a simple fact that most of us looked to the folk music tradition as a way of grounding ourselves, a way to somehow get underneath or break through the social veneer in which we were raised. Future events cast their

shadows and the counterculture revolution that was to come later in the mid-1960s was already nascent and emerging.

The Folk Scene

Unlike folk music, whose roots were often in England or Ireland, with blues, to the surprise of most white folk-blues lovers, a trip into the history book was often as easy as venturing into a different part of town, only we didn't know it then. The folk music scene was flourishing on college campuses and what started at Newport in 1959 was echoed in the next few years by startup folk festivals all across America, including the Berkeley and Chicago Folk festivals, both of which debuted in 1961. And, although these folk festivals also featured some blues (country blues), the blues at those festivals was mostly treated as part of the folk genre, and as a sidelight at that.

For example, one could hear Jessie 'Lone Cat' Fuller at Hertz Hall (Berkeley, CA) in 1959 and at Newport in 1960. In 1960 Robert Pete Williams performed at Newport. Other festivals in the early 1960s had Lightnin' Hopkins, Mance Lipscomb, and Mississippi John Hurt, Rev. Gary Davis, Sleepy John Estes, Jesse Fuller, and occasionally John Lee Hooker. It is hard for me to imagine John Lee Hooker or Lightnin' Hopkins not getting mainstream attention wherever they played. In 1965, an electrified Bob Dylan, backed by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, shocked the Newport folk crowd and helped to bring awareness of modern city blues to a mostly white folk crowd. Dylan was booed.

The Folk Revival – Looking for Roots

This folk music revival in the later 1950s and early 1960s was just that, a revival, an attempt to revive a music that most felt was already deeply embedded in the past. The revival started out looking back and, for the most part, stayed that way for many years. We sought to revive and find our future in past songs rather than writing our own songs for the future.

Initially, younger folk artists were just too shy. Emerging players like Bob Dylan, Ramblin' Jack Elliot (and scores of now-unknown players schooled in traditional folk music) were (at first) not focused on writing songs themselves. Their favorite contemporary songwriter was probably Woody Guthrie, but most of the songs they played came from even earlier times, sometimes all the way back to England and Europe. The great majority of folk artists did covers of earlier songs, Dylan included. The goal then was to do them well, to revive and make them live again.

Pivotal artists of the time like Joan Baez and the New Lost City Ramblers were not writing their own songs, but instead re-enacting and re-presenting the finest in traditional folk music. Their technique was flawless, but it was not

their own songwriting creativity that was being featured. Groups like the Kingston Trio and the Weavers are perfect examples. The folk music magazine "Sing Out!" is a written testimony to this approach. White America was exploring its roots, but we were looking backward to find what we felt was missing in the present – our living roots. Folk artists as a group had not yet empowered themselves to write for the present, much less for the future. They were too busy trying to make the past live again, reviving their heritage. That's why it is called a revival.

I was fortunate enough to be part of the early folk scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There was a route we all traveled that went from Cambridge, Massachusetts to New York City, to Ann Arbor, to the University of Chicago, to Madison, Wisconsin, to Berkeley, California, and then round back again. For the most part we all hitchhiked or piled into cars that could barely run all the way across this wide country. If I remember right, I believe I hitchhiked the distance from Ann Arbor to New York City some ten times and hitchhiked to and lived in Venice Beach and North Beach, San Francisco as early as 1960. I even travelled with Bob Dylan for a while, hitchhiking together with my friend Perry Lederman, who back then was a legendary guitar instrumentalist.

The folk route also included side trips to places like Oberlin and Antioch colleges in Ohio, and so on, wherever colleges and universities were. In Ann Arbor, folk artists like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez were frequent visitors, while groups like the New Lost City Ramblers and the Country Gentlemen were pretty much regulars and Ramblin' Jack Elliot spent a lot of time there. We met mostly in houses or apartments and it seems we spent an inordinate amount of time drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes in the cafeteria of the University of Michigan Student Union. I can recall sitting around the Union with a nervous Bob Dylan who was awaiting the Michigan Daily review of one of his earliest performances in Ann Arbor. He couldn't bear to leave town until the review came out. When he saw that the review was good, Dylan was on his way to the edge of Ann Arbor, hitchhiking out of town.

Singers, Not Songwriters

For the most part, the folk movement at this time was oriented around covering traditional folk tunes. The folk artists originality was in how well they sang the song and not yet in the writing of contemporary songs. This is not to say that no songs were written; some were. My point is that back then it was all about the 'singer' in 'singer/songwriter' and not yet so much about the 'songwriter'. For most of us, that came a bit later.

I can remember well traveling in 1961 with Bob Dylan and stopping at Gerde's Folk City on West 4 th Street in New York City. Gerde's was 'the' happening

place back then and the folk star of the moment in that club was a guitar virtuoso named Danny Kalb, who later became part of the group known as the “Blues Project.” Dylan was obviously aware of and perhaps a little jealous of the attention Kalb was getting (you could hear it in his voice), but it was not just petty jealousy. He honestly could not understand what Kalb had going for him that he didn’t. It boggled his mind. I didn’t know then that my traveling companion was “The” Bob Dylan, but I am certain he must have. After all, he had something to say.

Remember, all of this was in the early 1960s, well before Haight Ashbury and the hippie scene. Most folkies (like myself) were wanna-be Beatniks, but that train had already left the station. We stood outside conventional society, but we were not so much politically alienated from that society as we were repulsed by it, and fascinated by the world of music, literature, art, and our own little social scene. Things were happening man! I was 19 years old.

The Folk Blues

Real folk-blues artists like Elizabeth Cotton and Jessie ‘Lone Cat’ Fuller began to be featured at festivals like the Berkeley Folk Festivals in the late 1950s. Many of them came to Ann Arbor where I lived and we heard them live, songs like “Freight Train” (Cotton) and “San Francisco Bay Blues” (Fuller). To folk enthusiasts like myself, this was still just folk music, but you did get a different feeling when you heard the blues. To me at the time, this just sounded like really good folk music – ‘really’ good. Back then we didn’t know much about the blues, but we sure could feel that music.

While folk enthusiasts heard some blues early on (as mentioned), it was at first mostly only the folk blues, and folk blues were seen as just another form (albeit, with a lot of feeling) of folk music. Later, and only very gradually, more and more country blues began to appear, but usually only southern acoustic blues, not music from the North and nothing at all from the inner cities. There was no awareness of inner-city blues or electrified blues and no interest either. At that time electric-folk music was an oxymoron.

Being Part of the Scene

As a folkie myself, I can remember listening to acoustic folk-blues and really loving it, but I treated it the same way I treated traditional folk music, as something that also needed to be preserved and revived: learned, played, shared - kept alive. It was a natural assumption on our part that we were listening to the vestiges of what had once been a living tradition and we wanted to connect to that past, to revive and relive it. We had no idea that modern electric blues music was not only ‘not-dead’, but was playing ‘live’

most nights of the week probably only blocks away, separated from us by a racial curtain. We just had no idea. The folk music scene had few blacks in it (other than a handful of performers) and those that were present were usually the older folk-blues artists like Sonny Terry, Odetta, and so on. Their music was perceived by folkies as coming out of the past, not part of the present. Their singing was seen as some kind of recreation.

Please don't get the idea that our exposure to folk music was only at concerts or folk societies. Like most musicians, we played or practiced music all the time, if only to learn the songs and how to play our instruments. We were also exposed to a lot of jazz. In Ann Arbor in the early 1960s, before bars could serve liquor by the glass, everyone met in apartments and houses around town to drink, smoke pot, and play music. This was primarily a jazz scene and young folkies (underage high-school kids like me) were tolerated as long as we kept to the shadows and sat along the far edges of the rooms. We took this all in.

And quite a scene it was. I remember one house on E. Williams Street in Ann Arbor. Protruding horizontally from its second story hung a huge flag with a picture of Thelonious Monk. At nights, especially on weekends, there was impromptu jazz in that house that went on most of the night, with players like Bob James, Bob Detwiler, Ron Brooks, and many others. It was music, music, music plus wine and pot. High school kids like me sat on the floor, squeezed in along the back wall. We didn't rate any pot, but we used to snort the ashes from joints that others had smoked. That should tell you how desperate we were to be part of the scene!

Searchin' for Roots

We experienced jazz along with our folk music, but still not much blues. And the jazz was anything but bluesy jazz; it was more frenetic, like bop. And if it wasn't jazz we heard, then it was classical music played in the background on the stereo. Again: not much blues. This is an important point, because when the mostly-white folk musicians like myself were suddenly exposed to modern (and virile) inner-city blues players like Junior Wells, Magic Sam, and Howlin' Wolf, we were astonished.

As folkies made the gradual transition from studying and researching traditional folk music to also searching out historic country folk blues and then on to discovering modern city blues, all of a sudden things lit up. We got it. Blues was not simply R&B or pop music like you heard on the radio, but music by plain folks – folk music! We could see that blues was the same as folk music, only modern, fresh – alive and well, plus incredibly potent.

What we had assumed must always be lost in the past, like folk music that depended on our efforts to restore and revive it was, when it came to blues, very much alive and in the present – staring us in the face and more-or-less happy to see us at that. This blues music we were hearing lived in the present and not just in the past. It did not need us to revive it. Our idea of folk music as something to restore and treasure suddenly moved from the past into the present in our minds. We made the connection. Blues didn't need restoration. It was still with us and it was powerful. It was like the movie Jurassic Park; we had found a living dinosaur, folk music that lived in the present! And this music revived us and not vice-versa!

The blues scene in the early 1960s as played out in the small clubs and bars of Chicago, Detroit, and other major industrial cities, while very much still alive, was by then itself on the wane, only we newcomers didn't know that yet. To us, it was way more alive than the standard folk music we knew. Intercity electric blues music was still authentic and strong, but (for the most part) the next generation of younger blacks was already not picking up on it; they were just not interested. Chicago-style city blues was, to younger blacks at that time, old-peoples music, something from the South, a past and history they wanted to get away from rather than embrace. Younger blacks had already skipped ahead to R&B, Motown, and funk. Forget about those old blues.

My band played in a black bar for something like a year or a year and a half, a bar filled with mostly older black folks and a sprinkling of hippie whites who had come to see us. This was in 1967. Right next door was another black bar, where all the younger blacks hung out and where they played only the latest R&B hits. The younger blacks seldom came into our bar and, in general, were embarrassed that their parents and elders were listening to blues played by a racially-mixed band – listening to white boys play the blues. How embarrassing! Interest in the classic Chicago blues was just not there for the younger generation of blacks. They felt that blues was music from an older generation, music for old people.

While within the black community the door was slowly closing on the Chicago blues artists (even the artists knew this), another and much wider door for this music was opening onto white America, an open door that would extend the careers for many of these artists and secure their music well into the future.

B.B. King said in Time Magazine in 1971:

“The blacks are more interested in the ‘jumpy’ stuff. The whites want to hear me for what I am.”

1965: A Sea Change

As pointed out, in the early 1960s the folk music revival was one of the main things happening on all the major campuses across America: Cambridge, Ann Arbor, Chicago, Madison, Berkeley, etc. What happened to it?

For one, in the mid-1960s, pop music groups like the Rolling Stones were busy recording covers of blues classics and pointing out the source – the artists who originally wrote and recorded them. White players like me, eager for guidance, hunted down the original blues 45s, which were a revelation to us. I can remember rummaging through bins of old 45s in downtown Chicago and finding just incredible music.

That first “Rolling Stones” album, of the same name, was released in April of 1964. It contained tunes like Jimmy Reed’s “Honest I Do,” “Willie Dixon’s “I Just Want to Make Love to You,” “I’m a King Bee,” plus songs by Chuck Berry and Rufus Thomas.

The Stones second album, also released in 1964, veered away from the blues and contained tunes recorded by Chuck Berry, Wilson Pickett, Dale Hawkins, songs like “Under the Boardwalk.” It also included the blues-R&B tune made famous by Irma Thomas, “Time Is on My Side.” In 1965, the album “Rolling stones, Now!” had the Dixon-Wolf classic “Little Red Rooster.”

From that point onward, the blues content of Rolling Stones albums decreased. In 1965, the album “Out of Our Heads” had no real blues tunes, and neither did their other 1965 album, “December’s Children.” It was those first two albums in 1964, and in particular the first album, that pointed the blues out to many in the white audience. The U.K. was all about authentic blues well before white America ever heard of them.

In the wake of the Beatles and Rolling Stones, late summer and early fall of 1965 saw the emerging dancehall scene in San Francisco and the arrival of bands like the Grateful Dead. This was the beginning of the hippie era, and it’s when my own band, the Prime Movers, formed in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We knew nothing of the Grateful Dead, yet we too arose at the same time and represented a new era in music and lifestyle.

In fact, the summer of 1965 was the trigger point for so very much. It marked a change in the folk scene with the advent of groups like the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. If there was a single band that opened up blues to white players, it was the Butterfield Band. That first Butterfield album appeared late in 1965, and it totally kicked ass. The Butterfield band in person was way more powerful than anything they managed to record.

This racially mixed band playing authentic Chicago blues sent a lightning bolt-like signal to all of us who were just waking up to the blues anyway. Their message was that white players could overcome their fear to play black music, including the blues. The Paul Butterfield Blues Band set the standard and set white musicians on notice that anybody was free to try to play the blues. We were emboldened to try.

Unlike many areas of folk music, modern city blues at that time was anything but a dead art. While the lineage of most folk music required revival, like trying to trace out the history and line of the music, this was not true of blues. The blues lineage was not only unbroken, but indeed very much alive, both on black record labels and in thousands of bars and clubs across the nation. Perhaps some forms of country blues were endangered, but inner-city blues (at least for the older generation of Blacks) was in full swing. White Americans just knew little or nothing about it. During the later 1960s, all that changed. And last, but not least, many of the modern city blues players were still reasonably young and more than willing to be discovered. They needed the money and appreciated the recognition.

Historians would agree that from the middle to the late '60s, music in general was, to a real extent, fusing. The whole psychedelic era blurred the boundaries of different music genres and emboldened white players to play music of all kinds – black, Indian, Asian, etc. The first extended psychedelic-like guitar solo/jam was Michael Bloomfield and the tune “East-West ” on the Butterfield album of the same name in 1966. It was over 13 minutes in length and inspired legions of heavy metal players that followed. My brother Dan and I recorded an early version of “East-West” sitting behind a curtain in a Chicago bar with a reel-to-reel” tape recorder. Our recording was release some years ago.

The American Folk Blues Festival in Europe

The first large-scale blues festivals, “The American Folk Blues Festivals” were not really festivals and were never held in America. Established in 1962 and lasting through 1972, these so-called festivals were in fact tours of Europe by groups of black blues artists thankful to get the work. This is what informed the British blues-oriented groups like the Rolling Stones in the first place. Starting in 1962, at a tour run of three weeks, the American Folk Blues Festival excursions eventually would run up to six weeks. Individual concerts often lasted three to four hours. The tours started up again in 1980 and lasted until 1985.

Europe has always been in love with American black music, especially blues and jazz. Whereas in this country players like Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf

found it hard to get a job outside of their home-town bars and the Chitlin' Circuit, in Europe these players were treated like VIPs and played to rapt audiences. Race was never a real issue on the continent. This is why so many black blues and jazz artists have relocated to Europe. They found jobs that paid well and they were not considered second-class citizens.

Thanks to these touring festivals, Europe heard such blues greats as T-Bone Walker, Memphis Slim, Willie Dixon, Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, and John Lee Hooker. In 1963, the list was joined by Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Victoria Spivey, Big Joe Williams, Lonnie Johnson, and Sonny Boy (II) Williamson. 1964 brought Hubert Sumlin, Lightnin' Hopkins, Sunnyland Slim, sleepy John Estes, and Howlin' Wolf. And in 1965, there was Mississippi Fred McDowell, J.B. Lenoir, Big Walter Horton, Roosevelt Sykes, Buddy Guy, Big Mama Thornton, Doctor Ross, and others.

In a very real sense, Europe was privileged to hear the more modern, electric, city blues well before the general (white) public in America knew anything about it. White America for the most part did not even know this music existed until the later Sixties.

Memphis Country Blues Festival 1967

Perhaps the earliest festival in this country dedicated exclusively to blues, albeit the more acoustic folk or country blues, was the "Memphis Country Blues Festival." Although it was organized in 1966 with the help of the great blues journalist Robert Palmer, the first festival was actually held in 1967. For example, the 1968 festival featured artists like Bukka White, Nathan Beauregard, Joe Callicott, Furry Lewis, and Rev. Robert Wilkins. Again, as the festival title suggests, this was country blues and acoustic artists, not the inner-city electric blues that had not yet been celebrated. That was to happen in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The Ann Arbor Blues Festival: The First of Its Kind

There is no doubt that the first North American all-out blues festival for modern, electric city blues (in fact all types of blues) was the Ann Arbor Blues Festival held in the fall of 1969. It featured artists like Muddy Waters, Junior Wells, B.B. King, Otis Rush, J.B. Hutto and the Hawks, Howlin' Wolf, T-Bone Walker, Magic Sam, Freddy King, and dozens of modern-electric blues players as well as traditional blues artists like Son House, Lightnin' Hopkins, and those in between like Clifton Chenier, Roosevelt Sykes, and many others.

In the Ann Arbor festivals, the accent was off the folk and country blues and right on modern, big-city, electric blues artists. After all, Ann Arbor is only about a three-hour drive from Chicago. While the Newport Folk Festival

sometimes featured more than folk music, and to a small degree helped blues to segue from folk and country blues to a more modern blues, this was not something they actively featured. For many years, electric anything was frowned upon at the Newport festival. It was in Ann Arbor that we find the first all-out presentation of modern electric city blues.

It has been said that those first Ann Arbor blues festivals mark the end of the city-blues era and the beginning of its exploitation. Of course, there is some truth to that if we mean that by reaching a wider audience, the music will be more easily embraced and imitated. But in fact, the electric city blues by that time was already dying out of its own accord. The younger blacks had turned away. Reaching the larger White audience actually prolonged the music's decline and extended its life. Today (2020), with most of the original blues giants gone, we may be facing what amounts to reenactment and revival once again – blues as folklore.

There is no record of a blues festival of any similar scope and extent that predates that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival, which was organized in 1968 and held in 1969, much less one that endures to the present day. Actually, the popular Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival, which saw its roots in those first two Ann Arbor Blues Festivals, was suspended in 2007 due to lack of funds. The last festival was in 2006.

[Sketch of a photo of Magic Sam by photographer Stanley Livingston.]

John Sinclair: A Spiritual Biography

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 28, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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Interview by Michael Erlewine

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INTRODUCTION

This is not intended to be a finely produced book, but rather a mostly readable document for those who are interested in in this series on Ann Arbor in the 1960s

<http://SpiritGrooves.net>

John Sinclair

Interview by Michael Erlewine (sound recording).

Michael: Okay, you ready to rock?

John Sinclair : I'm ready to rock.

Michael: You don't mind in what order I do stuff?

John Sinclair : I don't mind.

Michael: Cool. Let's talk about the Grande Ballroom, Michigan's answer to the West Coast and places like the Avalon Ballroom and the Fillmore West.

John Sinclair : I don't mind [sings do, do do.]

Hi, I'm John Sinclair , I'm here to talk about the Grande Ballroom.

Michael: Well, let's. How did you get involved with it and what was your function? What did you do for them?

John Sinclair : Well...I was an unpaid unofficial publicist for the Grande Ballroom. When Russ Gibb started the

Grande Ballroom in the fall of 1966, it was a very interesting time as you probably recall. There had been these people who were like us, that we were part of... post-beatnik jazz-loving people, artists, people into poetry. People who got high as a way of life, smoked a lot of weed, and also started taking peyote and mescaline and LSD.

We had the Artist Workshop in Detroit, at 1252 West Forest and, out of there, I went to the house of correction on a marijuana charge and spent five months and 16 days in the Detroit House of Correction in 1966, emerging on August 5th.

I always get a kick out of that, because my daughter Sunny who is here with me [visiting the Erlewine family], was born exactly nine months later on May 4th. She has that six months in her. So, when I came home... remember in the 60's so many things happened so fast, so many cataclysmic changes in the way things were. At least, it seemed liked it to me. When I think back on it now, more would happen in six months than now happens in six years, or maybe we were just engaged with it. But I was gone for six months and that was when the hippies started to emerge.

I read about them when I was in the house of correction, I read about them in, "Life Magazine." Ha...also I had found an influential experience reading "Life Magazine" that summer, when I was in correction, and I read about Jerry Rubin appearing before the House on Un-American Activities Committee with a revolutionary war costume on. And that had a big impact on me, because I thought it showed for the first time that you could really respond to the idiocy of the government with a sense of humor [laughs]. I thought that was great. But also, these hippies, you started to read about.

THE BEATS

Michael: And where were you at with all this?

John Sinclair : I was in prison.

Michael: No, but...were you a hippie at that point?

John Sinclair : No, I wouldn't call... Well, we called ourselves as beatniks, even though the real... We were followers of the beatniks. We wanted to be like the beatniks. We wanted to be beatniks. I know I did.

I wrote poetry and I was into jazz and I wrote about jazz and, you know, I studied the works of other great beatnik authors and all the great be-bop musicians, and I was involved with the new wave in jazz - Cecil Taylor, Archie Shepp, Sun Ra, Pharaoh Sanders, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman. So that's where I was at mentally. Physically that summer, I was in prison. When I came

out a lot of things were different, in that there were these young kids, obviously influenced by the Beatles. They had long hair, but they were also smoking marijuana, and they were taking acid. But they had no intellectual...

You know, the difference between our group [Sinclair and Erlewine are the same age] and the ones that came after was, to a large part, having an intellectual heritage. The Hippies were like the television generation, you know what I'm saying? The first generation of kids that grew up watching television instead of imagining things. Because that was our generation. Our great thing was, and the one before it, we imagined a lot [laughs] and then made it happen, stuff that hadn't happened before you imagined it. But once they got it on television, they started this ugly process of fixing their modes of thought, so that they were primarily influenced by what they've seen on television. Anyway, that was just an aside.

John Sinclair : The Grande Ballroom. [laughs] Well I said all that to say that in August of 1966...Okay, when I got out, that would be exactly two months before the opening of the Grande Ballroom, right? October 6th, am I correct in thinking it was October 6th?

John Sinclair : You know October 6, 1966 was also the day that they made LSD illegal.

Michael: I didn't know that. The Grande opened on October 7, 1966, a Friday night.

LSD AND PSYCHEDELICS

John Sinclair : Up until that time you could take LSD with impunity.

Michael: And I did.

John Sinclair : Yes. [laughs].

Michael: I don't know about impunity.

John Sinclair : Hooray. Legal impunity, we may have colored in the face of the universe, but we didn't have to worry about the law.

Michael: Right, I certainly colored in the face of the universe.

John Sinclair : Right, me too, many times and thankfully I might add. So, I have been a parent of this kind of post-beatnik artistic activity, I was the organizer of not only the events, but also the living spaces and performance spaces and eventually, well, in magazines, and little books we printed. And I was the driving force of organizing this stuff, and making it happen. And now there was this interesting thing in the air that didn't have any of the intellectual

properties that had been so important, but it was more about bigger more intangible spiritualism, I don't know just how all those things connect with taking LSD, and not having any pre-conceived... You know, one of the things we had to do was blast a lot of pre-conceptions out of our minds. I know I did, in order to get to the things that I was trying to learn from that experience.

Michael: And when did you first take LSD, so I can time that?

John Sinclair : Well, I took peyote in October of 1963. That was my first psychedelic experience. It was August, mid-August of 1965, when I took LSD for the first time -- sugar cube.

Michael: Me too. I had peyote in the late 1950s and first took LSD in May of 1964 during the year I spent out in Berkeley, California, some original Sandoz in a sugar cube. And for you, was it a good...I mean a big trip?

John Sinclair : It was tremendous... They were sugar cubes from San Francisco that someone had brought through on their way to New York.

Michael: How did it change your way of looking at life?

John Sinclair : Wow. Then I took it many times after that, I mean several times. I don't know, I can't remember how many [laughs].

Michael: How did it affect you?

John Sinclair : You know, it would just sharpen things... See, when I had peyote, it all opened up. I mean I gained a different outlook on things. A sense of love for all humanity, a sense of oneness with the universe, a sense of humility in the face of the universe realizing that one was just a little tiny organism in this vast sea of atmosphere. Those things were primary, well the feeling of love, love for one's... just love for being alive.

Acceptance was the other great thing I always felt that I learned from psychedelic experiences, to accept what's happening as what's happening and not impose your idea structure on it and also, you know, to realize that what has happened can't be changed, it can only be acknowledged. And the only thing you can change is what might happen next. You can change that by doing something different.

I felt that all around me people were hung up because they had an upside-down vision of that. They spent all their time trying to change what had happened in the past, but they looked at the future as if it was futile, that there wasn't anything they could do about it. And that never made sense to me, but on peyote and on acid I kind of understood. Just the acceptance issue was so big, because our culture was so non-accepting. My mother and father,

I mean, they had the ideas of the way things should be and that's the way that they looked at everything.

RAISED CATHOLIC

Michael: What religion were you raised in, if any?

John Sinclair : Well, my mother was agnostic, and my father was agnostic, but it was a Roman Catholic upbringing.

Michael: You got some of that? Me too.

John Sinclair : So, he felt it was his duty to bring his children up in the church. We didn't go to parochial school or anything.

Michael: Did you go to mass on Sundays?

John Sinclair : Mass and Sunday school, what did they call it? Catechism.

Michael: Same here, for me it was Catholic school, Sunday Mass, catechism, and I was an altar boy and learned to recite church Latin. What year did you manage not to go to mass anymore, roughly how old were you?

ALBION COLLEGE

John Sinclair : Well, I had this wonderful epiphany right after my 18th birthday. I was at Albion College, my first semester. It was a beautiful fall day, in mid-October. I will never forget this moment, as long as I live. It was a great liberating experience of my young life. I was walking across the campus thinking and I'm thinking about it, as all good Catholic youth do, it was the weekend. Should I go to confession on Saturday, and go to communion on Sunday.

Well, I'm already planning to have too much fun on Saturday night that it makes it worthless to go to confession, because you would never it make it with the state of grace until the next morning. So, I'm having these kind of teenage thoughts, and all of a sudden it was like the sky opened up and I realized that this was all just some weird trip that some humans had made up and that God didn't have anything to do with this stuff.

It was something some humans had dreamed up, and they were pretty sick humans, the more that you thought about it. They were twisted, and they made up this really ugly construct and then somehow, they ended up imposing it on centuries of people [laughs].

And this occurred to me that it was all horseshit. Man, it was then that the cloud lifted, you know. It was like, it just opened the door to, well, what I

consider authentic religious experience [laughs] in the years since, which I had a lot. God...that was my first one. I have liberating forces, like epiphanies. One was that at the end of my first term in graduate school at Wayne State University and I got my grades. I was taking a full course load, four classes, and I got three A's and a B+, and I got the B+ because I missed the class five times instead of three.

I had never cared about schoolwork up to this time and I thought, I was pretty proud of myself, a full-ride. But, my mother, who was a schoolteacher, would be happy with me finally applying myself after 13 years of school and four years as an undergraduate, I finally had found that I liked this shit. You know, getting A's and stuff. I had resisted her up until then.

So, I stopped at a payphone, on like Cass and Warren, and I called my mother in Davison, and I said, "Mom, I just got my grades and man I got three A's and a B+" and she said, "Well, why did you get the B+?" And all of a sudden I realized that I would never be able to please my mother [laughs]. That whatever I did in life, it would never be enough to make her say, "Good job son," you know, so I just stopped worrying about that.

It was like being free of religion and family and those two things kind of opened the door for me to do other things, but I had already had peyote by then. I just felt that peyote and psychedelics in general... just heard from my mind all these horrid suppositions and cultural imprints that had been made by these people who, basically in my view, were kind of twisted, stunted, emotional dwarves, you know, but also their intellect wasn't that well developed either -- the kind of people that run our country now.

BECOMING A RADICAL

Michael: I've got another question for you, while we're back there, I think that something that would really be good is for you to describe a little about that you were raised in a very small town. What I need to know is that, when you were a little kid and stuff, how did you become so radical?

I mean where did all that come? Where and when did you begin to have an alternative view of community? You're an alternative community leader and that means something outside of... an alternative. Where did that come in? When you were a kid, you were probably just in whatever situation you were in.

John Sinclair : When I was a kid, you know, I played. I grew up in a little bitty town, Davison, Michigan. [near Flint, Michigan]

IT'S THE MUSIC ON THE RADIO

Michael: So where did the difference come in, in the whole life?

John Sinclair : Well, because of blues, rhythm and blues and the radio, that was what changed my life.

Michael: Please do talk about that.

John Sinclair : I'm a little kid in a little country town. I was kind of fascinated by the process of pop music when I was nine, ten... Well, I was a radio enthusiast from when I was a little kid, sooner. You know we came up in that last generation before television took over. Well, I was a radio guy.

Michael: What did you listen to? What were some of the programs?

John Sinclair : Well, when I was seven my dad got me, built me a radio. And I would come home from school and listen to the after-school programs, like Sky King and I forget the name of the program but it starred Gene Autry and Pat Buttram, Red Ryder. The Lone Ranger also. And this would all be after school.

Michael: Ovaltine Time. Also, all I had was radio for many years, because they had not invented TV, and we lived way out in the country with no neighbor kids. It was radio or nothing.

John Sinclair : They'd drag you out to eat dinner and then I'd go back into my room and then the mystery show's would come on, the "Fat Man," East Steps on the Scales, "Wait,Wait, Don't Tell me," "The Shadow," which was my favorite of all of these, The "Green Hornet."

Michael: That's cool, no, so let's talk...

John Sinclair : There were those and then there were the ones that the adults listened to also, like the "Great Gildersleeve," and "Jack Benny Show" on Sunday night was like the pinnacle of the week culturally in our household.

Michael: How about "Amos n' Andy", did you...?

John Sinclair : Well, I loved Amos n' Andy. I love Amos n' Andy to this day. I think Amos n' Andy were [laughs] just incredible. "Our Miss Brooks," but I mean if I sat and talked...I mean, I don't think about these things ever, so these are just popping up from 50 years [laughs], 55 years ago. I was just fascinated with that stuff.

Michael: So how did the rhythm and blues... how did the Black music arise?

WHEN TV ARRIVED

John Sinclair : Well, what happened was the television came in, and so the dramatic life of American entertainment, which lowered to television, and the radio became a medium for music. Changed its nature completely. All of the dramas, the soap operas, the serials -- all that stuff, all the basic spine of television programming, such as it is a jellyfish spine that as all converted radio programs, quiz shows, serials, soap operas, the weekly programs, comedies, all of that was on radio when I was a little kid and it was fascinating, because you invented all the pictures to go with it in your mind. You created the visual track, you know.

It gave you a big part to play in the entertainment process, because you'd be listening to this stuff, and you'd be a kid and your imagination would be running wild [laughs]. Oh, I loved that. Because when television came in, it just didn't interest me. I was about...I was 11, when we got our first television set. I was 10 going on 11, in 1952.

I'd watch the stuff and it was just too boring, because some people that didn't have an imagination as vivid as mine had fixed the imagery. Like when you saw Superman, it was so lame compared to hearing it on the radio. On the radio, when you pictured Superman, it just wasn't as good as what you had in your head, you know, so I just couldn't watch TV too much. But on the radio... Oh, the one thing I liked on TV, I was kind of fascinated, even at that age, even before the age of 10 by the, some of the conventional structures of pop-culture like the "Top 10."

Like I used to listen every Saturday morning on the radio to see what the top 10 records would be and then they had "Your Hit Parade." Remember that horrible show? But we used to watch it.

In my family, that was a pretty high cultural event, because people were singing songs. Most families didn't have music. I listen to music 24 hours a day, basically, at my house. But in my parents' house, they just didn't have music. Music wasn't important to them. But I did okay. There was a phonograph, one of those big 78 consoles. We didn't really have any records, but records just stressed the shit out of me. I liked the top 10, so I used to watch "Your Hit Parade" and it would be these horrible re-enactments of pop tunes by Patti Page, Guy Mitchell, and all these characters.

But I was too young to... I mean that music kind of was Snookie Lanson shot at eight or nine year old kids. I mean that's about the intellectual level of it. "How much is that Doggie in the Window?" I remember seeing them sing that on Your Hit Parade, Jerry McKenzie and Snookie Lanson [laughs]. Oh, that was some sick shit. So, I'm looking for things that would make life bearable as a kid, curious kid... comic books. I was a voracious reader, as I still am.

Well, I tuned into a Black radio station in Flint, Frantic Ernie D was the star of the disc jockeys and he was a spectacular personality, who rhymed everything he said and played the greatest records. I mean these records were so great, far beyond anything I had ever heard on white-oriented popular radio, you know to hear the Clovers sing, "One Mint-Julep." It was just like walking into a world that you had never imagined [laughs].

You know that just all of a sudden, bam, these people who had beautiful voices, singing these kinds of salacious lyrics but in a very smooth and charming way [laughs]. God, I wanted more [laughs] and that's characterized my life ever since. I just want more and more of that.

So, I didn't know, I didn't have any idea what kind of people... To me, it was using exotic sounds in a 10 year-old kids ears in a radio in a country town. I used to think that records came from God. Man, I used to think that records came from sweetest [laughs].... I don't know, you know, you didn't have any idea what the distribution of these things were. It was magic. You turned on the radio, you heard this station you used to hear, it wasn't the same.

"I WANTED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT NEGROES"

You wanted to hear something, you turned it a little bit, Bam! One early morning, when I was walking, you hear this shit man, or Ray Charles, you know, "Jumping in the Morning," "I got a Woman," Big Joe Turner, that put my mind on fire. And then when I started finding out that these were songs that were created by Negroes, that inflamed my imagination and curiosity and I wanted to know more about Negroes.

There weren't any around that I knew about, not where I lived. When you'd go to Flint, it was like...well you know society in the 50's, was pretty much segregated, wherever you went, as it is today, but even more so then. So, you didn't have Brown Vs. the Board of Education until a couple more years after that, 1954. So it was like a different world, but it was one that piqued my interest and I kept wanting to know more about it, and eventually was completely immersed in it, much to my happiness [laughs].

Oh boy, God it was so fun with me. You know, we had that wonderful, I don't know what your relationship to popular music was, because you come from a more intellectual household, but I had the pleasure of having the first records by Chuck Berry and Little Richard, Bo Diddley when they came out it was like... "Maybelline" by Chuck Berry came out, it was like the most beautiful gift from God. It was this record, and it was the most perfect record you had ever heard. It had everything.

We used to go to the Dairy Bar, where we hung out at, was a nickel a play, six for a quarter. And you'd put a quarter in the jukebox and play Maybelline six times and they would already be putting another quarter in and you hit it, so you didn't want to hear anything else that week, it was just so bomb, you know. Every week, like, five of the best records of all time would be released, some weeks it would be more. But when you look at the charts, like if you look in those books where they show week by week, they made so many amazing records. And they'd just come out and that was your environment, that was what they played on the radio.

They were popular, really good records, and then they took over some of the major airwaves when they started calling it rock and roll. That was quite an incredible phenomenon. I mean you don't hear anything remotely as exciting as Little Richard or Chuck Berry on today's radio, and you hardly hear anything you could even stand to listen to for three minutes.

For me, it's not swinging, it's not emotional, it doesn't... Little Richard, man [laughs], he was on the radio, then songs like "Long Tall Sally." That was on the radio then, "Rip It Up" and Ready Teddy," you know, just one right after another. That was an exciting life, wasn't it? Yeah.

COUNTER-CULTURE

Michael: How did that turn into something that was counter-culture, alternative? I want to try to find the roots...

John Sinclair : I don't know, but I mean when I started thinking about my... Well, the first thing is... see, to me, it was a new experience to be engaged in something that was art. You know what I mean? It would have been a perfect American community [laughs], where there was no art, you know [laughs]. Everything was on the up and up. They have one bar in the hotel, you know, it was like a clean white place. It was greening. It was like the American dream. So I got that to the max [laughs].

By the time I was 18, I never wanted to have anything to do with that part of life ever again, because it was just so ugly in all of its whiteness, really. The more you learned, the more you realized how ugly this thing was. The more you read, the more things you heard, the more you exposed the idea of people that didn't; they weren't allowed to share in this vision, you know? Wouldn't matter what they did, they would never be able to live in Davison, Michigan. They just wouldn't let them, colored people, no way. They didn't want that there.

You know it's just that perfect [laughs] embodiment of this culture, this idea. And as soon as you learned there was something different, then you wanted

something different. I guess you'd had to have gone to World War II to really, really desire that, you know. I'm not sure how they got that way, but I know it was repulsive to me. It wasn't any fun, and anything that you wanted to do that might be fun, you weren't to do any of that. I mean that's where I developed my earliest rebellious tendencies.

Michael: Well that's what I'm after, what I am trying to understand. I mean I had rebellious...I had all the same thoughts, no... I don't think I had the richness of the music, I mean I had things like "Sally Go Round the Roses" and "Earth Angel."

John Sinclair : We had our folk music in our town...art music, art-folk music.

Michael: You know Josh White, yeah, folk-blues.

John Sinclair : Ah, Josh White wasn't a cotton-picker, but he was a guy who put on an act about...but you know.

Michael: Well, that was what my parents had, those type of blues records.

John Sinclair : Right, right.

Michael: Not "Sally Go Round the Roses, but "Josh White," "Art Tatum," Duke Ellington, that kind of stuff.

John Sinclair : High art in my view.

"IT'S THE RACIAL THING"

Michael: Well relative... Just to find all those through a whole different process. But what I'm trying to understand. I never got political to the degree you did... I'm trying to understand the roots of your political rebellion, which I'm beginning to understand. This is helpful to me, I don't know, it's important for readers to know this stuff...

John Sinclair : Well, it's all in the racial thing, you know?

Michael: I think that's right.

John Sinclair : See when I found out about Negroes, then when I found out that they were into this great music, and I hadn't heard jazz yet. This was just like the lowest form of black popular music, you know R&B.

Michael: But not blues, you hadn't....

John Sinclair : Well I knew blues, I knew blues on these black stations. Blues never penetrated the white station, few blues records that really charted big

on the pop charts in all that time, but on Ernie Gum he would play Muddy Waters. He was dealing up seven people in Flint.

Michael: You're not talking about just rhythm and blues, you're talking about straight blues.

Michael: I mean there's a big difference between Little Richard and like...

John Sinclair : Not that much to me, I mean the emotional content is way up there [laughs].

Michael: But the form is different.

John Sinclair : The form is different. The form's different between "Wynonie Harris" Mystery Blues and Muddy Waters, but it doesn't make...I mean Wynonie Harris was equally exciting to me. Amos Milburn, Charles Brown, Willie Jordan...you know I was in on the tail end of all those guys when I was 12-13 years old.

Michael: But you're still in this little town?

John Sinclair : Yeah, I was in my little rec-room in the basement like this.

Michael: Were you buying these things or getting them?

BUYING RECORDS

John Sinclair : Well, when the 45's started, I was listening to them on the radio and I would get my father... Now it's good to sort this out. I was 14 when I got my 45 player for my 14th birthday in 1955. I got a 45 player that I could plug into my little radio that my dad fixed a jack in the back of the radio. It was a big mystery that they could continue at such nominal expense. And my dad built that, you know. And my dad built this fucking radio from a kit man and I had my own radio, AM radio, but I had my own radio and he built me a little shelf for it over my bed.

Michael: But weren't those 45 players beautiful then?

John Sinclair : Yeah, the little compact one. Cost probably, I don't know what they cost, \$25, I don't know. My dad bought a stand-alone 45 RCA and he drilled a hole in the back of the little radio for a jack and he hooked it up. So you put the jack in there and you turned your dial all the way to the end where there wasn't any station and then you could play your records. But I was already 15. I mean I was already 14 when I got the 45 player. Okay, my first 45?

John Sinclair : Did if ever tell you the first record I bought?

Michael: No, I want to know what it was.

John Sinclair : First 45 I bought the day I turned 14, "Hard Hearted Woman," by Big Walter Horton on States 154.

Michael: You couldn't do any better than that. One of the greatest recordings I have ever heard.

John Sinclair : [laughs] You know what I'm saying, one of the best records ever made.

Michael: Totally. I just heard it the other day. Big Walter is in 1 st Position on the harp, something he did not do all that much.

John Sinclair : Well, they finally put in on CD, Dellmark.

Michael: Really?

John Sinclair : Yeah. I didn't think I'd ever hear that record again. And I got it for 25 cents, it was a cutout. So I think that came out in 1954 I think.

Michael: But had you heard Big Walter before you got that, or you just happened to get it? Because...

John Sinclair : No, no, no, I'm real but, I knew who the artists were by the time I started buying 45's.

Michael: Even Big Walter? Because he's a little bit of an oddity.

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: ... Even now.

John Sinclair : Well, yeah, but I mean States Records would play it on black radio stations. States, Chess, Aladdin, Specialty, Atlantic, you know.

John Sinclair : If you went on one of those labels, you had an equal chance to get played as anybody.

Michael: Right, but that record didn't go too far out of Chicago.

John Sinclair : No, but it was just Chicago to Flint. Well, it didn't do any good in Flint, because somebody had bought a few from the distributor, but they couldn't sell them, so they were selling them for a quarter.

Michael: Instead of?

John Sinclair : .89 cents or whatever they were.

Michael: Wow. What are some of the next ones you can remember? I mean that's a killer one to have first, It is one of my all-time favorites, some of the best harp playing ever recorded.

John Sinclair : I'll never forget that. Well I mean it was there, it was there in the thing, you know.

Michael: But did you know it for...?

John Sinclair : My dad wasn't going to go in and spend a bunch of money on a bunch of records, but he said you can get a couple of records.

Michael: But did you know that song or did you know Big Walter by name? If you remember... perhaps you don't remember.

John Sinclair : I might have heard it on the radio. I just...I knew I wanted it. I knew what good records were by the time I was 14. I used to get my records...see in my time they didn't have a record shop.

Michael: Really?

John Sinclair : No, the only records you could get in Davison were Tops, you remember Tops?

Michael: Vaguely.

John Sinclair : Okay, Tops were dime store records. And they would be like your Hit Parade, there were some inauthentic of a popular tune.

Michael: Oh, I know what you mean, right. I had too many of those myself, hits rerecorded by not the original artist, until they were not worth listening to. I really know and that is what inspired me to create the All-Music Guide, when CDs were coming over from vinyl and, to use Little Richard as an example. CDs were coming of claiming "Original Hits by Little Richard," when yes he was singing the original hits, but it was 30 years later and he could hardly sing. I was worried that people would but these and think they had heard the best of Little Richard, when they had not. That's how AMG, the All-Music Guide was born.

John Sinclair : Some...not even a cover, the top studio orchestra would record the shrimp boats are coming and on the B side would be Jambalaya, you know or whatever, I can't, I don't know if that's accurate, but.... they'd have two, there would be a two-sided riff for .79 cents.

Michael: Right, I had them.

John Sinclair : Well in my town, you go to the drugstore and they had Tops, you know. I think I probably started on those. Because I knew the tunes that were popular, but then I remember realizing that these were inauthentic [laughs]. They were stealing my money. This wasn't the record that I wanted. So I was pretty sophisticated for a real young person on the record thing.

When I used to send away, see before, or after right around the same time, when I was 11 or 12, and at night you'd be listening to a station they'd be playing rhythm and blues and you just be fucking wiggling, you know, just having a ball and then all of sudden the show would go off and it would be hillbilly like, when

Ernie D went off, hillbilly music came on with what was probably after the third shift widows on WBBC in Flint, Michigan and all of sudden instead of Joe Turner and Ray Charles it was Faron Young and Webb Pierce ... I remember these songs because I would be too young and I would be drifting off to sleep, so I would be too tired to reach up and turn off the radio. So your show would go off.

Michael: But those were great songs. I like old country a lot and enjoy current country as well.

John Sinclair : Well, I like them now, but I mean at the time I didn't have any, I used to hear Jazz O's was another show that I used to listen I think when Ernie changed stations and then a jazz show came on after him. That was a strictly black oriented.

I used to hear this guy, he was a famous disc jockey, and he moved to Detroit later, named Jim Rockwell, and he'd say this is Rockwell and these are records.

Michael: Okay, I appreciate hearing your history with popular music, now I'm also curious about where did the poetry and philosophy come in?

John Sinclair : Oh, later.

Michael: And how did that happen? I'm just trying to understand how it all unfolded. So now you had the music which I think was...

John Sinclair : Well music was the thing, you know, I mean everything came from that.

Michael: Okay.

John Sinclair : See when I got turned on...I was going to say I used to send away...I found WLAC in Nashville, Tennessee. Did you ever hear that one when you were a kid?

Michael: I don't think so.

John Sinclair : A 50,000-watt station. I'd talk to people all over the mid-west and the south; there were 50,000 clear channel watts out of Nashville. Every night from 9 o'clock until 1 o'clock, they had this succession of rhythm and blues programs sponsored by mail order record retailers. Randy's Record Shop in Gallatin, Tennessee and only Gallatin, Tennessee and they were hosted by Gene Nobles and later by Bill Haus Allen. And each of them...and then they had Jumpin' John R would come on for Ernie's Record Mart, 179 Third Avenue in Nashville, Tennessee. And then Herman Grizzard would come on for Buckley's Record Mart. And each had the same format.

They would number the tunes they played that night. See there were, it was a programming strategy directed at rural Negroes who had a record player, but nowhere to buy records, because all these little towns were just like my little town was in the north, they didn't have a record shop. I mean you would have had to go to Jackson or Clarksdale or Mississippi to get a record, you know? So this show, this station catered to them by having the show sponsored by mail-order record shops and then they were also tailored to the illiterate.

You didn't have to remember a lot of this shit; you didn't have to know how to write, if you wanted a certain record. You would have a postcard. You'd get somebody to address it, John R., WLAC. Nashville [laughs] and on the back it would say number three and the date that you heard it and like two weeks later, a 78 would arrive C.O.D., having the tune you were waiting to hear in the privacy of your home whenever you had too [laughs].

It was a really remarkable thing when you think about it. And then they would have these packages. The Blue Star, Blue Special, six records, 12 big sides for the low price of

\$2.79 plus packing, mailing and C.O.D. "Send no money, just your name and address to Blue Star, care of me, John R., WLAC, Nashville, Tennessee" [laughs]. These are the formative things in my intellectual life really.

John Sinclair : Such as it was, you know, but I mean to me it was everything, getting those records [laughs].

Michael: Okay. So where were we? You might like to say something about what it was like for a guy that came from a little tiny town and then maybe went to Albion College

CONFINEMENT

Michael: But similar, it's actually better, not much. What was it like to be put in a prison cell. I'd really like to know, and not just the tough stuff, don't be brave about it. I am more interested in like... I mean I would be terrified of being confined.

John Sinclair : Well they confined me, yeah.

Michael: Yeah, but tell me what was it like?

John Sinclair : I mean I was terrified of the authorities.

Michael: How did they treat you?

John Sinclair : The way they treat everybody else in prison, you know, like a dog [laughs]. I mean I didn't have any...well I had special treatment in that I was always kept in the maximum-security condition.

Michael: Why?

John Sinclair : Well, because I was an organizer.

Michael: Oh. So they knew that?

John Sinclair : Well, that's why I was in there [laughs]. I wasn't there for no two joints, you know? That was just what they could use. Well, you know I mean at first, well the first time I did six months in the house of correction in Detroit.

Michael: Was that like in a cell or in a group thing?

John Sinclair : That was a camp type...I lived in a barracks with a 100 men, something like that; you had your own bed.

Michael: Did you labor or stuff?

John Sinclair : Well, I worked as a clerk. See when I was in the house of correction, it was in 1966 and I was already notorious among people into the arts. I guess from marijuana too.

ENGLISH SKILLS

Michael: Where did you get your English skills and stuff? where did you get skilled with the language?

John Sinclair : Well my mother was a schooled English teacher [laughs]. I got my training early, wouldn't you [laughs]? Then went I went to college. I was supposed to go into a law program and I decided... I had a teacher at Albion, named John Hart, who was an intellectual, stood out like a sore-thumb on that campus [laughs]. He imbued me with the passion for literature. I had

always been a voracious reader, but I was never exposed to literature, you know what I'm saying? When I was a kid, I read every landmark historical treatment in the Davison Library. I've read every western that they had, every Zane Grey book, every western.

We had a little library in this little town. I read 3 books a day. [laughs] I still read three or four books a week. I mean I just read all the time; that's what I do for kicks. Then after westerns, I got to murder mysteries and I read everything by Agatha Christie, everything by Earle Stanley Gardner, Sherlock Holmes, all that kind of stuff. So I was into all these things but I didn't know about Ernest Hemingway or F. Scott Fitzgerald or anything like that until I went to college and then I got to the writing class or English class with John Hart and somehow he fed me with the zeal of the person interested into literature and I changed my major to English literature and I went on and studied English literature and graduated with a degree from the University of Michigan Flint College.

Michael: Oh so you did graduate?

John Sinclair : In English literature. Then I went to graduate school at Wayne State in literature, because that was my real passion. But at least I learned how to write, I learned how to write in undergraduate school, writing papers and then I would write papers for other people [laughs], for \$5. That would be my beer money. So I learned at an early age to write anything about anything, which I can still do [laughs]. Then I learned how to write from writing papers on Thomas Fielding. I don't know just in English classes they had the most obscure shit and I got that passion for complete-ism, you know reading every...I guess I already had that [laughs]. But that's how I got into it. And then of course my semester in college I got tuned onto the idea of the Beatniks.

Michael: Yeah, let's talk about that. I did the same.

TURNED ON TO JAZZ

John Sinclair : I got turned on to jazz.

Michael: This was what year?

John Sinclair : 1959. I always say I had the good fortune to enter the jazz world after the greatest record of all time was released, "Kind of Blue." When I joined the Columbia record club for the first of many times. I got "Kind of Blue." [laughs] So that was just a fortunate accident of time, you know history. But, at Albion... my parents sent me to Albion because it was a good college and I tried to give up...to repudiate the teenage rock and roll greaser lifestyle that I found so much solace in during my high school years and I tried to get

with the college thing, you know short hair and khaki pants, Albion sweatshirt, and the whole nine yards.

But one day a guy I knew was doing a radio program on the campus, what do you they call that? Closed-Carrier, the radio station at Albion. That meant it was broadcast into the dormitories, like cable. It wasn't an open broadcast into the air. It was broadcast on these carrier lines. But anyway, they got to have their show at seven in the morning, one day. And he couldn't handle it. So he got me his show.

Well, see the other thing when I was a teenager, my real ambition in life, my personal private emotional ambition was to be a disc jockey [laughs]. Because all my heroes were disc jockeys, you know. So I used to do record hops when I was in high school. I billed myself as Frantic John, Flint's youngest deejay.

Michael: But also with black music?

John Sinclair : Yeah, playing R & B, yeah. Well, see rock and roll was nothing but rhythm and blues with a different marketing concept. But the records, the great records were all by black people. And I also subscribed to a small number of white artists like Buddy Holly and the Crickets, Bill Haley and the Comets, Sun Records Artist Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison, Johnny Cash.

DANCING

Even, Johnny Cash was about as far to the right as I went toward a folk type of thing. Billy Riley and his little green men doing flying saucer rock and roll, Warren Smith doing the Ubangi Stomp. I had all the Sun records; I just thought they were the shit. So I mixed those in, you know, Dale Hawkins, Suzie Q, Cross Ties [laughs], but yeah I would entertain the kids seeing I could do it. I wasn't doing it for money, I was doing it to get my nuts off, so you could hire me for like \$20, whereas you'd have to pay a guy who was a disc jockey on a radio station a \$100 maybe, or \$50 to do a record hop. I'd do it for \$20 or a case of beer, you know [laughs]. So, I was a fanatic dancer when I was a teenager, that was the other half of the records, and it wasn't just listening to them but also dancing to them. And I was a very accomplished dancer in the jitterbug, post- jitterbug school. I don't know what they call what we used to do. But I was a fanatical dancer and I went to dances, six nights a week.

Michael: What style of dancing?

John Sinclair : The bop, you know, dance like colored people. I used to go to the...See the high points of life were when I was a kid was to go to the Black show revues at the IMA Auditorium. I went there every show that came to Flint from 1955-1960. Allen Fried's, "Big Beat Show of 1958, headlined by

Chuck Berry and Jerry Lee Lewis". A show so bad that the 18 acts opened with Screaming Jay Hawkins coming out of the coffin and went on from there [laughs].

Oh man, so I saw all my idols perform and danced to them. With the colored people, and I was, like I'm not trying to swell my head, but I was such a good dancer I could clear the floor at a Negro dance. And the pinnacle of life when I was a teenager was to go to one of these big R&B reviews at the IMA Auditorium and dance with colored girls. To me this was like the ultimate...like winning the simple award for the athletically minded, you know. I think that's at the IMA Auditorium with 3000 black people there and make everyone stop and watch.

Michael: Really?

John Sinclair : That was spectacular. I mean it's hard to imagine, even now, but when I was a kid...when I ran into a guy at the Music Menu two nights ago named Pete Woodman, you ever know him?

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Michael: ???

John Sinclair : He's a drummer with from the Saginaw area.

Michael: I don't think I know him.

John Sinclair : He's got a hair lip and he's only got half his fingers. I've been knowing him...I met him in 1959 at the Music Box in Houghton Lake [laughs]. But I mean, going to dances, these records and then going to dances.

So these records, you know, not only would they be my works of art, but also you danced to them, and other kids like you danced to them and then there was like the elite of kids who knew about the records and danced to them and that would maybe be a grand total of 30 white kids in Flint, Michigan. Of course we all knew each other because we all went to the dances and we all dressed a certain way, like Negroes, you know. We had pointed toe shoes, we were sharp, and we wore sunglasses at night you know and all this crazy shit in the 50's man [laughs]. Oh boy that was something, you'd get a case of beer and you'd go to the dance and you'd get loaded and you'd dance and try to take some girl out in the car, you know the whole nine yards, big fun, or go to some kids house. See I was the guy when you had a party at the house, I would come in with a case of beer [laughs] and I would take a position by the turntable and then I would bogart the turntable for the whole night. I would just sit there in the chair and drink my beers and play the tunes ...and commander the record player.

Michael: You were a deejay.

John Sinclair : Yeah, yeah [laughs]. So when I went to college and I had a chance to do this deejay show, man it was like my life ambition was being realized. Even despite my surroundings, I'd take my old box of 45's down there, and "School Days" by Chuck Berry was my opening theme song "Up in the morning and out to school" at seven a.m.

Then I would play an hour of Jimmy Reed, John Lee Hooker [laughs], The Flamingoes, you know et cetera, et cetera, Big Jay Turner, Ruth Brown and then I would go back and try and get with the college thing. Well I did this for a few times and one afternoon they came a knock on my door in the dormitory, in the freshman dormitory. And I'm in there with my roommate who was a Canadian football player and hockey player and this other Canadian guy, total squares. And this knock on the door and I open it and it's the campus beatnik. We only had one, and this guy wore sandals, rode a bike, you know, brought a colored girl to the prom. He was out there. His name was Rodney Coates. And

he says...[laughs], well they called me Tuffy when I went to Albion College, because in Flint, in our circles of the hip young white people that had rhythm and blues records and went to dances we wore this kind of pants called Tuffies of the old west, do you remember those?

John Sinclair : So, I never heard of them. I don't know how they got to Flint, Michigan, but to us if you wore Levi's, you were a farmer, if you wore Wrangler's you were a farmer.

John Sinclair pt. 2

Michael: Okay, let's hear some more.

John Sinclair : Well, I was talking about Tuffies.

Michael: Yeah, let's see if we can get to the Grande.

John Sinclair : [laughs].

Michael: Because I need to know...

John Sinclair : It's a long trip, you know.

Michael: I know, you know...I think some of this is good interesting stuff.

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: And whoever makes your book should read through this.

John Sinclair : Oh, well, it will be me [laughs].

Michael: Yeah, all right. I'll end up being able to give you transcripts.

John Sinclair : Whoa, now you're talking.

Michael: Which is like enormously helpful.

John Sinclair : No shit.

Michael: Yeah, because I'm going to pay to have it transcribed.

John Sinclair : Oh very good.

Michael: I've found some people who will do it, expensive, but...

John Sinclair : Yeah, my wife does that.

AND HERE COMES JAZZ

Michael: I understand how you got activated and how...but you're still in Albion, I mean, that's not very...activist. That's not wild and radical.

John Sinclair : Not in the least bit.

Michael: How did you get to Detroit?

John Sinclair : Well, first, I was at Albion and this guy knocked on my door and he's like, "You Toughie Sinclair?" And I said, "Yes I am." He look's at me and I'm trying to look like a college boy, and he said, "Are you the Toughie Sinclair that was on the radio this morning?" I said, "Yes, I was." He said, "Well, where did you get those records?" I said, "Well, they're my records." He said, "They are?" I said, "Yeah, c'mon in."

So these other guys are looking at each other like man what's this weirdo doing here and so they split. So me and Rodney Coates sat there for about three hours, through dinner and everything playing 45's. Well it turned out he grew up on this. So we're listening to show and you know all this shit. And at one point he looks at me and he says, "Are you for jazz man?" And I said, "No, I really never heard it." He grabbed me by the arm, I'll never forget this, he grabbed me by the arm and he marched me up to the second floor in the sophomore part of his dorm, and he sat me down and he said, "Now I'm going to play you some music that I'm sure you're going to like it, but you know, but it might take a minute." [laughs] And he puts on this record of Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins and Jackie McLean, called, "Gig." And then about in three seconds I was totally with it. I said, "Wow, wow this is the shit."

Then he says, "Yeah, yeah, I knew you'd like this." [laughs] And so then we sat in his room and he played me records by Charlie Parker, you know Miles Davis and all this stuff. So that was when I got into jazz. And then I immediately thought that this music from my teenage years was lame, it was like a lower order and I graduated to a higher level. And I just got embroiled in it, obsessed with jazz. Used to go to...they had a record shop there, that had a pretty good, you know, for a little town it had a pretty good selection. And they had... Remember when they had the booths? You could go in the booths and listen to the records. And I used to take like 10 albums in there and I'll play one and I'd read the backs of the other nine, you know?

And then I would...you'd hear somebody, like had a Miles Davis...like Miles Davis. See I'd hear all the Miles Davis records, but then Sonny Rollins was on there. So then you'd hear all the Sonny Rollins records, all the Jackie McLean records, then Coltrane, than I became with obsessed with Coltrane [laughs].

BOB MARSHALL'S BOOKS

And remember Beatnik poetry, "Howl," "Gasoline."

Michael: What year was this?

John Sinclair : 1959 going into 1960. And in those days you couldn't get those books anywhere but from Bob Marshall's Books in Ann Arbor, Michigan. So I'd write away to Bob Marshall's and ask. You'd hear about them. You know it was like archaeology really, because this stuff wasn't in Life.

Michael: No, we could talk about this. I mean Bob Marshals Books was where I hung out in Ann Arbor. I just spent all my time there. I read all this...where I read the "The Subterraneans," all of Keroauc's books, huge slippery books from Evergreen Press.

John Sinclair : Yeah, well I used to send for them from Albion and ask him to send me some. Grove Press, City Lights Press, New Directions. Those were the main ones.

Michael: I read all that stuff. I went out to San Francisco and met Ferlinghetti at City Lights Books.

John Sinclair : Yeah. Well and then it was just like with the jazz records. There was enough information encoded in the book... pocket poets and see the rights by Allen Ginsberg and on the back it would have the other books that were on and so we had to have all of those, see [laughs]? And we just followed the threads, you know, until we had found the stuff we were looking for and that would in turn, open up other things. So that's where I got my intellectual curiosity from that kind of thing.

Michael: So there's where you and I are together, totally, because I totally went the same exact route.

John Sinclair : Yep.

ANN ARBOR COFFEE HOUSES

Michael: But I got it from the people in Ann Arbor, the beatniks in Ann Arbor, so to speak, and the Promethean Coffee Shop where you could go and hang your head down, smoke cigarettes, and look serious. Right? They didn't even have espresso back then, just coffee, Café Wein, Viennese.

John Sinclair : Yeah. I remember when I went back to Flint from college and I found they had a coffee house that they opened in front, a beatnik house called "Plato's Pad." My ex-wife used to work in one of them on Wayne Campus called "Cup of Socrates."

Michael: I know the Cup of Socrates, yeah.

John Sinclair : Tim Fairlane was in there. Well, those were all people from the "Cup of Socrates" that after I came to Detroit, I merged with them and I became a leader of that group in the sense that I organized shit that wasn't happening otherwise.

Michael: But at this point there was not really a political edge to it?

POLITICS

John Sinclair : No, my whole political thing came through really finding out more about Negroes. The Civil Rights movement had started in December of 1955 with Rosa Parks. So the Civil Rights Movement and the emergence of Martin Luther King and all that stuff was all taking part during the same period. At some point I hooked it all together that this music was coming from these same people that were in the Civil Rights Movement. So I was an advocate of that.

Michael: Me too.

John Sinclair : After two years at Albion, in which I was in a fraternity; I was the rush chairman of my fraternity.

Michael: That's really hard to picture, you fraternity fellow.

John Sinclair : Well, it was, Sigma Nu. They sent me there. I was there. It was where it was happening and I was trying to get with what was happening. So I was trying really hard, but at the same time I started to listen to jazz and was trying to write poetry and then I found eventually... Well, Allen Ginsberg was a

real idol. But I also found my real mentors in poetry through Charles Olson, Mary Brock and Robert Creeley, Amiri Baraka always opened me up and I learned he was LeRoi Jones then and he opened up another possibility, because he wrote about jazz and he wrote the book, "Blues People."

Michael: And he was political.

John Sinclair : Well yes, that's some... from that. Castro took office in that period -- my first semester in college. He had a beard. Ginsberg and these guys were telling you he was the greatest, so I thought he was the greatest. When he wrote a book that was the most influential of all which was covered, "Black Muslims in America," by C. Eric Lincoln. It was about Elijah Muhammad. I read about this, I read his book. I was just floored because everything he said about white people I knew to be true and even more so. You know what I mean?

Muhammad's idea of separating from the white people. Hear him talk about what the different things white people did. I thought he doesn't know the half of it [laughs]. Just from my experiences with white persons, you know. And so I became an advocate of black people in America, I just thought that what was being done to them was the most vicious cruel shit that I ever heard of. I didn't want to have anything to do with the people that were doing that. This is kind of where I started with yelling from the Caucasian sphere [laughs].

As completely as I could, we were still interacting, but mentally put them in line with these other people. So when I was in Flint...oh, when I went to Albion, okay.

At the end of my second year, which is 1961 in the spring, there's the push to integrate fraternities. I had a meeting in that fraternity house where I lived. At this meeting they carefully laid out the stratagem to rise by the national office of the Legion of Honor as they called themselves. Which was sort of: any chapter was forced by the university where I was based to accept black people into their fraternity.

They could then apply to withdraw from the national. So the national fraternity wouldn't have its honored sullied by these people of color. And after the meeting the guys all ran through the fraternity house signing, "They will never be a Nigger Sigma Nu." And I started kind of mentally packing right at that time. [laughs]

That was our getting married or something and then in June we were out and I just decided I wasn't going back. I didn't care what they did. I wasn't going back with these people. Which I thought they were alright people. They were my friends and fraternity brothers. And then all of a sudden, they're just these

vicious racists, you know? And we found this more and more about white people where they were friends, but were as bad as Bull Connor [laughs], in their attitude. There wasn't any difference among white people. There were very few white people who want to write this.

Michael: Yeah.

John Sinclair : You know. Other than that, all those were phonies. [laughs] But other than that, white people pretty much united against the Negro and so this just turned me off completely to the whole concept of white people and white America. Man, this is really awful. So I imagine that's why...you know a lot of my interest was spurred by jazz records that I listened to, like "Freedom Now" by Max Roach and Coleman Hawkins. Sonny Rollins did the "Freedom Suite," and was always talking about this stuff. And these were people who were my favorite artists you know. So all of these things and the Castro ascendancy... Kennedy became President at that time and things seemed to open up a little bit more, politically. I mean it wasn't Eisenhower... Eisenhower was in the closet, you know.

Michael: At this time... I was in Ann Arbor, and Ann Arbor was halfway...

John Sinclair : Halfway cool.

Michael: ...about, you know, racism.

John Sinclair : Well, I often talked to our friend Charlie Thomas.

Michael: I mean Charlie and I were friends.

John Sinclair : Yeah, we were...but I mean he was so direct in his criticism [laughs].

Michael: Yeah, but in Ann Arbor there were all races.

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: Because of the university.

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: I was raised with all kinds of races around me.

John Sinclair : Indian people, yeah...

Michael: So, I never thought of it like that.

John Sinclair : Yeah. Well everywhere I had been that was the way it was.

Michael: Well I think that fact is one big difference between us.

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: That I understand...that helps me go through the realization of it. No, I never got the full realization, because I was already comfortable with all kinds of people of different colors and races on campus...

John Sinclair : Right.

Michael: Although the black people in Ann Arbor were not like the foreign students, those from India and those people at the university.

John Sinclair : Right.

Michael: The foreign folks were educated...

John Sinclair : They had their little....

Michael: The Blacks in Ann Arbor had their own element. They had their own little neighborhood and they had their own little business section, Ann Street, which was gentrified decades ago now, and lost.

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: Which I ended up playing music in, Like Clint's Club on Ann Atreet for a year and a half, right?

John Sinclair : Well I know. I saw one of the first people at Albion.

Michael: Right.

John Sinclair : There was a little black ghetto there, people that worked for Albion...

Michael: And our band was integrated sometimes from pretty early on.

John Sinclair : Ah.

Michael: We had a black drummer for awhile.

John Sinclair : Now who was that?

Michael: That was...Shorty. I can't remember his last name. I think it was McGaugh or something like that..

John Sinclair : Shorty [laughs].

Michael: Do you remember Shorty and his brother?

John Sinclair : No [laughs].

Michael: Shorty on drums and his brother was the bass player....

John Sinclair : Oh wow.

Michael: I can't remember his last name but I think he's a car upholsterer now in Ypsilanti, and I'd love to see him again.

John Sinclair : Oh wow.

Michael: Because he was cool.

John Sinclair : Shorty.

Michael: Shorty. But what was his last name? It was like a Scottish name.

John Sinclair : Right, right.

Michael: McGaugh, or something, anyway, my brother would know. I can't remember. Anyway, so I'm just...I'm sorry to talk too much, I just...

John Sinclair : Oh no that's fine.

Michael: Realizing that I didn't have the same vision and I know that you lived in Detroit.

John Sinclair : Right.

Michael: Ann Arbor was like cushy, right? What I hated as a high school student were the pinheads.

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: And so I didn't like intellectuals. I didn't like academics.

John Sinclair : I like...right, right.

Michael: Because I was a townie.

John Sinclair : Right.

Michael: We used to beat them up. I mean not me personally... but Ann Arbor high school roughnecks would.

John Sinclair : Right.

Michael: As a rule.

John Sinclair : Yeah, I remember the town and gown controversies.

Michael: Anyway, keep going, I just...

John Sinclair : Well I fell in with some black guys in Albion and I would go over to their place and they had one of those huge record players that... They lived in little bitty place and they had one of those huge record players that took up

like half the room. We would drink wine and listen to jazz records all weekend, you know?

John Sinclair : Yeah, see the first blues I ever heard were the Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf.

Michael: Yeah, I don't think I heard much Muddy Waters, early on.

John Sinclair : On Chess '78's, you know.

Oh I was going to say going back to when I was a kid, one thing I wanted to put in there was it was racist to send away for records to these...to Randy's Record Shop or Ernie's Record Mart. And I would hear this on the radio and I would send away for the Blue Star Blues Special.

Michael: Right.

John Sinclair : You get six 78's. Michael: \$2.79. Yeah, plus packing, mailing and C.O.D. You'd send for these. I remember, I hated my mother for years because my package of records would come and she would refuse to pay the C.O.D. because it would be like \$3.50.

I would come home everyday from school waiting for my box of records, you know? [laughs] This life line from outside, and finally my mother, "Oh, some package come but I sent it back." Oh, no [laughs]. Sometimes when we'd get through, I had to give her the money from my little earnings.

John Sinclair : Man I can still... the feeling of unpacking the box with the six 78's in it, that came from like another planet, you know? "Sincerely" by the "Moonglows" ... that blue and white Chess label, you know?

Michael: I imagined you liked doo-wop probably as much as I did.

John Sinclair : Oh yeah...

Michael: I still hear it and go into raptures, right?

John Sinclair : Ah yeah, that doo-wop is what my heart's composed to that [laughs].

John Sinclair : What I used to do was on Fridays when I got my little \$2 allowance for the week, I'd give my Dad a list of like ten records and he worked at Buick. Buick was in the middle of the north-end ghetto in Flint, and Ernie's record rack number one at 943 E. Street, near Industrial was just up the street from the Buick Headquarters where my Dad worked. So on Friday, on his lunch hour, he would go to Ernie's Record Mart, Ernie's Record Rack, and he would pick me up two records out of the list of ten that I gave him.

And he did that, I don't know for how long, but I mean that was my...before I could get to be 13 and start hitchhiking, we used to hitchhike into Flint every Saturday, hitch around to the different record shops and steal 45's [laughs]. And hitchhike back to Davison, because you could hitchhike everywhere then as you recall.

Michael: Yeah, I know. Hitchhiked to NYC some 10 times.

John Sinclair : That was a great thing to stand out there and next thing you were in downtown Flint [laughs]. Who's in time tram through teleportation [laughs].

Michael: Right.

John Sinclair : I just wanted to get those three things when I was a kid.

Michael: That's great, yeah, I know.

John Sinclair : Man, records are like holy objects [laughs].

You can never have too many.

Michael: I don't know about that. My CD collection is now part of Michigan State University in East Lansing, some 800,000 CDs.

John Sinclair : And you wanted to have everyone that you liked, you know?

John Sinclair : Who's on Vee Jay, you had to have it. Where was the Spaniels? Wade Flemmings, Jerry Butler, Jimmy Reed, Billy Boy Arnold, , Ben Eldorado, you had to have them [laughs].

Michael: Yeah, I'd like to have them.

John Sinclair : Well, that's when they were on Brunswick.

GRANDE BALLROOM

Michael: You really did a lot for that scene according to Russ Gibb. Russ went on for five minutes which I will transcribe and send to you at some point. So how did you...he made it sound like you really made the intellectual aesthetic decisions and booked the bands.

John Sinclair : I schooled him, yeah. I didn't book the bands.

Michael: Well, how did you get involved with it?

John Sinclair : See when he started, I didn't know anything about rock and roll bands.

John Sinclair : I saw the MC5 at the Grande Ballroom opening night, and I just thought they were the shit.

Michael: So you weren't booking them then?

John Sinclair : No. I was becoming friends with Rob Tyner and Rob Tyner's best friend was Gary Grimshaw and so Rob Tyner had the band and Grimshaw did the posters. I remember a poster before the Grande opened that Grimshaw did.

Michael: No, Grimshaw didn't do that one. Because I just talked to him and with Russ and that was from an earlier time, the poster with a trumpet on it.

John Sinclair : Well, I don't think it was published

.

John Sinclair : But I remember seeing this in his apartment.

Michael: But it's not a Grande poster.

John Sinclair : I don't think it was a Grande poster.

John Sinclair : Well you asked him about that trumpet thing?

Michael: I did and he doesn't remember it, but what he said is that he made that seagull poster in one night. I pulled a "Seagull" poster out of my basement some years ago. I must have been there. [laughs]

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: And so he couldn't have made anything before because they hadn't asked for anything.

John Sinclair : No, but he had a rock and roll type poster. It was blue. I can see it, I can't see the image but I can see the color.

Michael: I believe it.

John Sinclair : It was on his wall he didn't have...I just thought man, you know, wow [laughs]. I was blown away. I always thought it was the greatest thing, that somebody was doing that there, and it was him.

John Sinclair : You know another thought I had about that last night? That could have been from the old Grande Ballroom.

Michael: That was my point. It was.

John Sinclair : That could have been the opening for their fall season.

Michael: From back in 1960 or 1955?

John Sinclair : That's what I'm saying.

Michael: No, what Russ told me is that he found a stack of them when he took over the building and he put one up in the wall because it was fun, but then he contradicts himself in another interview that someone else did.

John Sinclair : Oh.

Michael: If it was a Grande thing then it worth a lot of money.

John Sinclair : Oh right.

Michael: Otherwise, it's worth nothing, other than as an oddity.

John Sinclair : Right.

Michael: I'm just trying to figure it out.

John Sinclair : Right, see you're trying to authenticate this is a valuable item.

Michael: Well, you can't blame him.

John Sinclair : No, you can't, but...I wouldn't be surprised if it didn't go back to an earlier incarnation. That's like art from the early 50's isn't it?

Michael: Well, their response to that is, "Well, it was a standard stock image, over which they overprinted a date."

John Sinclair : Well, it could have been the opening of the fall season. Wouldn't it be summertime, everybody would go to the Walled Lake Casino and places like that and then they would start in the fall and they danced...

Michael: Yeah, the years it could have been was 1960, or 1955, those are the dates, September...

John Sinclair : September 17 you said.

Michael: Friday, September, whatever it was. Either that or the other thing is that Russ had a pre-mature opening, but why wouldn't he have set a band? Unless he was just going to open the place and he didn't even announce a band. Didn't happen.

John Sinclair : I can't see that.

Michael: I can't see that either.

John Sinclair : I know they did announce a date. I'm almost positive.

Michael: You tell me that the seagull poster, you didn't have any influence on it.

John Sinclair : No.

Michael: You didn't know Gary then?

John Sinclair : No.

Michael: What...how long after...it must have been pretty soon after?

John Sinclair : I met him right around then.

Michael: Okay.

John Sinclair : Like I say I got out of the house of correction August 5th. August 6th they had a big party, coming home party at the Artist Party Workshop on John Lodge and Warren and the MC5 played there, but they didn't play until three o'clock in the morning and I had already turned in and there was the legendary time where my wife went down and told them to un-plug; it was too loud.

Michael: And I've heard that story. And the Grande, what was in it for you? At some point you were managing them?

John Sinclair : That was the year later?

Michael: A year...you probably didn't have much to do with the first thing, or did you?

John Sinclair : I wrote about it. I publicized it.

Michael: Okay so you...

John Sinclair : I wrote about it in my column. I thought it was really great that they were doing this and I went every week.

Michael: But you weren't interfacing with Russ the first few times.

John Sinclair : I met Russ when he came down to the Artist Workshop when we were writing Jerry Jounkins. And the MC5 auditioned for Russ at the Workshop. This would be August, or either very early September 1966.

Michael: So you came out of.... whatever detention and then somewhere between that and the opening of the Grande you met Russ?

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: But Russ wasn't seeking advice from you, or was he? Sounds like he says he was. He didn't know what hippies were much.

John Sinclair : No he didn't. Well see...

Michael: But you didn't either, you weren't a hippie either but you were a big...

THE FIFTH ESTATE

John Sinclair : Well what they had there... I was like the beacon, you know?

Michael: Okay.

John Sinclair : Because I wrote about it and I...the Artist Workshop was the only thing hip happening in Detroit at that time.

Michael: How long had you been writing? When does that...?

John Sinclair : Oh I say writing...

Michael: Were you writing when you were in detention?

John Sinclair : Sure.

Michael: And they were publishing it on the outside?

John Sinclair : I started writing for the Fifth Estate by the first, second issue. That would have been 1965 in the fall.

Michael: Oh really?

John Sinclair : Yeah. Because Harvey O' Shinski had the same experience that Russ had a year later. Harvey went to Los Angeles for the summer. He was a junior in high school, you know Harvey?

Michael: No.

John Sinclair : And his father Stan O' Shinski, the guy who invented the microchip?

Michael: Really.

John Sinclair : [laughs] Harvey worked here. Harvey was a nerdy kid, you know? Harvey O' Shinski,. He was kind of a nerdy kid and he went to California for the summer and he hung out at the Fifth Estate Coffee House and the Los Angeles Free Press had just started. Incidentally Art Conklin, the publisher and founder of the Los Angeles Free Press came to one of my gigs in Los Angeles not too long ago.

Michael: Oh really?

John Sinclair : And just made my whole fucking night [laughs]. Anyway, Harvey saw this underground paper in the Fifth Estate Club. He also went back to high school for his last year and he decided he wanted to start an underground paper. That would be the Artist Workshop and our mimeograph machine. We created this school arts of publications on mimeograph machine.

Michael: Right, right.

John Sinclair : Poetry magazine, an avant-garde jazz machine. This would be a 150 page mimeographed magazine with a pictorial cover. We were like in the forefront of the mimeograph revolution, basically spearheaded by Ed Sanders.

Michael: Yeah.

John Sinclair : So we mimeographed all this shit as part of our mission. Well, all of a sudden here is this little tabloid paper, the ugliest piece of shit you've ever seen. Harvey and his younger brother and sister, I think, made it in the basement in northwest Detroit, or Oak Park or wherever they lived [laughs]. I never forget seeing that, because it was the first thing outside of our efforts to turn up that was like...what was happening, you know? Even though it was ugly and it wasn't really happening, the idea that some kids had made this happen was really a big thing, so Leni and I went and talked to them and she kind of became the art director and I was the arts columnists and we kind of told them what was happening and what to cover, because they were high school kids.

So I started with them with the second issue and I had this little column called "The Coat Puller." And it was like a column, classic bullet-column, you know? Odds and Ends of what was happening. So, this was my influence on things, because I wrote about what everybody was doing, and it was the only place...and I had aggrandized the stuff, you know what I mean, anybody who was trying to paint or have a jazz, I aggrandized.

Michael: So, I guess if there would have been a false opening...a pre-mature opening to the Grande, you probably would have written about that?

John Sinclair : That's what I'm saying, it's probably in my column...it seems to me, almost certain that he announced another opening date in September, but then for some reason either having to do with permits or the physical preparation of the space or whatever it was prevented them from opening then until this October date. God, I remember all that shit so good [laughs]. You know when the Grande opened there was the MC5, and I forget who was the other perhaps "The Chosen Few" or something.

Michael: Could have been.

John Sinclair : I didn't know anything about rock and roll bands because they were...we were beatniks. It was about jazz bands, you know?

Michael: Some of us...we didn't think of ourselves as a rock and roll band...

John Sinclair : No, you were a blues band.

Michael: Yeah, the blues were our love and intention

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: Yeah, I mean that's what we liked.

John Sinclair : There was no question in my mind that the Prime Movers were a blues band.

Michael: Right. And that was...

John Sinclair : They were like Paul Butterfield.

Michael: Oh, the Butterfield bad were our idols.

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: Those were...

John Sinclair : I loved Paul Butterfield.

Michael: Yeah, me too, seeing them live changed our life.

John Sinclair : Yeah [laughs].

Michael: They were a mixed band.

John Sinclair : Yep.

Michael: Yeah, I mean Sam Lay, Jerome Arnold.

John Sinclair : Jerome.

Michael: Right.

John Sinclair : Yeah, they were so great. Where did they play, the "Living End."

Michael: Yeah, so did we. Yeah, they played at the
Living End, the Chessmate. J

John Sinclair : Chessmate.

Michael: I used to go down and see them...

John Sinclair : You were in the blues reviews went to the Chessmate.

Michael: Well Jimmy Cotton lived in my house for six weeks with his whole band.

John Sinclair : Wow.

Michael: And he played at the Chessmate, and every night we drove from Ann Arbor...

John Sinclair : Wow.

Michael: And it was during a time when he...he never could get quite enough confidence in himself.

Michael: Yeah. We would sit there with our heart in our mouth praying that Cotton would have a good set.

John Sinclair : Wow.

Michael: And he couldn't quite make it, right?

John Sinclair : Oh wow.

Michael Erlewine. He wanted to be a "Bobby Bland," but he was James Cotton, which we loved.

John Sinclair : Well, I've hung out with him a couple times. I don't know him all that well.

Michael: We were with him and the whole group, Luther Tucker on guitar...

John Sinclair : Wow.

Michael: And what it was is that he could not get his thing, his mojo going for that gig.

John Sinclair : Wow.

Michael: Not one hundred percent.

John Sinclair : Wow, Cotton.

Michael: He would rise to it and we would rise with him and then he'd fall back and we'd all be crestfallen and we all be going back to Ann Arbor, so anyway I don't want to...

John Sinclair : Wow.

Michael: Interesting.

John Sinclair : Wow.

Michael: So we would go there and drink booze...drink whiskey with John Lee Hooker in the back and come to see Cotton and he'd go in the little side room there and drink whiskey...

John Sinclair : Wow.

Michael: And I'd go back and sit with Hooker, so...and he was cool.

Michael: I'm sure, but not this one...these were Cotton's gigs, but John Lee would come to see him, right? I mean to hang out and talk to him, friendly.

John Sinclair : Steve Booker.

Michael: Oh yeah, I know...but it wasn't, I don't remember...

John Sinclair : He used to play at the Chessmate, he would play like between sets, he would do drum solos.

Michael: Yeah, not this time.

John Sinclair : [laughs].

Michael: Well Cotton walked out in the audience and sang "Turn on your love light" just like Bobby Bland. It was kind of...it wouldn't always get turned on.

John Sinclair : Right, right.

Michael: It was heartbreaking, Because we loved Cotton and for all the stuff he already did and could do.

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: Because we loved him; He's such a nice man and a great player.

John Sinclair : Yeah, but the crowd wouldn't know how to respond to somebody like that.

Michael: He'd always end up being like a second fiddle, right? He was not Bobby "Blue" Bland.

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: He wasn't used to being a front man and he didn't know how to do it so that he was satisfied. The crowd was happy with whatever he wanted to do.

John Sinclair : Wow.

Michael: He had a heart of gold, so, it was cool. Anyway.

Michael: Okay, so we're...so in the Grande, I mean...so you slowly, so somehow you got to a leader of the hippies.

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: Without really being the hippie and...

John Sinclair : Yeah, I was there.

Michael: Because you were a little older.

John Sinclair : I had to tell them when I got into there that I called myself a rock and roll beatnik. That was before hippies.

Michael: I never called myself a hippie, but I...

John Sinclair : But see they called me the king of the hippies.

Michael: Well, they never called me that, but I could control hippies, right? Because I knew...like you said, I knew all the intellectual under-garment that they didn't possess.

John Sinclair : Right, right.

Michael: You said it well, that's what I'm saying.

John Sinclair : No, that was where I was giving about these hippie folks. They didn't have any intellectual...they read comic books and watched television.

Michael: Well they had to come through, you know, they hadn't worshipped at the Beatnik altar of learnership.

John Sinclair : No. So we would always try to turn them on to these things, we're always trying to turn them on to our little poetry books and our little art activities.

Michael: The other thing is that you, even though Russ remembers all kinds of stuff you don't remember, were you that influential on him.

John Sinclair : Well not at the outset except that...obviously the people who read my writings in, were the target audience along with the young kids from the suburbs who were circling into rock and roll. But see, that was different from rock and roll because rock and roll was going toward matching suits and haircuts, at that time.

Michael: I remember.

John Sinclair : And the Grande wasn't about that, it was about rock and roll beatniks really, kids with long hair who got high.

Michael: It's like what Jeep Holland our band manager for a short time wanted us to wear us to wear Beatle jackets.

Michael: Oh, see we already knew Jeep, because he had already managed us as a band and gave up, because we wouldn't be managed...

John Sinclair : You too I caught a classic.

Michael: We wouldn't play anything but the stuff we liked.

John Sinclair : Yeah. He couldn't see any future in that even with Butterfield, no?

Michael: No, I'll tell you one other quick story, there was a time when Motown, a subsidiary of Motown courted our band and drove us around in a limousine, wanted us to be a white band playing black music, they would set things like...

John Sinclair : Kind of like Rare Earth does.

Michael: Right, for example, so they actually set up a lunch between myself and my brother Dan and the Everly Brothers. We had lunch with the Everly Brothers. We were geeked.

John Sinclair : Wow.

Michael: We had dinner together, sitting at a table for four.

John Sinclair : Wow.

Michael: But I was so stupid, or stubborn, I refused to play anything but the blues that I loved and they had songs for us to play, because we would have been a white band playing the songs that they wanted. Kind of...

John Sinclair : Right, never be writing them of course, be a Motown...

Michael: And then we would be a white band that could play a bluesy sound.

John Sinclair : Right.

Michael: But we refused to do it and then they spit us out pretty quickly. We would have had a lot of opportunity. I didn't care.

John Sinclair : You know where I was at the same time that they signed the Underdogs?

Michael: I don't know, I don't remember.

John Sinclair : Because the MC5 had a pal named Peter Prim, and he was the bass player in the Underdogs.

Michael: I remember the Underdogs.

John Sinclair : And I remember this guy would come around here and talk about what Motown was doing with them and everything. To me Motown was another planet, you know?

Michael: Yeah, no it just didn't appeal to us because we didn't want to be told what to do.

John Sinclair : Of course not [laughs].

Michael: So anyway, let's go on. I have a little bit of history there of our own, so...

John Sinclair : But I mean, we were a part of the Grande from the minute it opened.

Michael: Well that's the way Russ presents it. I want to send you...you won't believe what he says. I couldn't believe it.

John Sinclair : Oh, I believe it, because it's mostly true, but it wasn't when he opened, he got his ideas to open it from San Francisco.

Michael: Totally.

John Sinclair : And he came back and he said, man this guy Bill Graham is making money hand over fist [laughs], and this is a good thing, and kids need...you know he had, the altruism and also it was profitable.

Michael: Right. And he made a lot of money from it.

John Sinclair : I'm sure of it.

Michael: He told me on tape, he made a bundle of money.

John Sinclair : Because I'm sure Gabe was ripping him off as well as everybody else. That was just his way. Yeah, what they got, like their first year, was all local bands. And he gradually grew and grew but, in the fall of...in the late summer of 1967 that's when the Grateful Dead came in on their first tour.

Michael: Right.

John Sinclair : And they played there and then we took them up to Ann Arbor to play them at the Free Concert.

Michael: And we played on stage with them in West Park at one point.

John Sinclair : Did you play on that?

Michael: Prime Movers did. We jammed for a set or so.

John Sinclair : Yeah, well that was...

Michael: What was the first time they....?

John Sinclair : You brought them there from Detroit.

Michael: But very informal.

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: We just played out in the bandshell...

John Sinclair : Lee said, "Or friends in Ann Arbor have these free concerts at West Park on Sunday, do you want to go up and play? You got Sunday off?" And they said, "Sure." And so...

Michael: They weren't any big deal then.

John Sinclair : No, they weren't. That was as big as they got then, you know?

Michael: I don't remember.

John Sinclair : Their first album came out on their first tour and they said we're having these concerts, because we were going up there...

Michael: we all played together if I remember.

John Sinclair : I wouldn't be surprised.

Michael: You were there because I remember you being there.

John Sinclair : I was there, we brought them. I was hanging out with their manager, Rock Scully, that's what got me into this management. Because I said this guy is crazier and more a dope fiend than I am, but his bands on Warner Brothers records and on a national tour. I guess I could do this, and this is when I started doing for the MC5.

Michael: When was that, roughly?

John Sinclair : Well, they came in August of 1967, I imagine by September I had...you know we didn't sit down and say I'm going be your manager or anything, I just started...I just decided to take responsibility.

Michael: Did you ever remember...did you ever make much money from that?

John Sinclair : I never made any money.

Michael: Really, how is that?

John Sinclair : Then or now. We were a commune. All I ever wanted until I was 40 years old was a place to sleep and a ride and something to eat and some weed. That's all I ever wanted. I got all my records for nothing, I wanted my record collection and I got all those for nothing. It didn't cost anything, thousands of records. I just hustled them, you know, disc-jockeying, whatever them, but...I never wanted anything, so I didn't...I wasn't about money [laughs]. It wasn't about money in the slightest...I mean the money was to rent a house where you could put 15 people in it, you know?

Michael: When did you move to Ann Arbor again, tell me that?

John Sinclair : May of 1968.

Michael: And talk a bit about that, what drove you to that, and why you did it, what came up and came into your life that you moved to Ann Arbor?

John Sinclair : Well, we were in Detroit, we had a commune, we had not only a commune, but we had a system of communes around the Wayne State area. See the thing about our communes is they were always single economic units.

Michael: Meaning, what is that?

John Sinclair : No one had any personal money. They were kind of cults.

Michael: Who managed the money?

John Sinclair : I did and my brother.

Michael: David?

John Sinclair : Yeah.

Michael: And how did it work out?

John Sinclair : Well, it was just always an incredible fucking hustle. But everybody had a place to stay and something to eat and a ride if you had a gig, you know? And then we would hustle things, and we learned how...I don't know, we...we had publications we'd hustle all of it, we'd steal the paper, we'd go to somebody's office, my wife worked for Otto Feinstein at Wayne State and she had a key to his office and we'd go in there at midnight with a box of stolen mimeograph paper and we would print it all night on the mimeograph and then we'd take it back to the Artist Workshop and go to bed and get up in the afternoon, get everybody in, roll some joints and collate the magazines and staple them together. Somebody's book of poems, you know, everyone

was a hustle, we didn't have any money, nobody ever had any money. The MC5 worked for a \$125 a night.

Michael: We were the same way.

John Sinclair : Yeah. Now \$125 would have got them about 15 people, that's not very much money [laughs].

Michael: Well I think we used to play at Clint's Club, our whole band for like \$35 a night. That was it.

John Sinclair : But I mean the top of the line was \$125 at the Grande, that's what we got every week at the Grande,

\$125 and they had, unlike your band, they had this heavy metal habit.

Michael: Yeah, right.

John Sinclair : We had to have more equipment. The drummer used to go through a lot of Drumsticks per month.

Michael: Wow.

John Sinclair : I mean they just had to have more. They wanted... Jimi Hendrix came through with his Sun Amps, and the next week I had to figure out how to get a complete set of Sun Amps for two guitars and a bass, you know?

Michael: Yeah.

John Sinclair : Then we installed like 60 inch Electro-Voice speakers and we pretty much had to go into more stuff for the band.

Michael: That's the way you grow business.

John Sinclair : That's what we did.

Michael: Yeah, know it well.

John Sinclair : And we had all these fanatical hippies who just wanted to get high and do something worthwhile and have some laughs, so we'd just assign them to different things. These people do their light show, these people would have another show. See in the building we had the light show, that was Grimshaw, Leni, and someone. And others, they did the lightshow they got \$25 a night [laughs]. Grimshaw did the poster, he got, maybe \$25.

Michael: The most he ever got was \$75.

John Sinclair : Oh that would be that big show at Cobo or something, he didn't get no \$75 at the Grande.

Michael: Well, that's what he said.

John Sinclair : At the Grande?

Michael: I'd have to ask him again, I think so.

John Sinclair : Well, that wasn't...at the outset it was like

\$25 or \$50. It wasn't shit. Whatever you could make doing what we did wasn't anything and it wasn't...you'd put it all together in an aggregate and your rent was \$50 a month for the whole house.

Michael: But you weren't in it for the money.

John Sinclair : No, and the electricity was \$20 a month and the phone was \$25 a month, and we had several of these houses. But to get that money together was always over your head. It was always hard; you never had enough. I mean we were accustomed from the very beginning to the idea that our work was worthless in America [laughs] you know? Nobody wanted to pay for it. Unless you got a hit record. If you got a hit record you could generate a lot of cash, but somebody would probably steal most of it.

Michael: I know.

John Sinclair : The managers, the record companies, the agents, you know? Well so what, we're still going to do this. That is kind of where we came from.

Michael: Well a good friend of mine is Audrey who was like your secretary.

John Sinclair : Audrey Simons.

Michael: Oh yeah.

John Sinclair : We didn't have secretaries.

Michael: Well, that's what she called herself.

John Sinclair : She took care of things, I don't know, Audrey, I love her.

Michael: Well, she and I dated for a while, yet we didn't get on too well; we're still good friends.

John Sinclair : Yeah, good people man.

Michael: Now one...

John Sinclair : I remember she went to California with us when we went out and she finally gave me some pussy, I was so happy, I wanted it for so long and so bad [laughs]. I'll never forget that, in a motel on University Avenue in Berkeley.

Michael: I know that place.

John Sinclair : Yeah [laughs]. Audrey finally broke down under my ministrations. She was a tough character, then she was Dr. Simons daughter that ran away, you know? We took her in. See that's the kind of people, the people that ran away from home we took them in.

Michael: Well, that's true.

John Sinclair : Give them something to do. They were looking for something to do. Some strung beads you know? Some made roach clips out of spoon handles and...

END

NOTICE: WELCOME SUBSTACK AND MEDIUM

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

October 29, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/bf8c9249-df98-496a-83a9-7211e7824bbe_1640x2048.jpeg

[That's me in 1967. I'm still the same inside, although I am now 82 years old. I have a theory that each of us, somewhere around 30 years of age, break some kind of inner cord and remain the same age inside as we were when that cord broke. In my case, it was when I was about 25 years old, and I feel that age today, despite evidence to the contrary. LOL.]

Those of you're here on Facebook should know I blog on Dharma, Music, Astrology, Pop Culture, Photography, Macrobiotics, and 1960s culture. I am a well-known archivist of popular culture, music, film, and rock concert posters.

ALERT!

As the world turns, things come up. And one recent occurrence is that it is time I posted somewhere in addition to Facebook. Of course, I will continue to post on Facebook. I have 16 years of blogs stored there.

However, there are two quite similar forums to FB, both free for readers, one is 'Substack.com' and the other is 'Medium.com'. Both are very readable and in these two new formats I believe I can embed images as I go along (with cutlines underneath), an idea I like, rather than having photos always in a separate section. I am very visual and feel it is a richer experience to have embedded images in the text as it is read.

So, in addition to FB, you will have the choice to receive posts by me from Medium and Substack, delivered to you and perhaps easier to read. I believe we will still have comments, but I am learning about these two as I go. Stay tuned.

If you want an alternative way to stay in touch, here are the links:

MEDIUM

<https://medium.com/@MichaelErlewine/1340276ad390>

FACEBOOK

<https://www.facebook.com/MichaelErlewine>

Michael Erlewine (

Weltscmerz (World Sorrow)

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 29, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8cb6f854-838b-4b99-b44c-2a7a95a3ad36_1024x1024.png

Midjourney graphic prompted by me.

World sorrow, what the German's call 'weltscmerz' is something we all have... sometimes. This last year or few, more so, IMO. Either that or it occurs as we grow older. Well, yes, that too.

I'm surfing it as best I can, yet like the old Satchel Paige comment "Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you." I don't even have to look back, just looking around is enough with all that's happening in the world these years.

It's gaining on me, all the sad things... all around... all the time.

"Enough or Too Much" as William Blake said in his seminal poem "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," and that fits in too.

For me, it's been too much, meaning too much to digest or grok or whatever, the sadness that overflows of late.

It's not only the big things, like wars and the like, I'm seeing it in the little things, the tiny things that ought to be just fine because they are small, but no, I see sorrow leaching into there too. It's overflowing from the big sorrows and rolling downhill.

I am a pretty positive guy, as my friends can tell you, and I slough off the darkening of my view as best I can. However, as Dylan said "It's not dark yet, but it's getting there." Is it

getting there?

It's not getting brighter as of late. At least that much is true. And the big dark things like the 'Ukraine War' and the upcoming '2024 Election' are kind of bleeding over into the little bright things and casting their shadows.

I don't have to go on in this vein or say much more, do I? Because we all know these are not the most auspicious of times for light and peace.

As for explaining it to myself, this next year to a year and a half, the sunspot cycle will reach its peak, and after that we will not be inundated with so many

huge influxes of solar change. Until then, it may be rough because it's already rough now and space scientists say it's not over, and there is more yet to come.

Well, I don't want to spread all this sadness around, yet at the same time I find myself shaking my head to make sure I'm awake to all this. I am, pretty much. And it's not going to get me down, but it does seem to be hovering around and over things, a darkening or dimming of the light.

And the worst: I especially see it in the little ones, grandkids and children in general. It's hard to grow up in and through this. I remember only too well the 1940s and 1950s, first the polio scares (terrifying for a child), and secondly air-raid drills in my classrooms, and crouching under my desk as they simulated a Russian nuclear bombing. We grew up through that and for a kid, that's imprinting. You don't forget the fear of the unknown.

So, anyway, forgive my worry. let's make lemonade as best we can. As for the little ones, I don't know how to explain to them the foolishness of the adults in this time that we live in, and what we all are somewhat responsible for putting them through and imprinting them with. I'm ashamed. What a world to leave them with!

Note: If you would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are the links:

Making Blues Time

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 29, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/56bc8947-6090-44b3-9ef8-107db68540fa_397x598.jpeg

Big Walter Horton

By Michael Erlewine

This article is about musical time, something we might agree to call “making time.” The classic blues players, like all great musicians, literally “make” time. They don’t just follow along in time like most of us do when listening. They set the time, inset the time with their music, but it goes deeper than that. They make the time for us to follow, and take us for a ride.

Every once in a while, you and I might look at our watch and see what time the clock says, but does the time in between those clock checks goes unchecked? It just passes, like the old song from Sandy Denny, “Who knows where the time goes?” I certainly don’t know where it goes.

My point is that while clock time seems to be regular, what goes on when you and I are not watching the clock can be anything but regular. Try taking a hallucinogen sometime and then talk to me. In other words, time contracts and expands, especially when it comes to musical time, which is a safe way to play with time.

The really great blues players, and we all have our favorites, actually can ‘make’ time. Time is also something we make.

My favorite for “making” time would have to be Big Walter Horton, the Chicago blues harmonica player. In my opinion, he could make the best time. He could show me the best time I have ever had musically, the very best time I have ever experienced. And I have of course (like we all do) my own sense of time, you know, just going along each day, like each of us are doing now, reading this – taking our own sweet time. Yet, it’s pretty regular.

But with Walter Horton, Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf and other blues greats, somehow their music takes over time as I know it. They can overtake and supersede my personal sense of time and replace it with the kind of time that they make, which is for me a much more vast sense of time, more time, time enough to do other things in -- extra-ordinary time. In that extraordinary time,

there can be room for us to think about life. That's my point and why I write this.

I can synch up or resonate to their time and it becomes (for the moment) my time too. Big Walter Horton (for me) is a great director or conductor of time, and I gladly groove along with him to his beat.

Great blues players can expand time for us and, in that expanded time, these musicians give us more room to experience or listen, creating an envelope (almost like an aura) with their music, an envelope in which I have more room or space, not just to listen, but to know myself, to relax, to be myself, or to just think and be here now. As mentioned, making time is what this article is about.

MUSICAL TIME BEYOND CLOCK TIME

Making time is one of the hallmarks of the great blues musicians. Most of them are gone and I have resigned myself to not hearing their kind of expanded musical time played live any longer, although I can still hear it on some recordings, sort of. It is gone.

However, to my surprise, I actually experienced this form of blues time live a few years ago after a very long hiatus. It was at a Michigan music festival called "Wheatland," held not far from where I live here in mid-Michigan. Perhaps 20,000 people attended it. I was there.

They had a musician there named Aubrey Ghent, a lap-steel player from somewhere in the southeast; I believe it was Florida. Ghent plays gospel music and, sure enough, that day he was making time like the old masters. I was spellbound.

I had not heard profound "blues" time like that since back in the day around Chicago and places like that. And Aubrey Ghent was sitting up there on the stage playing blues time, just like the masters used to.

Aubrey Ghent was 'making' the time. It immediately put me back in a musical space when I used to listen to players like Muddy Waters, a space where a blues player would take over time as I knew (and lived it) and would put me through something I could not put myself through, taking me on a trip and to a place where I sure liked to go because I had never been there.

Aubrey Ghent had that kind of sense of time and one of the songs he displayed it on was, to everyone's surprise, "Don't Worry, Be Happy," the Bobby McFerrin tune. The whole audience just stopped whatever time they were having and went on Ghent's time for a while. And, of course, the rest of

the night we were all telling each other about that incredible music. What I am after here is what makes that kind of music time incredible?

Maybe at the end, after you listened to Ghent, you would say to yourself, “Wow, that music was ‘really’ good,” but it is way more than just the music being ‘good’. Most of those present had just experienced something that they never had before and that some of us hadn’t heard for a very long time. And maybe they can’t quite remember it or maybe they remember it later, slowly, over a period of time, calling it back into memory with satisfaction, a little bit of that time, reading it back to themselves, remembering.

Anyway, Howlin’ Wolf would put me through something like that when I was with him. And another blues player who did that to me was Chicago’s Magic Sam. Some of you may not know of Magic Sam, but he was one of the most virile and seminal guitar players that have ever played the guitar. And he also was an incredible singer, and I ‘mean’ incredible! You can hear what I am pointing out here on the Delmark album “West-Side Soul” by Magic Sam here:

http://www.amazon.com/West-Side-Soul-Magic-Sam/dp/B000004BIF/ref=pd_sim_m_2

And in the re-release of his Cobra and Chief Recordings from 1957 here:

<http://www.amazon.com/Essential-Magic-Sam-Cobra-Recordings/dp/B000059RVO>.

I first heard Magic Sam live in Chicago back in the mid-1960s in one of these large rooms like you find in some of the Chinese restaurants in the major cities, the ones that go on forever with really low ceilings. I am talking about big rooms, where they have all these little tables and chairs that kind of go way back in the distance. You can’t even see the end of them and in this case everyone was already standing.

I couldn’t see Magic Sam. I had just squeezed in the door and was flat up against the back wall, and the place was packed. All I could make out were heads as far as I could see. Yet I could hear this incredible sound coming from somewhere way up front. It was Magic Sam’s voice, which immediately made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. I had never heard anyone sing like that. It was literally a shimmering sheet of sound. It was Magic Sam making time. That kind of time was rare then and almost impossible to find now.

In my opinion, what we are getting from blues players today, and I don’t mean to offend anyone, so I will try to say it gently, is that the blues music “sounds like this,” as in: “it sounds like Howlin’ Wolf.” To myself I just call it “reenactment” blues. Today we are now reenacting something that used to

be there but no longer is like: Howlin' Wolf used to be there, but he is no longer with us, and so on. Or we could just say that no one sings like the Wolf, and those who try are just re-enacting Wolf, trying to sound like Wolf. As they say "Trying doesn't do it, doing does it."

The problem with younger players re-enacting Wolf's songs is that they always make me think of Wolf, and whoever is singing does not really sound like Wolf. This spoils it for me because there is no comparison. I would rather these young players just sing Wolf's songs in their own voice and with their own experience, so I could hear 'them', and not them through a Wolf filter, and often a lousy one at that. That's just me.

Consider this: most musicians listen to someone like Howlin' Wolf or Big Walter Horton and they set about to learn Wolf's style, to play Wolf's licks, and so on, in hopes that they can make the kind of music Wolf makes. But this is just exactly backward to what would actually be needed to create the effect of a Wolf or a Muddy Waters, and this point may be a little subtle.

Playing Wolf's licks, and so on, will never get you there. Wolf himself was not doing that. Wolf is not trying to resemble anyone. He has managed to get his mind and consciousness (whatever we want to call it) into a certain state so that anything he plays already has that sound and perfection. It is already perfect "Wolf." You can't imitate perfection and why would you want to?

Therefore, to play like Wolf plays, you would first have to perfect not your guitar licks, but your mind, your consciousness, pay your dues, and get yourself into a state where anything you do, including playing music, will already be significant, and will exactly signify you and where 'your' head is at. Do you understand?

Don't work on the licks only, but work on perfecting yourself, your life, your consciousness, and where your mind is at. However, to do that you would also change your life and perhaps not always to an easier life. Then whatever you do will sound right, authentic, at least right for you. Anyway, back to "making time."

The main blues players from back in the 1960s were all incredible, but the greatest time-maker of all time (for me personally), and I mentioned this before, was the harmonica player Big Walter Horton. He could set or make time better than anyone I have ever heard. I refer you to Volume Three of the "Chicago the Blues Today!" album on Vanguard, and the song "Black Spider Blues," as an example. Horton is playing there with Johnny Shines and the two of them are making time together. Here is a link:

And it is perfect. If you were to add someone else, the time would probably immediately change for the worse and the expanded sense of time that I can clearly hear on the record would be lost, unless that player too was of the same caliber.

And by “making time,” I mean this: We all have a sense of time. Musicians who play regularly know that on the really good music nights they can make time slow down or somehow expand; time stretches. I may not have the best words here.

The energy and effort put out by the musician to build the musical time actually creates not just a slowing down or expanding of time, but also produces some kind of mental or psychological space in which the audience can think or exist in. It’s like clearing out the menial cobwebs when I listen to one of these masters; they somehow give me time to perhaps know more about myself. I learned this years ago in a little bar in Ann Arbor called Mr. Flood’s Party.

Musicians, at least this one, constantly worry about how they sound. You know, is it good or good enough? Anyway, back then, playing harmonica and singing in that bar along with my brother Daniel (on guitar), I had a good night. I felt that finally I was playing what I intended to play and from a raised band platform, about five feet up, I looked at the audience, thinking, well somebody might be giving me the thumbs up, like “Michael, you’re doin’ good, man!”

Yet there wasn’t any of that. As I looked out over the audience, everyone was in some sort of trance. They were all looking into their own mind as if in some kind of reverie. And I suddenly realized what was happening and said to myself: Oh, I get it now. It’s not about me!

I realized that, like everything else in life, even music has a “what’s in it for me” quotient, and in this case it was about what was in it for them, the audience. My music only gave them the room to experience their own thoughts more fully. And, as mentioned, I said to myself: “Oh, I get it now.”

Great musicians make space in time. They expand time into space and make more room. They make room for us. They make time and in that expanded time people can get some very personal and specialized jobs done, like thinking or feeling whatever they need to. That happens when the music gets “good.”

We all do this, and music is not the only avenue. For example, I work a lot. And I get up like at two or three in the morning and I work until five at night. I might take a nap. And then somewhere around 6 PM I like to watch a movie.

It doesn't have to be a whole movie or it might be two movies. It often is just a little bit of a movie. In that movie time, that down time, I am, of course, watching the movie, but I am also mulling things over in my mind, about what happened that day.

Movies may be the most common form of meditation for most people because we really are just looking at a spot on the wall and holding very still. Isn't that what meditators do? Anyway, in that down time, I get things done in my mind (while I am watching the movie) that I need to do. I am processing the day's events. For me, it is very relaxing and some days actually quite necessary.

When great blues players play, they create a similar kind of time in which we, the audience, can get into and experience. So, the great time setters, the great blues musicians (great musicians of any kind) take over our sense of time, take over what we call clock time, this time and that time. They take it over and supplant it or replace it with their sense of time, if only for the moment, what they know how to do. They're setting the time. They are creating or making the time for us and suddenly our mind is caught up by their sense of time. We are into it. This is why live performances can never be replaced by recordings.

We might say afterward, "Oh, isn't that an incredible guitar player" or we could also say "Wow, he or she took me on a trip." Musicians make time and, in that time, we have our own personal experience. It is not only about 'their' music, but also about our life. That is the point here. That is what great music is all about.

I can remember one example and it's a good one. In Chicago, back in the mid-1960s I went into a club, a tiny little place (I forget the name of it; it might have been "Mother Blues") that Howlin' Wolf was playing in. It was way late, and there was nobody there, except my brother Dan and myself. There was only Howlin' Wolf and next to him there was his wonderful guitar player Hubert Sumlin. That's it.

And so, we came in and it was almost totally dark. There was just a little bit of light up near the stage. Wolf was sitting on a wooden chair way up front and singing like only Howlin' Wolf can sing. And for a while, time just stopped. It was not so much that time stopped, as it was that the walls, that whole place I was in, faded and gradually became transparent. I could see right through them.

Not just the walls, but from the walls on out forever. What remained was this consciousness (I guess it was me) floating in an ocean of translucent space.

And scout's honor, I was not on drugs! Everything just went void. For that time, I forgot where I was in my life. I had to reach inside to get a hold on myself, and there was nothing to get a hold of. Wolf's voice and the power of his musical time had taken over mine. I could have been anywhere in the universe – somewhere, and yet there was still no place, because place had nothing to do with it.

I was transfixed by Wolf's time. And of course, I came out of it, but it was like: how could I forget this? That's what I mean by time.

Wolf's time was better than mine. I wasn't even prepared for the experience; it just happened. He took me deeper than I could get by myself. It is like one of those times when somebody dies that is close to you. Those events kind of stop you in your tracks and make you, for a time, more open. You are popped out of your groove and open to alternatives. Life is new again.

TOWARD AN EXPLANATION

What am I talking about here and how does it work?

This is where words can fail, but I will give it a try. You may have to meet me halfway. Have you ever been in one of those car accidents or near accidents when you see it coming, but maybe can't avoid it?

It is easy to find these events when driving on ice. Your mind concentrates and you are "right there." Time slows down and everything seems to be taking place in slow motion. That is somewhat similar to what I am pointing at here when I use the term "making time."

In times of stress, intense awareness, or extreme concentration, time stretches and slows down. You can see it all happen. Time just somehow expands or makes room. "Making time" with the blues is like that.

The standard blues progression is just twelve bars which keep repeating themselves over and over. In order to take control of that progression and go deeper with time, the blues musician has to concentrate (be aware) and articulate each bar of that blues progression, putting the brakes on here and rushing to catch up there. What matters is to emphasize and willfully stress, accentuate, or push the time leading up to this or that change here, and drag out the turn-around or what-have-you over there.

If a musician is aware or present enough, and has enough experience, he or she can articulate the blues so that, although clock time just ticks on along, the end result of the effort is to expand time, slow it down, and we go between the clock-ticking seconds into what can only be described as expanded time, time in which we are beyond the distractions of the moment

(our regular life) and able to taste or experience what is beyond, beneath, above (use your own words here) the normal.

I don't want to call it eternity, because that term has been overused, but it is somehow outside, however marginally or temporarily, our normal sense of time. This then is what I mean by "making time." Musicians do this all the time (pun intended).

And really great musicians give us such great time or can make time so well that we can hitch a ride with them, even if only for the length of a song. For those moments we are on their time, traveling with them, part of their mandala, and they are taking us deeper within conventional time to something greater than that. It is easier to experience this than to put it into words. Let me try another metaphor.

The discipline and energy of making music can create more room in time than we normally have – expansion or extension. Think of it as an aura or envelope of normal time that somehow expands time as we know it (and the moment) into something deeper and wider – stretches time. It doesn't stretch time longer, as in making a song last longer; it stretches the time deeper as in going beyond normal time into somewhere else. I don't have a word for it.

In other words, when time appears to slow down, the song in clock time does not slow down or get longer in duration. That stays the same. It is our consciousness and experience that stretches or reaches deeper inside ourselves. We expand.

In other words, intense musical activity creates space, an envelope or aura, and the 'kind' of our musical activity (the kind of blues we play) creates the kind of space or room we can experience or rest in. Different musicians create different spaces for us. Think of it as a living room, room to live, room to move around in, something like a time out from whatever line of life we are usually travelling along.

The more that the musician is able to work the time, the more of an aura or special space surrounds the moment, and in that space or in that extra room, there we are, experiencing it, living it. We are experiencing not only the music, per se, but the music allows us to experience ourselves as well, to go where we can't usually get to on our own, except rarely. That's what we get out of it, time for ourselves we may not be able to create.

I don't want to digress too much, but this brings up the question: what is music? I won't go there just now, but when great musicians make time, and we experience that expanded time, we use it like money to think about or

spend however we like. It is not only about their music; this experience is beyond the music, if you mean labels, lyrics, notes, song titles, and albums.

Music is not only about what it means, as in the words of a song, but those words and notes are only references, means and ways to experience the heart of music, the purpose, which is to experience what I can only point to here. We each have to experience it for ourselves, of course.

The words and sound of music depend on what they mean, the sense it makes. And 'sense' is always an experience, not an idea or thought. When great blues musicians make time, we sense it and have a deeper actual experience. We live it. Often that experience is 'special' because we can't get there from here, not from our day-to-day experience. That is why we listen to music.

A great musician is capable of transforming our day, sending us back home (after the song is over) with a deep experience and sometimes with a new sense of direction.

There you have the general idea of making time. Please don't read this article as a know-it-all statement from me, but more as a question, something I am thinking about and interested in, something to be discussed.

JUKE JOINTS AND SATURDAY NIGHTS

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 29, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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[This is a short article about juke joints and their part in African American music, in particular the blues. But it also sheds some insight on the legendary innate musicality of Americans of African descent. What seems forgotten here (conveniently once again) is the whole specter of slavery and what that dictated. Some of you that are blues fans may find this interesting. Let me know your thoughts.]

JUKE JOINTS

The term Juke (or Jook) Joints is probably derived from the Creole “juk” meaning to be disorderly and rowdy. Juke joints are said to have arisen after the emancipation, when Jim-Crow laws forbade blacks from entering white establishments. The facts show that they existed long before that, probably as early as there were plantations and slaves. In other words, even after the emancipation, when slaves were free to leave the plantation, they were not allowed in any establishment in town. Proscribed from white society and white establishments of any kind, juke joints arose wherever blacks could gather, socialize, eat, drink, and dance; many also sold grocery items, moonshine, and some even had rooms to rent and other conveniences.

Jook joints were shacks, originally built by the plantation owners themselves on their own property to give slaves a place to socialize and blow off steam. Most were open only on Saturday nights and were not much maintained. And juke joints always had music, which meant at least one musician and often two or three. Historically tagged as ‘blues’ joints, the music originally played in these places was not blues but dance music -- ragtime, slow-drag, etc. What we know as blues today did not actually appear until the early 1900s. In fact, musicians were not the focus early on but rather were there just to enable the dancing. It was all about dancing. It could be one happy drunk person dancing and clapping their hands with maybe someone keeping time on a table along with them or perhaps a harmonica – anything with a beat.

And juke joints could be held anywhere, in someone’s home, an abandoned sharecropper’s house, any old shack of a building - wherever. In slavery days

(and even after) blacks had no transportation, so juke joints had to be within walking distance or reachable by tractor, bicycle, or mule. And there was no law at juke joints.

On plantations, the authorities never came unless the owner himself called them in to break something up. It was private land. Later, during prohibition and the sharecropping days, the sheriff was actually paid to stay away so that the illegal whisky would get sold and everyone in power got a piece of that. The law only came when they were called in on purpose. They never just “showed up.”

Most early juke joints were one-room shacks, seemingly always too small for those who filled them. And they were not open the rest of the week, just Saturday nights, so they didn’t get much upkeep and they weren’t much at all, just some kind of roof, four walls, and a dirt floor.

I did not grow up down south and I am not African American, but as a musician I have played in plenty of bars both black and white. In fact, I played more often in black bars than white ones.

Older blacks liked the kind of blues our band played – Chicago-style blues. I never knew the Deep South juke joints, but I am sure that most any small bar on a hot summer night after a long week will hit the same pitch, if only for an hour or two. As for the rough quality of juke joints, I have seen knives, guns, clubs, whatever, and actually witnessed one fight (hiding behind our amplifiers) that it took nine police cars to break up.

A juke joint was often an open shack in the back yard with a tin roof. It didn’t take much of a place to draw a crowd. People were looking for somewhere to go and any excuse for a place would do. If you have ever found it hard to wait until Friday night when you got off work to visit ‘the scene’ at some local bar, imagine if that one Saturday night a week was your only chance to let it rip and socialize AND if there were no other opportunities for you than hard work the rest of your entire life aside from singing in church Sundays. That was the case for African Americans before emancipation. Consider that.

I am reminded of the poem “Black on a Saturday Night” by Rita Dove of which this is an excerpt:

“... and an attitude will get you nowhere fast, so might as well keep dancing, dancing till tomorrow gives up with a shout, ’cause there is only Saturday night, and we are in it - black as black can, black as black does, not a concept nor a percentage but a natural law.”

We all can identify with a wish to socialize, especially after a difficult work week. Just imagine if that Saturday night once a week was your only chance to do anything other than what you were told to do AND for your entire life this would be the case. That Saturday night and the following Sunday church service would take on a whole different meaning. And history records that blacks that could sing or play music were more valued as slaves than ones that could not.

AFFRICAN-AMERICAN MUSIC

I find it interesting to read comments about the innate musicality of African Americans. I don't question that. What I question is the myopic view that manages to ignore two-hundred years of slavery, when blacks were basically restricted to one night of social gathering and what that restriction might actually mean in their history.

What seems forgotten here (once again) is the whole spectre of slavery and what it infers, so I am asking readers to please think about this for a moment. And I am going to repeat some of what I presented earlier.

You are twenty-five years old, young, bright, full of promise, and a slave to some owner of 'you'. While you have your whole life before you, in the slave's case that life is already mapped out in terms of the possible. You work at what you are told from morning until night and what is left? Perhaps you have Sundays off and maybe something like a Saturday night. That's it. You don't have college, schooling, or even trade school. You have no hope of seeing the world or even this country because you are not free to travel anywhere. You are not free. You are somebody's slave. And depending on how far back we go, you can't even read or write and your owner likes it that way.

I spent a good part of my young adult life studying black music, so I know full well blacks are great musicians. Wouldn't you be too if your forefathers, parents and their parents before them, had nothing to look forward to but Saturday night music and Sunday-morning services? Instead of a myriad of possibilities and choices you had no choice and two possibilities. The only social outlet you had each week was perhaps getting together with your own kind on Saturday nights and singing the Gospel in church Sunday mornings. Music and dance were one of the few outlets open to Black Americans and to their forbearers. Everything else was scripted. No wonder blacks know music and dance! It didn't all come from Africa my friends.

SONG AND DANCE

My point is that aside from any traditional culture carried over from Africa centuries ago, of which there is a rich heritage, plantation life (slavery life) left

only a few opportunities for free time; music and dance were often the only social outlets open to slaves and then only at certain times. Life as a slave in America gave African Americans generations of training in music and dance in addition to whatever culture they brought with them from Africa. Think about it and I will reiterate please.

You are young, hopeful, energetic, and you have zero plans that involve freedom on your part. Your whole life is already entirely scripted leaving only Sunday church service and perhaps a Saturday night at a juke joint open to you. No wonder black Gospel music is so powerful. And no wonder blues music is so powerful. These were the only outlets open to many black Americans for generations – Saturday nights and Sunday mornings. The rest of the time they were slaves! And the transition from slavery to tenant farming did not change things much for most blacks. In fact, as often as not, the black tenant farmer ended up owing the plantation owner money at the end of the year – another form of slavery.

There was one break each week. Work stopped for most blacks in the slavery (and tenant) years sometime Saturday afternoon and that is when barbecues and social getting-together began. By Saturday night, workers were headed for the juke joints on foot, by tractor, and by mule. Early on the juke joints were right on the plantation itself and black workers would even drive the plantation tractor right to the juke joint with the understanding that as long it was on the plantation, they could use the tractor.

I am not going to go into extreme detail on juke joints and what happened there. That has been covered elsewhere, but suffice it to say that these places were where the work-week steam was let off, and the later the night got, the more out of control these joints could become. It is said that after 11 PM anything could happen and usually did, everything from bar fights to shootings and knife fights.

My main point is that these Saturday night juke joints were the focus of music, dancing, and celebrating. This is where the blues were born and grew up. This is where dancing was permitted, and drinking took place. This was your one night out. And (as mentioned), the law never went to juke joints unless it was called in. That was understood by all. So, there was the juke joints music and dancing Saturday night and the gospel singing in church Sunday morning. That was it.

I have pointed out that juke joints or Barrelhouses as they were also called originally were set up on plantations as a place for blacks to socialize on their one night off, which was Saturday. Later on, after the emancipation, when tenant farming had replaced slavery, blacks were not allowed at bars and

saloons in town, so juke joints sprang up just outside of town at crossroads or wherever it was convenient. These joints were often hardly anything at all except a place to meet, drink, gamble, and dance. They were essentially shacks hastily thrown together and often with not enough room for but a few to dance - jammed.

It is true that juke joints were later moved into town, urbanized by whites in the south, and called "Honky Tonks." But the original juke joints were hardly any kind of building at all, with no running water, and so on – just a roof and some side walls. That's it. But juke joints were where everything exciting happened socially for black Americans way back then.

So, when we say that blues music and blues musicians were popular with blacks, understand that it means a lot more than just 'popular'. The juke joint scene was all the freedom there was to let off steam and have a good time. Period. That and Sunday morning church service and gospel singing.

The main point here is not to just describe the juke joint scene, but to highlight that the skill of black Americans in blues and jazz, in dancing and having a good time, did not only come from Africa. It had generations of extreme focus right here in this country to hone those skills into a veritable lineage. And those who believe that the emancipation changed all that had better get out their history books, because tenant farming changed things very little at first and often made things even worse. In slavery, African Americans had nothing to lose because they had nothing. As mentioned, with tenant farming, they most often went into debt to the plantation owners on top of struggling to make a living.

If your whole life was work unending until you died and that one Saturday night a week of celebration followed by Sunday church were your only social outlets, what would that mean to you? How important would that music be and the musicians that played it? That is my question and also my point.

If blacks are master singers, musicians, dancers, and entertainers, it is not just because they brought these skills from Africa. African Americans have had 200 years to refine these skills. It's no wonder that some say that white Americans can't dance and blacks can. And it is no wonder that popular music (especially jazz and rock 'n roll) in America finds its roots in the blues.

And it is not only about dancing and playing music; it is about having a good time in the midst of whatever your situation is, about letting go and grabbing time to celebrate in the moment – being here now. There is wisdom here.

And it's all right there embedded in the music. You can hear it. Growing up, I could hear the wisdom in the blues music and it pulled me to it. The music of

Pat Boone didn't grab me that way, but Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf did. There was something in the music that spoke to me beyond the sounds. These blues musicians knew something that I knew little of and I hungered for it and it was not just the sound of poverty or deprivation.

Later, when I had an opportunity to interview scores of the greatest blues musicians, I got to know these players often on an eyeball-to-eyeball basis. What I heard in the music was backed up by the persons they were. Blues greats like Big Momma Thornton, Arthur Big-Boy Crudup, Roosevelt Sykes, and Howlin' Wolf were incredible beings that made me feel accepted and welcome.

They had wisdom and life experience I did not have and that my teachers in school did not have. They had what I wanted to learn and I yearned for it. I more or less studied rural folk music, blues, and jazz from the late 1950s until around 1971. And it was an inspiration.

In the early 1970s, I found the Tibetan Buddhists, who had the same joy and insight that I found in the great blues artists. And they were also devoted to knowing the true nature of the mind and life. While I never abandoned my blues teachers, I did begin to study and practice with the Tibetans and am still doing that today.

It was never the down-and-out nature of the blues that caught my attention. It was the wisdom of life and the ability to seize the day and find joy in any situation, the ability to master extreme circumstances and still have a life. We all owe a deep cultural debt to African Americans.

CYCLES OR CIRCLES, CENTERS, AND CIRCULATION

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 29, 2023

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https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/95430b9b-38ce-4b17-9170-eb8d9afbc7d4_426x606.jpeg

ALL IDENTIFICATION IS CIRCULATION

I have been working with the structure of Deep-Space for nearly 60 years. My good friend Charles A. Jayne Jr. and I were about the only people I am aware of who were interested in the subject back in the early '70s. Of course, there was Theodor Landscheidt, whose every word on the subject is worth reading.

Many astrologers have asked me what is the meaning of points like the galactic and supergalactic centers. Of course, I could rattle off their coordinates and a few other particulars. But if you are actually interested in understanding the nature of cosmic structure from an astrological point of view, see if you can get through the following. Take it slow and think it through.

A central idea for understanding recent cosmic research is the use and value of various astronomical coordinate systems (geocentric, heliocentric, galactic, supergalactic, etc.) as best representing the different levels of our conscious experience. Each coordinate system has a center and the word CENTER can mean both the same and yet something different to different individuals. Take our own center, for example.

The center about which our life appears to revolve (for each of us) is sacred to us in its ability to reveal or communicate to us the essence or identity of ourselves. The center for each of us always refers inward to our essence, and yet the center or lifeline of one individual may be a new car at one point in his life, a new wife/husband, or a child at another point. The takeaway here is that at each point, the "meaning" of center is inviolate, although the outward form of what we take for our lifeline to the center is constantly always changing.

I find that the different kinds of center may be conveniently expressed in the various coordinate systems of astronomy and their meanings as defined by astrology, which basically is cultural astronomy. Otherwise, it's not astrology. The origin or center chosen should most correspond to the center of gravity, the "kind" of question, inquiry, or level being considered. Thus, for a study of the personal differences, circumstances, and the specific terms of our life, we

traditionally use the horizon coordinate system in relation to the zodiac with its familiar Midheaven, Ascendant, Houses, etc.

Studies of the general terms of mankind (Mundane Astrology) involve consideration from the center of the earth or geocentric astrology, often using Right Ascension and Declination. This is traditional. For a study of the motion and relation of the bodies in our Solar System considered as a functioning whole, the Heliocentric Ecliptic System with the origin at the sun center would be appropriate. In this coordinate system, we could examine the archetypes of life and consciousness, and in general questions traditionally referred to religion or spirituality, perhaps more recently also considered by some as psychological. As for me, I call the heliocentric chart, the "Dharma Chart."

In like manner, galactocentric and super galactocentric coordinates are appropriate for dynamical studies of the larger or more cosmic structure of our reality. They are all there and there all of the time. However, for each of us, there are moments and even days when our awareness is truly cosmic, of or in synch with cosmic dimensions. We move in and out of the body, so to speak.

There are different levels of truth or reality. What is essential as the kernel of truth to one person may appear to another as just one example among many of a larger ordering or structure. When we each refer to the center around which we revolve, we share in the idea of centers and yet different ones among us revolve around or consider what is central or essential differently. We can agree on that.

All reference to different centers (perhaps at different times or different times in our life) simply points out the lack of Identity or, another way of saying this is that these seemingly different levels or centers together (in fact) form a continuum -- a continuing experience of identification, starting within us and reaching toward eternity. The following may help clarify this:

All of these larger systems such as the solar system, the galaxy, and so forth, include us within their reaches like a mother holds a child within her womb. We are the children and particular representatives of the earth, and the solar system, but ALSO of the galaxy, the supergalaxy, and beyond. Their nature, identity, and self are Identical with our own. In fact, it is fair to say that we have come through this "outer space" through all the time there is (and has been) to BE HERE NOW ourselves. We don't have to look for a spaceman. We already are totally out in space, parked in one of the spiral arms of our local galaxy, the Milky Way.

And mark that our day-to-day consciousness continually circulates from more particular awareness of our person to more "cosmic" awareness and back again. We do this all the time. From an astrological perspective, the exercise of various astrological coordinate systems, like exercising our muscles, can serve to remind us that ALL reference to centers (in fact, all referral of any kind) indicates an attempt to achieve identification, the circulation (circle or cycle) of identity -- to RE-MEMBER, put back together, or remind ourselves (and keep in mind) who we already are and have always been, intelligent life.

ALL IDENTIFICATION IS CIRCULATION

In other words: all inner discovery is self-discovery and what we call 'identification' is in fact circulation! Cosmic events and structure are a very consistent and most stable reference frame through which to come to know ourselves. The use of these inclusive meta-coordinate systems is not the symbolic process some suggest, but the symbol in fact is also real. We are not working with analogies or, if we are, the analogy is complete down to the specific example through which we discover the virtual process itself -- our body and Life.

What we call Life, "God," or Spirit is no beggar, creating a symbolically true but specifically disappointing creation, such that we should have to "touch up" this creation or somehow make the ends meet. The ends already meet! It is we who will change first our attitude and then gradually our approach to this creation, this so-called cyclic Samsara, and eventually realize its better half, Nirvana.

And these changes in attitude on our part, this reorientation in approach to what is unchanging or everlastingly true in life, represent the specific areas where the exercise and use of various astronomical coordinate systems of understanding our life become important to present day astrologers. To discover our own orientation and inclinations -- that we are already (right now!) perfect representatives of all space and all time, acting out in detail through our persons events of a so called "cosmic" nature that occur in space at remote distance and times, yet to us they occur right here and now. How could that be? Because all of this is happening now or at least the effects are.

Supernovae and black holes are not simply some ever-distant cataclysmic events but are (rather) part of our own everyday experience acted out in fact by persons within the galaxy of our own experience. The goal of our study and our inquiry into astrology is to re-present and re-veal the nature of ourselves and our intimate circulation, connection, and identity in the heart of the earth, heart of the Sun, heart of the Galaxy, heart of the Supergalaxy, and so on.

In a word, that ALL IDENTIFICATION IS CIRCULATION (a continuity or continuing and circle) and all inquiry, questioning, and search can but end in the discovery of our own Self whether "writ small" in the corners of our personal struggle or "writ large" across the very heavens itself. And so, again: all self-discovery, all Identification is but re-discovery, reconnection, and simple CIRCULATION.

If you want to boil this down to the most common denominator, we have the concept that all sense of identification by each of us with ourselves is not just our own personal Odyssey, but at the same time is the intelligence of the universe discovering itself in and through the same moment. In other words, what we call personal identification with our spiritual sources is also the universe circulating intelligence at the same time, thus guaranteeing the coherence and sustainability of a particular system. As for finding intelligent life in the universe, best look in a mirror.

Note: If you who would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are the links:

SpiritGrooves.net

YouTube.com/channel/UC3cL8v4fkupc9IRtugPkkWQ

<http://michaelerlewine.com>

"As Bodhicitta is so precious,

May those without it now create it,

May those who have it not destroy it,

And may it ever grow and flourish."

THE ALCHEMY OF IDENTITY

As we look into the Sun during the course of a year's orbit of Earth around the Sun and describe the qualities of the 12 zodiac signs as astrologers do, this should be second nature to us. In fact, this illustrates to me an important axiom, that of LOCAL ATTRACTION.

All inquiry into greater (higher) centers does not reveal the nature of that center (in itself), but rather reveals our relationship to that center.

This is the 'alchemy of identity'. Be sure you understand this, please. Perhaps, read it again. In other words, higher centers can only serve to mirror or reflect. Their nature is to reveal to us not THEIR intrinsic nature, but our own. REVELATION of any kind is the sign of communication with greater centers or

planes -- revelation, not of some far-off distant entity or "God," but always revelation of ourselves and the spirit and nature in us, here and now.

In a discussion as to the qualities of the centers of the Sun, the galaxy and super galaxy, we are to understand that all inquiry into the direction of the Sun will reveal the nature of the Earth; inquiry into the nature of the galaxy will serve to reveal the nature of our own Sun; and inquiry into the Super Galaxy will serve to reveal the nature of our Galaxy, and so on. The idea presented here is that it is the very nature of Higher Centers to reflect and respond, as they embrace more particular or local centers. Simply put, higher centers reflect!

At this point, if you are with me, another very significant axiom of astrology emerges:

The experience of physical attraction (traction = to draw across or towards) or gravity, itself is primarily the sign of a LOCAL phenomenon. For instance, we directly respond to the attraction we call gravity of the center of the earth. Our earth responds to the center of the Sun, the Sun to the Galaxy, and so forth. Yet as individuals, we are not aware of the pull of the Sun on the entire earth, or again, the point being made here:

ATTRACTION OR GRAVITY IS ALWAYS A SIGN OF A LOCAL PHENOMENON

Please, think about this. It will perhaps will make more sense in our practical affairs if we put it this way: a sign of our communication with higher or "vaster" centers (or Spirit or "God") is not a physical gravity (graveness) or attraction, but always an ENLIGHTENMENT (becoming light-er), the releasing and accepting of the nature of the particular terms (terminals) of OUR existence and a release of our experience of duality (this dualistic world), in exchange for unity and "oneness." Knowledge of so-called 'inner-planes' exhibits itself to us through a process of reflection or mirroring of our self RATHER than through the presentation to us of something new that is somehow "Other" than us.

"Mirroring" means we see our OWN essential nature reflected in a teacher or spiritual guide; the traditional word is "reflection." When we ourselves begin to reflect, our life changes. And by "Reflect," don't think about "thinking," but rather about mirroring – 'reflection', as in reflecting something other than ourselves.

In other words, higher-centers than ourselves (first of all) mirror or reveal to us (reflect our own self) and do not exhibit in themselves a greater intrinsic attractiveness or gravity than we now already have. To make this even more obvious, perhaps this example will help:

We each meet in life individuals who have a great impact on us. Following the above rule, those to whom we feel a great attraction toward and who hold great power over us are the sign of only a LOCAL phenomenon; they are not really teachers for us. And this is so, because TRUE teachers affect us with their presence by making us realize, not their own nature, but OUR own essential attractiveness and nature, not theirs.

Please: It is important to consider and think about this.

In other words, inquiry into true higher centers than our own reveal to us our own essential attractiveness. In fact, it is the nature of higher-centers to be non-material or non-physical, by definition, meaning: they embrace us and help us to embrace ourselves. Our inquiry into this realm is limited only by our fear of and reluctance to see our self in their vast mirror and seeing through the back of the mirror has always been a sign of Initiation. To sum this up: Greater (or higher) centers than our own mirror or reflect our own self and nature, revealing to us our essential identity as already a part of a larger whole, and enlightening us of (or from) our "grave-ness" and the burden of an apparent loneliness or separation from that whole.

This is key!

I will give one, hopefully clear, example of this principle, when I first met the 17 th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, at his ancestral home Tsurpu Monastery high in the mountains of Tibet, at some 15,000 feet. Prior to meeting the Karmapa, particularly through the late 1960s and the 1970s as I grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I had met many imposing yogis and spiritual 'gurus' of one kind or another. I always came away with how powerful, magnetic, and attractive they were.

Here in the mountains of Tibet, meeting His Holiness the 17 th Karmapa was very, very different from my previous meeting of various spiritual beings around Ann Arbor. Here are my notes about that time:

"That afternoon, we were summoned to His Holiness, and I slowly climbed the multiple (three sets) of ladder-like stairs, huffing and puffing from the high altitude. As we entered the actual interview room, there was a puja (ritual) going on, with His Holiness leading the practice, accompanied by a small number of monks. We were encouraged to sit up front, and we settled in.

Gradually, I realized we were in the middle of the Mahakala puja, perhaps the most important daily practice for the Karma Kagyu Lineage. We found out later that we had experienced a special form of the Mahakala, one only for insiders. It was complete with the Tsok, the ritual feast offering. Karmapa was sharing this with us.

“It was very intense. His Holiness led the chanting with an intent and often fierce look. His eyes lock with yours and then, locked like that, his eyes seemed to move in an out like a lens focusing.

“Mahakala is a wrathful practice, as some of you may already know. And this one was performed complete with drums, cymbals, and various Tibetan horns. I had experienced the Mahakala puja before, but never quite like this. I don’t really know how to describe what happened next.

“I began to identify this puja as being not much different from my own practice, and then my mind ranged over that practice, examining where I was within it, and what it was about for me. I had done this practice, without fail, every morning, afternoon and/or evening, for many years. I was to do it until my death, or until I completed it by realizing the essential nature of the mind.

“Now, here in the midst of Karmapa’s mind, I began to explore the true meaning and nature of my practice. What was that practice and what was the essence of it? In my own mind, I was somewhat of a tough character, and I carried that strength or toughness to my practice. In fact, I loved the fierce, wrathful deities, somehow identifying with them. And now, here in this room with Karmapa, that same strength and toughness (or we might even say fierceness) came to mind, and began to be examined inwardly, in a new light. But this was no idea I was playing with; instead, I was examining myself, or, to be more exact, I was realizing a part of my self—in this case, the part of myself who had been doing my practice—the one who did the practice.

“And as this realization took place, I saw how my fierceness or toughness was but a shell covering up an extremely sensitive inside. I was tough because I was so, so sensitive...and, at heart, I was kind. I was flooded with a state of compassion, and with the realization that I was (and always had been, in my deepest part) compassionate, concerned, and caring, and that this was my natural state, not something to strive for but something already, in fact, the case. It was the state of my being, something to be uncovered and opened up. I did not have to strive to be compassionate, for this was already my natural state. All I had to do was to relax and let it shine through.

“And I should point out, again, that this was not a concept or idea I had, but a realization that totally involved me. I realized that the essence of my practice, of my fierce presence, was none other than compassion. It was as if, like a glove, I had turned myself inside out. Tears just flowed as I was overcome with this—now so obvious—realization. I was, in essence, very simple—just a soft-hearted, easy mark for this world. I was easy, and all my toughness, my fierceness, was nothing more than an attempt to cover over and shield myself from responding too much to all of the suffering I saw around me. At that

moment, I felt I understood myself and my practice: all of this taking place in midst of that Mahakala puja, with Karmapa. I was at peace.”

The point here is that as I gazed into the Karmapa’s eyes, I did not focus on the Karmapa’s powerful presence. Rather, in his presence, by reflection, I realized the nature of my own mind not his power. That, to me, is the true power of a spiritual teacher, a realization on our part, not of their nature, but of our own.

With this idea in mind, let us resume our investigation as to the nature of the Galactic Center (26 degrees Sagittarius) and Supergalactic (1 degrees Libra)

centers, etc. We can expect the Galactic Center to exercise considerably greater physical attraction for us than that of the local Super Galactic center. In fact, one

of the identifying features of the galactic center (GC) at work, as revealed in chart analysis (in research by Charles Harvey, Reinhold Ebertin, and many others) is a certain "macho-like" quality, a sense of strength and power perhaps typified in the zeal and self-righteousness of certain extreme religious factions. Or, more simply: the tendency in the qualities of Sagittarius and Capricorn of sternness and physical action or "power." Look for it.

Another way to put this is the great ability and power of the GC as represented (when strongly aspected in the natal chart) to move and attract others. We find this feature in the charts of great political and religious leaders who possess the power to move nations to action. The GC figures in these charts in the traditional astrological ways -- by conjunctions and other aspects to the galactic center.

We may contrast this "macho-like" quality found in the GC to the qualities that indicate the presence of Super Galactic Center (SGC) in natal charts. Here we look to the traditional qualities of Virgo and Libra -- that of care, service, reflection, and love. Perhaps the best representative of the Supergalactic nature occurs in Eastern Buddhism in the idea of compassion and especially in the beloved figure of the Bodhisattva, a being who is literally devoted to the service of all life until ignorance vanishes in every one in complete realization.

Bodhisattvas are awake.

We do not find the SGC as physically powerful and moving as we do the GC. In the west, the traditional god figures (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) are more fierce and full of the "fire and brimstone" approach than of the endless care and service as typified in some of the eastern traditions, as in the concept of the Bodhisattva.

In fact, only in these times we are now living are the "servile" qualities associated with Virgo sun-sign coming to be appreciated as a power in themselves. In other words, the SGC represents a non-material or essentially a more passive power (the power to help things to pass) rather than the more active kind of macho power as seen in the galactic center Idea.

In the Bible it repeatedly says "This came to pass; that came to pass" The passive genius is not active in the "doing of things," but rather is active in the "undoing of things" that is: helping things to pass from this world. This is a non- material or spiritual task and genius equally to be valued along with the more active one-who-does-things or brings-things-to-be in this world. We may see these two archetypes at work in the world, and they may be conveniently studied in their local representatives, the Galactic and Super Galactic centers and planes.

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WE ARE "SO INCLINED"

"As Above, So Below ... but After Another Manner," familiar as an occult maxim, might be the perfect description of what is involved in the various astrological coordinate systems and their transformations. Let me explain.

It is easy to communicate the concept of "As Above, So Below," wheels within wheels, thus larger systems containing within them nested smaller systems, and this has resulted in the popular idea of the chakras or planes (planets) of our experience and self as an ascending hierarchy of levels (As Above, So Below), each inclusive of the preceding level. What is NOT generally appreciated but becomes increasingly clear when we examine the actual structure of the various cosmic systems, is not only the idea of larger systems embracing the small systems within them (levels, 'As Above So Below'), but that each larger coordinate system is also differently INCLINED to the preceding one. This is the point here.

It should be understood that aside from the often-tedious mathematics involved in astrological/astronomical coordinate transformations, there is an accompanying philosophical or psychological adjustment to be made (and empowerment to be had), a shift in viewpoint, a change in the approach or attitude to the subject. This transformation of coordinates merits our attention. In fact, it is key to a proper astrological understanding of the different astronomical coordinate systems.

And so, there is not only an expansion in perspective when we move to a larger coordinate system (As Above, So Below), but also a reordering of our sense of direction (change of inclination). This reordering is what makes it so

difficult for an individual to see beyond their present dimension and get a feel for what is perhaps his or her inevitable future.

There exist what are termed "event horizons," beyond which we cannot understand how life can go on. An example of some event horizons: puberty, marriage, childbirth, and death, (also Saturn Returns, etc.) to name a few of the classics. We cannot see beyond our present sphere into what our future might be like in these other dimensions because we cannot help but conceive of these future events in terms of our present line (linear) of thought, the line along which we imagine we are going now. To pass through these event horizons involves total change on our part not just in encompassing previous systems, but also in attitude (inclination) and that means reorientation. We do not watch our own change, for we are what is in fact in transition or change. "WE" are changing. That's something we are unprepared for.

The idea presented here should be obvious: the crossing of an event horizon also involves simple reorientation on our part, call it a change of approach, view, or attitude. The new dimension or sphere we enter turns out (after our adjustment or change) to reveal our previous or past life in new light. We see our old behavior and opinions differently with our new approach to life. It is very difficult to communicate the difference to one who has not yet had that experience of reorientation. This is called "initiation." Or as my first teacher used to spell the word "In It I Ate."

What has changed perhaps most is our INCLINATION. We do not want the same things we did want or want them now in a different manner. We are no longer "inclined" such that we feel the way we used to. Our life now revolves around a different center than before. Where before, as a child, it was a new bike (or whatever), and now it's a wife or child, for instance. In other words, we are differently inclined, something we did not anticipate.

Many of these principles I am presenting here are graphically revealed through the study and exercise of the various astronomical/astrological coordinate systems. For instance: what appears in one astrophysical system as isolated and singular entities that are apparently unconnected, when viewed from the perspective of another system, define the basic shape of the system itself.

How often in our lives does some singularity appear (initially) as if an "other" and foreign entity, but later, when we have experienced several of this type, they are recognized as representatives of a kind or group that at first was unfamiliar (and perhaps even scary) to us. This same event becomes recognizable to us and loses its threatening quality. Astrophysics is all about clusters and groups. In astrophysics, 'clustering' is the rule, not the exception.

I cannot (apparently) recommend strongly enough the exercise of these various ways or systems for understanding our universe to astrologers practicing today. Here is a list of some of the systems. When you study a coordinate system like the heliocentric coordinate system or the equatorial coordinate system, keep in mind that these systems are more than just numbers. They offer an insight into different areas of life, chakras, and each can be charted astrologically and interpreted. It is amazing that we can do this! Here is a beginning. I will not include the inner changes connected to synodic cycles like the 30.4 year Saturn Cycle, and others.

COSMIC SYSTEMS AND THEIR CENTERS – A List

1. The Earth System

2. *SOLAR SYSTEM center: sun*

2. SOLAR SYSTEM center: sun

3. LOCAL SYSTEM (Gould's Belt) This is a group of some 10.8 stars of which the sun is a member. The Local System, originally thought to be a minute galaxy embedded with the Milky Way, is considered to be an ellipsoid of 700x200 parsecs with the long axis parallel to the New Galactic Longitudes 160 deg/340 and located in the Orion-Cygnus spiral arm. The centroid of the Local System is in Virgo at about 15 degrees 25' minutes, with nodes to the Ecliptic at 10 deg 22' of Sagittarius (North node) and Gemini. The system is inclined to the ecliptic by about 66 degrees. Note – positions are of the Epoch 1950.0.

4. LOCAL GALAXY...The Milky Way. Estimated to contain 10 to the 11th stars, The galaxy is a disc-like structure with a diameter of some 30,000 parsecs, a central ellipsoidal nucleus of about 4000 parsecs, and an average disc thickness of several hundred parsecs. The nodes and center (about 26-degree of Sagittarius) in relation to the ecliptic are given elsewhere. The sun is located some 10,000 parsecs from the galactic center.

5. LOCAL GROUP OF GALAXIES The local group includes about a score of member galaxies...the largest of which is the Andromeda galaxy (M 31). Our galaxy (Milky way) and M-31 revolve around a common center of mass roughly in the direction of 27- degree in the Sign Aries.

6. LOCAL SUPERGALAXY. Our galaxy is part of a vast flattened super system of galaxies some 40 megaparsecs in diameter, with the center (1 degrees of Libra) in the great Virgo Cluster some 12-16 megaparsecs from our sun.

This article just touches upon the value of astrology as a form of cultural astronomy. I published an entire book ("Astrophysical Directions") on these

topics in 1976, the result of years of research on my part into astrophysics. That book is available today as a free e-book (“The Astrology of Space”) at this link.

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/The-Astrology-of-Space.pdf> Michael Erlewine

The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind Toward the Dharma The Four Reversals

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

October 30, 2023

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THE FIRST REVERSAL: THE PRECIOUS HUMAN BIRTH

The First Reversal or first “Thought That Turns the Mind Toward the Dharma” is the precious human birth. I have been to Tibet, China, Sikkim, India, Nepal, etc. and I have watched the lamas carefully brushing mosquitoes off their arms, so I know that Buddhists value all sentient beings, even mosquitoes. In Nepal I was told they give you life in prison if you hit and kill a cow with your car, and there cows wandering everywhere in the streets over there - that kind of thing. How “foreign” to those of us over here in America. And the Buddhists are even more concerned with human life. And while all human life is to be treasured, Tibetan Buddhists reserve the words “precious human life” to refer to those of us fortunate enough to be born physically able to learn the dharma (have the necessary senses) and in a country or place where the dharma is available. The fact that we are reading this here and now means that we are such people. It might sound trite but the Tibetan Rinpoche I have worked with for almost thirty years has reduced me to rapt attention and tear-filled eyes a number of times when he has gently and clearly pointed out to me that if we are here now learning the dharma, we are one of the very, very few -- the 99th percentile. He states that to have the good fortune to be born in a place where (and time when) the dharma is actually taught means that we have accumulated an enormous amount of merit in our past lives to

(no pun intended) ‘merit’ this. He goes on to point out that many of us might be alive now but born not in a country where the dharma is taught. Or we may glance over these words and never take them in or actually even be repelled by them entirely. Or we could have severe mental or physical problems that make learning the dharma impossible. Or we may be so obscured by anger and desire or just busy with nonessentials that there is no way we can overcome our condition enough to actually hear and practice the dharma. We don’t get it. His point seemed to be that if we are open to these concepts we already have come a very long way and that in our past lives we have somehow accumulated enough merit to deserve such a precious human birth as we have now rather than some other birth, like an animal, in which bewilderment and desire may cloud any other possibilities. In other words: in our own way we already have great merit. That idea. And in Tibetan Buddhism, as I mentioned in a blog not too long ago, they put great value on the concept of motherhood. In fact they say that all beings (not just human beings) have been our mother in past lives and have given birth to us, wiped our bottoms, and cared for us like no one else ever would. Every being has been our mother and we have been the mother of every being. I grant you that this concept is foreign to those of us here in the west and takes real time to sink in. We are all that close. Every Tibetan is raised with this thought. Anyway, you get the idea. Buddhists feel that all life is sacred and that this precious human life in particular is a rare opportunity to be able to hear and practice the dharma, the path to greater awareness of our own mind. In this short blog it is difficult to present in enough detail the First Thought That Turns the Mind, how very precious our life is and how each of us wants to make it count for something and for it not to be wasted. Tomorrow I will wrap this up with the story of how I first came upon these four concepts that can reverse our direction, that can turn our mind toward greater awareness.

THE SECOND REVERSAL: IMPERMANENCE

Of the four reversals (The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind to the Dharma) the best known of course is the second one, impermanence, but it is also the most ignored -- our great ignorance. Ignorance can also be willful, as in “to ignore.” We agree to ignore what we find too hard to remember. It is a cliché that most of us act like we are going to live forever and it takes some life-shattering experience (the death of a loved one?) to remind us that death is perhaps the one thing we do know for certain. Our eventual impermanence is something that we acknowledge only when put on the spot. I call impermanence the “smelling salts of the dharma,” because even a little whiff of it wakes us up to the actual reality. The great Tibetan Rinpoche Chogyam Trungpa once opened an evening talk with these words: “Some of us will die

soon, the rest a little later.” Steve Jobs, who was a practicing Buddhist, was very aware of the Four Thoughts, in particular of the thought of impermanence since he was dying of cancer. It is said that his awareness of his mortality (the Second Reversal) kept him focused almost mono-maniacally on perfecting the iPhone and the iPad. At least that’s what I understand. In a eulogy read by his sister at his funeral she said that Jobs had ‘achieved death’ and that his last words were “Oh wow. Oh wow. Oh wow.” This is why these are called “The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind,” because only they are strong enough, medicine or remedy enough, to tear our attention away from our often mindless day-to-day business. Only these four thoughts are capable of turning the mind from its freight-train rush at nowhere to an awareness of what is important. And it was the Four Thoughts that got my attention when I first encountered Buddhism. They turned my mind. I had looked into many spiritual directions, had read about the trinity of this and the sacredness of that religion, all of which seemed so abstract to me, so distant and other-worldly – a world I did not know. When I came across the Four Thoughts they seemed so down to earth, so very natural. In fact they made clear to me what I had pretty much come up with on my own. They spoke right to the heart. They were better than any religion I knew and I had some experience with organized religion. Having been raised Catholic, I went to Catholic school for a while, was an altar boy, learned church Latin – the works. But I left that. I never had a quarrel with Christ (still don’t!) but organized religion and the behavior of its authorities appeared arbitrary and cruel to me. It lacked the intimacy laced with the taste of blood or reality that Mother Nature showed me – something real. Enough said. That First Thought, that “life is precious,” did not need to be explained to me. I had always thought that my life was precious and hoped that I might be put to some good use and not just wasted. And here was an acknowledged spiritual direction telling me straight out that my life was precious. I just inhaled it. And that was just the First Thought. It was the Second Thought that struck me to the core, impermanence. Death and impermanence had always hovered just out of eyesight in the peripheral vision of my life. I had never looked it straight in the eye and here was an instruction to do just that. There was nothing churchy or ‘clergy’ about this. It was what was always in the back of my mind anyway, part of what I sensed to be true. Mother Nature had always confirmed this. And the idea of rebirth (that not only had we lived before and would again, but had done this innumerable times) was more than I could hope for. After all, I was raised with the deep impression that (as the beer commercial says) “we only go around once” and that without warning we are tossed into this world and have to figure it out (heaven or hell) on our own in one shot. It took years for me to realize that the great majority of people in the world believe in rebirth and

still more years before I dared believe it myself, and that only those of us here in the West are stuck in the view that at our core, beneath everything, we are sinners. The Buddhist teach just that opposite: that our obscurations, our so-called “sins” are just on the surface and that beneath that we all have Buddha Nature. All we have to do is to become aware of this. After all, the word “Buddha” simply means ‘awareness’ or “the one who is aware.” It seemed too good to be true. But when I began meeting these high Tibetan lamas and rinpoches, arguably the most authentic authorities I have even known, they spoke of rebirth as a fact, as a personal experience. Here were authorities who actually were authorities. Imagine! And it was those Four Thoughts that first got my attention, that turned my mind or that I recognized without a doubt to be the truth as I already dimly knew it. All I had to do was to work on removing my own obscurations, which is what mind training or ‘meditation’ is all about.

THE THIRD REVERSAL: KARMA

Called the “Third Reversal,” it is taught at the very beginning as one of four ‘reversals’ that are said to cause us to suddenly stop our business of life-as-usual that we are living, reflect, pause... and then reverse ourselves, reverse our direction of ignoring everything important and get real, if only for a day or part of a day. The Four Reversals are taught to most students of the dharma somewhere at the very beginning. But we meet them again much later as the basis of the most advanced teachings in the Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, what is called Mahamudra meditation. They are that important. The Four Reversals are also called “The Four Thoughts” or the longer version “The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind Toward the Dharma.” As mentioned, when we reflect on these thoughts, any one of them, they have the ability or power to stop us in our tracks, to give us pause, and the power to turn us from wherever we were blindly heading and redirect us back home to where our heart is, to what is really important. They could also be termed “The Four Reminders” because they are always a wakeup call to remember what is actually most important. The Four Thoughts are: (1) That life is precious. (2) The fact of impermanence. (3) That everything we do has an effect. (4) That we will never be able to game the system. The Third Reversal or Third Thought that can turn the mind is the law of Karma, the law of cause and effect, the idea that the things we do (all of them) inexorably have an exact effect. And it is not just what we might all agree are mistakes like killing or stealing, and the like. Of course these “big” mistakes leave a track in our mindstream but it is the little mistakes that we do all the time that really add up and that imprint our mind with indelible tracks or grooves that are almost impossible to erase. And it is these deep marks that are reinforced on a daily basis that accumulate

to unimaginable proportions. And every so-called mistake or error is not judged by the conventional laws of society or by “someone up there” but rather is determined solely by our intent. It is our own intention in every thought, word, and deed that determines the kind of karma we are creating for ourselves. We do it to ourselves by increments and by degrees. We dig our own graves in the mindstream. There is a bright note to all of this. It is possible to become aware of what we are doing and to catch ourselves before we make mistakes and to stop reinforcing karmic tracks that will have to resurface later very painfully. We can stop pinching ourselves but it does take some practice. That is why dharma practice exists. And like all things related to the mind, it depends on our becoming aware of what we are doing enough to stop doing it. I am reminded of our dog and when he finds some horrible dead thing in the road that he wants to pick up and carry home. We say to him “Leave it!” Just leave it where it is and move on. This same concept works for much of the bad karma we create. There is a moment when we first become aware of whatever situation that has arisen that we could go negative on. It could be as simple as that someone walks around the corner that we really don’t like and the mere appearance of them will upset us to the point of spending seconds, minutes, or hours rehashing whatever happened between us that resulted in the negativity – the anger, humiliation, sorrow, etc. We go over and over it trying to make it right, trying to get on top of it so that we can put it right. That first moment is when we can learn to just leave it. Instead of following that thought, instead of indulging it for the nth time, we can just leave it. Yes, we take note of it arising. We recognize it but that can be the end of it. We are aware of it but we leave it there at that. It is written in the teachings that if we can do that, just see it for what it is, note it, and let it end at that, that we can avoid accumulating all of the karma that results from going over and over and over it in our mind. By not indulging it, we don’t reinforce that karmic track in our mindstream and we take one small step toward freedom from that obsession. We let it liberate itself on its own. We don’t add to the injury of the original event the insult of carrying it onward. As usual, I can never say things in a few words and I could go on defining this, but the message is this: Training the mind, mind training or meditation, is about becoming aware of what we are already habitually doing and learning to stop reinforcing habits that only leave deeper and deeper tracks in our mindstream, that mark or obscure our inherent brightness and consciousness. The majority of the karma that we accumulate, the sheer bulk of it, comes from our habit of embellishing, annotating, and endless rewriting the things that disturb us constantly all day long. By learning to just gently leave those thoughts that are not beneficial to self-liberate on their own, just as they are,

the constant accumulation of obscurations ceases and our mind clears up. This is what the Third Reversal, the law of karma, is about.

THE FOURTH REVERSAL:

THE DEFECTS OF CYCLIC EXISTENCE

This fourth “Thought That Turns the Mind Toward the Dharma” or fourth reversal of mind was the hardest one for me to get my arms around and to take seriously. In a word, some of the texts made this thought (the defects of samsara or cyclic existence) read more like an admonition that this world I love is no good and should be given up entirely. Actually I like a lot of what this world I live in offers and am not about to just ‘give it up’ and go where, do what? I had no idea. It took many years for me to warm to this concept, much less to willingly try and keep it in mind. But like some hard stone, the winds of time and change gradually erode even my heavy obscurations enough that some light peeks through, and a couple of insights have emerged. The first was that this cyclic-mundane world we live in is inherently undependable meaning that I tend to be up one day and down the next. I can’t depend on it. It’s not stable. Like some great pendulum I swing from being happy and seemingly heading toward reaching my goals one day to feeling down and thwarted (with nothing working out) the next. The time I spend being stable between these two extremes is little to none. I seem usually to be at one extreme or the other: overly positive or overly blocked and frustrated. Working the extremes out of this equation is what mind training is all about. By “inherently undependable” I mean I can’t count on this world to be stable because it’s not. Just look at the stock market or any of a dozen other indicators out there. Change seems to be the only constant. There is no real rest or stability to be found. This is the nature of cycles. Then it occurred to me, although I have always implicitly assumed that one day I would get all my ducks in a row, that I am getting old and I have yet to get them all in a row. I used to think that although others don’t seem to be able to game the system that I could do it and that I am different. I am special. I certainly can get ‘my’ ducks in a row and figure out a way to game the system that will be a win/win for me. Well friends, this does not seem to be happening. I have given it seventy years and that’s a fair try. The system can’t be gamed. What goes up, comes down, and so on. Finally I began to examine the word “samsara” in the phrase “Contemplate the defects of samsara.” The Sanskrit word “Samsara” refers to this world of everyday cyclic existence we are living in. It is the world I project outside myself on the movie screen of my life and then take to be reality. In other words the Fourth Thought is talking about the projected world of my own obscurations that I carry around inside me. Of course I can’t escape it or game that system. Those ducks will never be all in a row, not ever. And

why? The reason is that it is my own mental ‘eyeglasses’ or mind that is obscured, that needs cleaning, and not the outside world. Like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, I can try to rearrange the outside world until the cows come home and nothing will ever really change for me. I will never get my ducks all in a row and I will not game the system. What to do? As it turns out the answer is very simple and I don’t know why it took me so long to understand it. I can simply clean my dirty eyeglasses; I can get busy removing the mental obscurations that are like clouds in the sky of my mind and just let the Sun shine through. And I am. I am learning to do this by the traditional mind-training methods (meditation and so on) that are available to all of us. Anyway there you have some comments on the Fourth Thought That Turns the Mind Toward the Dharma, the inherent undependability of samsara, our obscured vision of this world of cyclic existence.

THE STORY OF HOW I MET THE “FOUR THOUGHTS”

I will end this short series of blogs on the Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind Toward the Dharma (the Four Reversals) with the story of how I met the great lama Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche who first pointed the Four Thoughts out to me. Trungpa Rinpoche founded Naropa Institute in Boulder Colorado and is credited with introducing thousands of students to Buddhism as a path rather than just a bit of Asian philosophy. I grew up in the late 1950s and early 1960s with Buddhism as one of the topics (along with Existentialism, etc.) that were sometimes savored late at night along with plenty of caffeine and cigarettes. By the early 1970s it was becoming clear that Buddhism (and Tibetan Buddhism in particular) held something special for me. I had been reading the early books of Chogyam Trungpa, at first stunned by the incredible art on the covers and later by the content. Sometimes probably late in 1973 I was thrilled to see a notice that Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche was coming to speak in my home town of Ann Arbor, Michigan in February of 1974. I wanted to meet him in person. I called the group that were putting his talk on to find more details, found that they were really short-handed, and ended up as Trungpa Rinpoche’s chauffeur for the weekend plus I designed the poster for the event. I couldn’t wait to go and pick him up at the airport. In my old beat-up ford station wagon I waited breathlessly at the airport for him to deplane. People poured out, but no Tibetans. I knew he was travelling with Larry Mermelstein who later headed up the Nalanda Translation Committee. And finally there Trungpa was, standing before me and looking directly at me. I was really close to him. I could see that his eyes looked very tired and somehow the whites were all yellow. Then Trungpa rolled his eyeballs upward toward the top of his head until I could hardly see the pupils and when they came back, all the tiredness and yellowness were gone and I was staring into

the eyes of perhaps the wildest human being I had ever encountered. It was an incredible moment. Suddenly, there 'HE' was. Wow! No disappointment. We drove back to the professor's house where they were to stay and I brought in his luggage. My job for the moment was done but I kind of hung around the edges of the room hoping to get some more clues as to what this incredible man or being was all about. I hoped I would not be kicked out. But the whole group of them were leaving for a tour of the University of Michigan campus. I, of course, was not invited so I prepared leave too. As the last moment Trungpa Rinpoche decided that he was not going but would stay by himself at the house and get some rest. Everyone was filing out and I waited off to the side as they came past me. And then to my astonishment Trungpa Rinpoche looked directly at me and beckoned me to stay with him. I was only too eager. He led me into a small library/office room and sat me down on a chair. This was beyond my wildest fantasies. And there I sat, not knowing just how to behave. Next Trungpa Rinpoche opened a small bottle of sake, drank some, and proceeded to inspect just about every item and knick-knack in the room. He was very animated, lifting each little memento from its shelf, sometimes holding things up to the light and peering through them, and so on. He did a pretty complete inventory of whatever was in the room. And all this time I sat there, afraid to move, taking this all in. He was very animated. Then before I knew it he was inspecting me and for the next hour or so proceeded to instruct me in basic meditation and related topics but he never called it that. He taught me how to watch my breath, watching the breath go out and watching it come in again. And he very carefully monitored what I was doing. In particular, he was concerned with my "out" breath, how I breathed out. It seemed to him I was not letting it go out far enough. Needless to say I was nervous being on the spot. At one point he said "Michael, let your breath go all the way out... all the way!" As I struggled to relax and let this happen, he remarked, "Don't worry, it will come back!" And I did this but it was not as simple as just following his directions. A lot of deep internal stuff was happening at the same time he was speaking to me. As I breathed out, my whole life-long fear of letting go, of dying and death flashed through my mind. I struggled to suppress it for a moment and then finally just let go. As the breath went out, my fear vanished. Perhaps this moment marked the beginning of my actual dharma practice, the end of Buddhism as something to think about and the realization that it was a path and method, not just a philosophy. It was only much later that I understand that Trungpa Rinpoche was teaching me basic meditation. At the time it seemed like my whole life was changing around me as he spoke. And later, as I was getting ready to leave and we were walked down the hall toward the front door we came upon the poster I had designed for his public talk hanging on the wall. It has an

image of an Asian dragon flying in the clouds on it. I enclose it here. For those of you who don't know the oriental dragon is a far cry from the Western idea of the medieval dragons that knights in armor fought. In the east the dragon is a heroic figure, one of the most abiding signs of good fortune. Trungpa Rinpoche pointed to the poster and asked me if I knew what this image represented. I told him that I did not know much about it and that to me the image was striking and suited (to my mind) his visit here. He then proceeded to point out to me that the dragon in the woodcut holds four precious pearls or gems, one in each claw. He said that as long as the dragon has a grasp of all four pearls, he can fly, but if he drops even one of them, he plunges to the ground. These are the Four Thoughts that we have been discussing here, what are called the Common Preliminaries or the "Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind to the Dharma." He was pointing out to me that we need to keep all four thoughts in mind and not just one or two of them if we want to turn the mind toward the dharma. I understood that these four thoughts are essential for any further practice – all four of them. I have never forgotten this. This experience with Trungpa Rinpoche had a deep and lasting effect on me. And although after that weekend as his driver I never saw Trungpa Rinpoche again, I will always remember his concern for and kindness with me. I went on from there (a few years later) to discover my main teacher in the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, the abbot of KTD (Karma Triyana Dharmachakra) Monastery in Woodstock, NY and have trained there for the last 28 years or so. However Trungpa Rinpoche opened a door for me that has never closed. Some time ago I wrote this little poem about the Four Thoughts and my experience with Trungpa Rinpoche: The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind

This precious life, Impermanent and brief, I know. My actions keep on piling up, And I can't quite get my ducks into a row. Trungpa said to me, So many years ago, By grasping just one thought or two, We'll never turn aside. We must, he said, maintain all four, And leave not one behind. Four precious thoughts that touch the heart, Only they can turn the mind. For those who don't remember or have never seen the four thoughts are: (1) The preciousness human life (2) Impermanence (3) The inevitability of karma (4) The undependability of Samsara]

“I FEEL LOVE (ALL THE TIME)”

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

November 5, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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First, if you will take time, please hear the music.

Theo Katman “I Feel Love (All the Time)”

This is a remarkable and lovely piece of music that won’t ruin your day, a song by Theo Katzman, sung by Theo and my daughter May Erlewine that, in my opinion, says a lot. These two have been touring a lot, with May opening for Katzman, but also doing duets as you can see here. Give yourself a treat. Spend a little of your busy time and give it a listen. It’s worth it.

What I want to blog about is so subtle that even I can’t find the edge in on it unless I really try, and I am. I want to, as the old song goes, be there ‘when the saints come marching in’.

What this is cuts it close and is easily lost in the uproar of just living life, our being able to slice the near edge of nothing and slide through into this very important view. That’s why I feel the song is helpful, to get us there.

I warned you that although I just pointed at it, it’s a good question whether anything was meant or perceived.

Another way to say this is that there is a moment in the day, in any day, when we are on thin ice, as to how we feel about that day, and it can go either way, very good or just average.

I used to call it the “Go to Meet Your Maker” view, which means going halfway to make this day a good day. Yet, that’s not quite right because we don’t ‘make’ a day anything, yet we can go with the flow more or less, take a ride on the nether edge of the good. As my friend, the poet John Sinclair says, “It’s All Good.” That’s the spirit here.

We can feel that, call it ‘love’ or what unites us, or just that we feel good. However we want to spell it, we are embracing life in the moment. This moment now. We are going halfway to meet our maker, so to speak, taking life up on its offer of life.

Well, there you have it. I have done like a ‘drive by’ to what I am talking about here. In my case, when this happens, I also gladly embrace all the chores I

have to do that day, even the ones I would rather not have to do. I'm up for it and ready to go.

On those days I'm embracing life as much as life is embracing me. As Katzman's song says, "I feel love, all around me."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

Note: If you would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are the links:

GRAPE HARVEST AT HOME

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

November 8, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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Our grapes are ripe for the picking which we better do before the racoons get them, and so I went and harvested about 25 lbs. or so. I include a bunch of photos showing the process in some detail. It is a lot of work and a little bit messy.

The grapes have to be washed and stems removed, then mashed down with a potato masher, then a little water added to keep them from sticking to the pots and burning.

Next we bring them to a boil and let them be at a slow boil for 20 to 25 minutes. After that, they are pushed through a large strainer to get the juice out. Next ,they are put through a fine strainer to get more stuff out of them and then put into jars to refrigerate.

We got about 2 gallons, which we will drink some and perhaps freeze some.

And then a lot of clean up and mopping some of the floor.

Messy.

[Cellphone photos]

Note: If you would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are the links:

Report Card

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 9, 2023

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REPORT CARD

by Michael Erlewin

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Without an active dharma teacher, it can be very difficult to determine just where we are in our practice, especially when there are no obvious outward signs of progress. The mind races up and down the gamut from high to low and back again, “How are we doing?”

No one can really tell us, accept perhaps our teacher, and that in my case was 800 miles away and he did not speak English, so I could not just phone him. So, it’s up to us and we are not quite up to it. How do we know?

The textbooks say that one way to know is if you find yourself becoming kinder and more loving to other people. That makes sense, of course, if you can see that in yourself.

This is easy to say once we are certain of progress; we just know. Of course, we do. Then it does not matter. So, my guess is the best view is that if we are not certain ourselves of progress, then there is nothing to report.

If we have a question, then the answer is no, as in ‘not obvious progress.’ And if we are certain of progress, the point is moot.

This situation may not be as we would have it, yet there it is, nevertheless.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

Note: If you would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are the links:

A COSMIC JUKEBOX

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 17, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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On the one hand I am getting old and am not as nimble as I once was. And definitely, I have been working with my mindstream, tinkering with the mind itself, in particular when it comes to picking very subtle threads out of the ethereal slipstream, where thoughts arise. I'm not saying that the thread contents themselves are subtle, although they are, but that grasping them is and can be, these thoughts at the edge of the future.

Many very fine or delicate thoughts are only there for a millisecond, and are gone so fast that, if I don't write them down or at least start to, they are gone. Of course, some of them do reoccur, but just as many don't. These are momentary phantoms that are barely there at all and are not graspable unless I secure them at once. Even the slightest waver of attention on my part and they vanish.

This requires one-pointed concentration. As mentioned, any distraction on my part, however slight, and they are already gone. When I look up from being distracted there is nothing there. Gone, and I can't remember what the thought was, try as I might. And some of them are profound, now lost to me.,

This is the environment in which I work a lot, the merest flash of insight, too subtle to reflect it in words, and there are many of these insights sputtering out at once, like a string of tiny firecrackers.

If I am to use them, I have to tie them down at once with a note, a word or a few words that can remind me, because these proto-thoughts are gone, one replaced by another, perhaps just as good, in an instant. It takes actual discipline to retrieve and remember them using whatever way best works.

However, up in these ethereal regions, the means of retention are few and the moments brief. It's like catching fireflies; as you reach for them, they turn off, only to reappear a little distance away. It's like that. Grasping at straws does not hold a candle to what I'm describing. I'm speaking of something that is barely there, something at the very edge of not being at all, at the borderline where the future and the present meet, broadcasting themselves like a cosmic radio.

Yet, these threads are fresh, as mentioned, almost proto-thoughts, and can be very rich in in the sense they make, and most of them are worth gathering up and considering. They often are threads that can be elaborated into entire topics of interest, thoughts never thought before, and my tying them all together through a stream of insight, weaving these into the normal thread of time that makes up the fabric of our existence as best I can. That's about the best description I can give. We have to move toward poetry to capture the spark of it, which I will try here.

AN INTERNAL FLAME

At the extreme limits of our mindstream crystals of time sparkle like falling snow along the edge of the mind, fireflies winking and blinking in the night of time. An effervescence of insights.

Where the future meets the present, it's so hard to acknowledge or confirm what we are not yet certain of ourselves, that which is in the process of becoming a fact for us but is not yet a fact, inner thoughts surviving a process that stretches across the bridge of time like an overstrung guitar string that gets plucked.

This is a future that is not yet certain, yet already casts its shadow on the present and waits for time to acknowledge it. Ranging out there on the borderline is an iffy thing at best and perhaps is more of a probable expectation than a fact. After all, it still is part of the future, and not yet quite present. Being there, we are the first to experience them, a kind of welcoming committee.

Why go there at all? Because of the freshness, the life that could be, a life that perhaps can be shaped by our will. We assist in the creation of the world, like a midwife of time itself.

Where else are we going to find the future other than at the very edge of the present moment, where the anticipation of the future is mixed with the pure oxygen of insight.

Mixing the fuel of this present moment injected with the oxygen of the future works like a carburetor, a pilot light that burns at the very edge of time, an inner flame waiting for their time and incandescence.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOW

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 21, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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William Butler Yeats

“The falcon cannot hear the falconer”

By Michael Erlewine

My DNA tells me I am 73% Irish, and the rest Dutch, which perhaps explains my interest in the Irish poet William Butler yeats, and my favorite poem of his:

MEMORY

“One had a pretty face, and two or three had charm, but charm and face were in vain, “because the mountain grass cannot but keep the form where the mountain hare has lain.”

However, Yeats’s best known poem is said to be “The Second Coming,” and these lines:

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre The falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;”

Are these those times that Yeats writes of? Also, from this Yeats poem come lines that perfectly describe our current Congress:

“The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity.”

Oh well, we might as well read the entire poem:

THE SECOND COMING

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

“Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: a waste of desert sand;
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Wind shadows of the indignant desert birds.
“The darkness drops again but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?”

It is perhaps Yeats’s most powerful poem, so powerful it did not appear in many collections of poems until some time after it was published.

I can’t speak to the ‘second coming’ part of the poem, but the rest describes the status quo quite well. We certainly are getting a taste of that ‘rough beast’ these years.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

HOUSEKEEPING

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 22, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/be9c58a0-98c6-4044-b07d-9ced07cd94f1_1024x1024.jpeg

Highway 131 at Night in a Downpour

By Michael Erlewine

A lot of internal housekeeping tops the list for what's going on around here. For example...

Today, at 6:45 AM, I drove an hour in the pitch dark of early morning through one hell of a rainstorm. Couldn't see but a few feet ahead of the car and so drove a freeway at 60mph and the speed limit is 75mph, which meant that everything was passing me, including semi-trucks, one after the other. And when each semi passed it spewed water high in the air and everywhere and for a moment, I could not see anything, not even the white stripes in the road. Nerve wracking is the word and dangerous.

Anyway, that got me to an early dental appointment a full hour from where I live. The purpose was to see if two dental implants were doing OK, both put in a little over a week ago. They are fine, but I was pretty frazzled while getting there. No more early appointments in winter when there is no light.

And did I mention that all that drive was at 34 degrees temperature, just one degree above freezing. That added to the worry. Anyway, I'm back, got the good report on the implants, which are still pointing in the right direction; only have to wait four months now. All of this and it's not even December yet.

The other iron in the fire is what to do after taking a full course of antibiotics following the two dental surgeries. Antibiotics always wipe out my internal intestinal flora, which the Internet tells me takes almost six months to re-establish.

So, I am running around trying to get good sources of intestinal probiotics, which so far includes unpasteurized kefir, unpasteurized sauerkraut, unpasteurized kimchi, a bit of unpasteurized cheese, and a special prebiotic called 'Saccharomyces Boulardii' that is supposed to be able to get through the stomach acids and actually reach the intestines.

Of the lot, the kefir seems the most intuitively. Color me interested in getting my intestinal flora back on track. Let me know about your favorite probiotic.

And there are other irons in the fire, but I will spare you the chapter and verse.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

FRIENDS OF THE SIXTIES: THE PRIME MOVERS BLUES BAND

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 22, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/42033f49-0e19-42d9-b49b-f1780197b95e_1273x718.jpeg

Link:

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=prime+movers+blues+band+friend

Rainy and continued cold these days out here in Big Rapids, Michigan. Received some questions about the 'Prime Movers Blues Band', our band from back in the mid-1960s, so I thought I would post what the band sounded like for those who were too young or not born yet to hear us.

Unfortunately, these are the only extant recordings, so I can't choose the best of the best, only what we have on hand, so here it is, a sample the Prime Movers Blues Band back in about 1967.

Listen if you have the inclination and time, while I help get ready for tomorrow's Thanksgiving dinner.

We don't shoot the turkey around here; however, I am in charge of Thanksgiving stuffing, mashed potatoes, and peas, plus I have skinned and pared all the apples for an apple pie and Margaret made the crust. She also made pumpkin pie, her favorite. Me, I like the apple. We will eat some tonight!

None of our kids could make it to be with us for Thanksgiving dinner, so we decided to pull out the stops and make a dinner just for the two of us. I think we have to have a sit-down dinner and not each sit in front of our computers. LOL. I vote for the sit down.

[Graphic by me.]

EMAIL

DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT IT

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 24, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/cf1a8f80-8eab-430f-857a-c75a6ce41d71_1024x1024.jpeg

I'm talking here about letting thoughts just naturally arise rather than thinking them up as we often do. Both methods work to some extent, but letting thought naturally come up removes the stain of the effort used to think them up, and also the forced directionality. That 'thinking them up' narrows the mind, as opposed to seeing what comes up without thinking. Thinking and thoughts are two different things.

And a byproduct of that effortful thinking is the shadow of our effort playing on whatever we are thinking about. Effort obscures. Sitting around thinking is something many of us do. I can well remember how I would think myself to sleep at night, concentrating on whatever I was interested in and by that process falling asleep.

We might ask, if we don't consciously think of something to dwell on, will there be no thoughts coming? And the answer that the dharma texts say is that there always will be thoughts coming and passing away, forever. In meditation we don't remove thoughts but learn to live with them, and even are propelled on their energy.

In other words, it's not that our goal is to have no thoughts and somehow keep them out as much as it is to not be bothered by them, not recognize them as just the play of the mind. If we allow thoughts to arise and go as they will and when they will, this relieves us. In other words, pay thoughts no particular attention.

And I have found that if I am not always thinking, ginning things up and then riding them as on a train of thought, that my thought process greatly improves. And by this, I mean just take note and be aware of what thoughts do arise and come to mind, and let them go or, if we wish, consider the thought.

The more we can keep our own personal two-cents out of the process, the more organic or natural the process of thoughts become. There are thoughts that, naturally arising, actually can be helpful and are meant for us to consider as opposed to our just thinking thoughts. We don't have to think, at least not so much.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

TAKE IT TO THE PATH

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 24, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7aafa1ed-91b3-4a4e-8328-87e61853945c_1024x1024.jpeg

Bobbing again at the surface, treading water so to speak, there is no directionality. Are we no longer going anywhere, or have we finally arrived at where we always have been headed or going? I doubt that.

There is always the opportunity to take whatever happens in the present moment to the path and make a feature of it. Everything then seems to be a learning experience for us.

In the case of no directionality that is obvious, taking that to the path is just that, making ourselves at home and becoming familiar with it. We can say that, given lemons, we are making lemonade, but that's not what I'm suggesting here.

Rather it's not seeing what we don't like or find useless as lemons. Making ourselves at home and becoming familiar with wherever we are and with whatever we have been given. That's the ticket.

If we have already labeled the present moments as 'lemons,' then we are already on a downward spiral and need to renegotiate. The sage advice, IMO, is to become familiar, make ourselves at home in the present moment, just as it is, warts and all.

The dharma speaks of taking everything to the path because if it is the present moment, it already is the path, or at least is in our path, meaning that whatever it is it already has been permitted to happen to us. It's not like we have a choice.

And how are we to know that the present is not a doorway to the future because that is exactly what it is. And here it is right now, the learning ground that is being offered to us, like it or not.

And how are we to get around the present moment, certainly not in the past and probably not in the future, either. The present moment is directly in our way and, as mentioned, there is no way around it. Therefore, work with it without prejudice against it.

It's not there for no reason. In the dharma that I am coming to understand, pliancy and flexibility are high on the list of traits that are useful if not mandatory, being able to work with what is. And don't forget 'patience', perhaps the most important trait of them all.

And determining what 'Is' is not a judgment, but a process of familiarization that we have to go through. We 'have' it to go through, so best get on with it.

And so, take it to the path and the path is right here in front of us, in what have you? So, we all have the same opportunity.

And so, it's not "Take It to the Path" so much as "It" already is the path or right in our way.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

GIVE IT A REST

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

November 30, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ebbbfec4-1b2b-4ec1-b6fb-79e86abe8ed7_2048x1316.jpeg

I don't consider myself a poet and my advice to myself is that writing text like this, prose, is like carrying water in your hands, while poetry is like drinking from the faucet.

What follows looks like a poem because it is succinct, but it's just the way I clarify what's going on inside of me. I write it out. And in this case, what has been going on has been going on for quite some time, but I am finally getting a little realization as to what it has been trying to say to me. Not sure it will make any sense to readers here. Let me know if it does, please.

WHEN TO STOP

What to do,

Right now,

With the here and the now.

Like a cycle,

Circulating,

What has linked is linked,

And is not to be broken,

It points here now.

Movement,

Not necessary,

Or recommended.

Moving about,

Brings no effect.

Might as well be still.

Wipe away the signs of birth.

Because nothing else is there.

You can't improve,

What has been improved.

Let it rest.

Anything more,

Only clouds.

Accept this,

As it is.

Because it's 'done'.

Where to go from here?

That's the point,

Dear One.

There is no point,

Nowhere to go,

And nothing to do.

Allow the rest that this requires,

And know when to stop.

At this point,

Even your imperfections,

Are perfected.

EMAIL

REALIZATION: WHAT IS IT?

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 4, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c8bcacff-cae7-4499-8489-c971e77d4573_1024x1024.jpeg

Since I have had a recent brush with ‘Realization’ more of the mundane kind, I’d like to go over a few things in this article.

First, let’s be clear what a realization is and what it is not. A realization is above all a one-way trip. Once you have it or turn it on, there is no turning it off. You can’t ‘unsee’ a realization. It does not come and go. It comes and stays.

A simple example of a realization is being instructed on how to turn on a light switch. Once you ‘realize’ how to turn on a light, you know how to turn on most any light. And you can’t unlearn it. It stays with you forever unless you manage to forget about it, which is not normal.

Psychological realizations or spiritual realizations are no different. Once you have them, they are yours forever. It’s like turning on a light.

One thing about all realizations is that before you realize, you did not realize. When we get to the more spiritual realizations, more often than not, previous to the realization, we had some other expectation or anticipation in mind, something that we perhaps dreamed up or imagined from reading books or gathering information. By definition, we got it wrong. Otherwise, we would have the realization.

And so, the first thing that happens with a realization is that our previous ideas are vacated. The Tibetans like to use the example of seeing a poisonous snake coiled up in a dimly lit room and eventually realizing that the snake actually is just a piece of rope. And with that realization, the whole image and idea of the snake evaporates and is gone.

That’s why they say that with realizations we don’t need a remedy because the realization already is the remedy. And once we have the realization, whatever it replaces is gone, which may or may not be painful for us. Many realizations dash whatever we dreamed up on our own, so how each of us reacts to a realization varies and can be enlightening or heartbreaking, but regardless, it is the actual truth of the situation.

I recently had a relatively big mundane realization, and it completely shattered the idea and concept I had maintained for a great many years and replaced that with a view I had not ever properly considered. In my case, the realization occurred in like slow motion. It came over me and my previous history fought against it, but in vain. It came over me anyway and, in the process, my previous house-of-cards came tumbling down, with me trying to hang on to it.

Yet, the realization overpowered me and gradually replaced my previous view, just like the sun comes up. Although I twisted and turned in the wind of this change, as the smoke cleared, so to speak, the actual truth won out as I realized the actual nature of the problem I was considering. However, it was painful, excruciating for a while, but ended by exorcising from my mind my previous view, which was very much damaging me until it lifted.

And so, realizations are both mundane and sacred, with no preference. They just happen if the time and situation is right. And while most of them are minor, the occasional 'big' realization is to whatever degree lifechanging. I just went through one of those realizations that was capable of changing, reorienting my life with a more accurate view.

I also have, in the past, some sacred or spiritual realizations that without a doubt were life-changing in a big way.

The blessings of realization include clarity and quite often relative emptiness; our slate has been to some degree wiped

clean. And in realization, there are no echoes, no embellishments, and no thoughts. It is a clear view and immersive.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

‘Harmonica Ace’ William Clarke

By Michael Erlewine, SpiritGrooves.net

December 9, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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I’m celebrating my friend and fellow blues harmonica player Paul Barry’s now biography of the harmonica great William Clarke, “Blowin’ Like Hell.” I very much recommend this book to all blues fans. I just read it from front to back in one sitting!

Also here is a video I made of William Clarke, a chance to hear how Clarke plays.

I have had the very good fortune to hear great Chicago harp (harmonica) players like Little Walter, Junior Wells, Big Walter Horton, and others playing live in the clubs of Chicago. Those days are gone and I had given up hope of ever hearing a new voice on amplified blues harp again in my lifetime. Then came William Clarke.

Technically, Clarke is a master of both the cross and chromatic harps. He takes blues on the chromatic up to and well beyond where Little Walter left it years ago. But far more important than the technique is the music. Clarke plays straight-ahead blues that is music to the ears and it rocks big-time.

I had the good fortune to hear William Clark twice, and one of those times I actually brought Clarke to the town of Big Rapids where I live and paid for him to play in a local bar for us on Tuesday April, 27, 1993.. It was incredible. I include the poster I made.

William Clarke was born March 29, 1951 in Inglewood, California and became turned onto blues during the 1960s, oddly enough by hearing covers of blues tunes by groups like the Rolling Stones. Many of us did.

Although he had played some guitar and drums, Clarke started playing the harmonica in 1967. He states that his main early influences were Big Walter Horton, James Cotton, Junior Wells, And Sonny Boy Williamson II, and especially George 'Harmonica' Smith.

In mid-1968 Clarke began listening to jazz organists such as Jack McDuff, Jimmy McGriff, Shirley Scott, and Richard "Groove" Holmes. "This had a huge influence on my playing," says Clarke, "Along with jazz saxophonists Eddie Lockjaw Davis, Gene Ammons, Lyne Hope, and Willis Jackson, the combination of listening and absorbing the grooves of tenor-sax-led organ trios had an everlasting effect on my direction in music. For my style, I incorporated the hard core attitude and tone of the classic Chicago harmonica players along with the swinging and highly rhythmic grooves of the organ trios and to this I add my style and ideas and you have the William Clarke sound."

By the middle of 1969, Clarke was spending a lot of time in the Los Angeles ghetto clubs -- South-Central Los Angeles. There he met T-Bone Walker, Pee Wee Crayton, Shakey Kake Harris, Big Joe Turner, Ironing Board Sam, J.D. Nicholson, and George "Harmonica" Smith, who would later become his greatest influence on the chromatic harp. Clarke would go from one club until it closed at 2 AM, switch to an after-hours club from 2 AM to 6 AM, and then go to jam sessions that could last until 11 AM -- and still hold down a day job! Clarke spent 20 years working as a machinist and family man before launching his blues career.

Then Clarke began to see and listen more to George "Harmonica" Smith -- a veteran of the Muddy Waters band. Clark says "To me George was bigger than life. I was always afraid to start up a conversation with him, not because I thought he was mean, but because I thought of him like a god on the harmonica." Around 1977, they became friends and started performing together. They worked together until Smith passed away in 1983. Clarke was George Smith's protégé and he became the godfather to Clark's son Willie. Clarke says "George and me were very close friends and in a lot of ways he was like a father to me ".

Clarke recorded a number of albums prior to releasing his first CD. They are "Hittin' Heavy" (Good Time, 1978), "Blues from Los Angeles" (1980), "Can't You Hear Me Calling (Watch Dog, 1983), "Rockin' the Boat" (Riviera, 1985), and "Tip of the Top" (Satch, 1987 -- nominated for a Handy award). He won the 1991 Handy award for blues song of the year, "Must Be Jelly," and has also received six W.C. Handy Award nominations.

Clarke writes most of his own songs, and many of them are real ear catchers. He has a working-class background and songs like "Gambling for my Bread" and "Pawnshop Bound" are right on the money -- just great tunes.

William Clarke (along with Big Walter Horton and Paul Butterfield) has an almost impeccable sense of which notes to play. There are a lot of players out there (white and black) that basically play what's on the records of the great Chicago artists. Nothing wrong with this, but no news there either. Clarke is an original. Having heard him play live a number of times, I can testify that here is the real thing -- an extension of the classic Chicago-style amplified harp tradition into the present.

Just listen to those first two Alligator albums -- It's all on the CDs. Harmonica recording artist Charlie Musselwhite says that Clarke is his "favorite living harp player -- no doubt about it." I am in total agreement with Musselwhite. While most great players are either dead or on the decline, Clarke was available and cookin' right up to his death on Nov. 2, 1996. He was playing about 200 gigs a year. Check him out. Here are some of his albums:

(5 stars) *Blowin' Like Hell* -- The title says it all. William Clarke cooks on this one, his first CD. And these are new sounds. Songs like "Lollipop Mama," "Gambling for My Bread," and "Lonesome Bedroom Blues" (all written by Clarke) are just great tunes. "Must Be Jelly" won Clarke a W.C. Handy Award for blues song of the year in 1991. I find myself humming them. Clarke's timing and music right on the money. With the great Alex Schultz on lead guitar. There is no doubt that Clarke is one of the few modern bluesmen who are exploring and extending the amplified blues harp tradition without violating any of its principles. No one plays chromatic blues harp with this kind of passion and sheer conviction. Hear for yourself.-- Michael Erlewine

(5 stars) *Serious Intentions* -- His follow-up to "Blowin' Like Hell" burns with a ferocious intensity, particular for his groundbreaking work on chromatic harp and his ability to cover all styles with remarkable elan. Again, he wrote most of the songs and "Pawnshop Bound," "Tying to Stretch My Money," and "With a Tear in My Eye" and real songs. Instrumentals like "Chasin' the Gator" feature Clarke. With Alex Schulz on lead guitar. -- Cub Koda and Michael Erlewine

(4 stars) *William Clarke -- Groove Time* -- Here is Clarke, hot again. This time he has added a horn section on some cuts for this recording. No problem. Alex Schultz is there on lead guitar to make sure that this album rocks. Clarke once again writes most of the songs -- all 15 fat tracks. By this time, his Alligator albums have a style and feel (all his own) that one looks forward to. Plenty of high-impact amplified chromatic harmonica here of the push-the-band-hard

variety that Clarke does so well plus some tasty acoustic thrown in too. --
Michael Erlewine

(4 stars) The Hard Way -- His fourth CD from Alligator is his jazziest and bluesist recording to date. Clarke has written half of the compositions and put his own sound and style on those he did not write. Highlights include "The Boss" (inspired by saxophonist Willis Jackson) which is a fast jump that finds chromatic harp riffing along with a horn section -- some interesting ideas. Other tunes are the Benny Moten tune "Moten Swing," "My Mind is Working Overtime," (a Latin-tinged tune written by Clarke), and "Letter from Home."

EMAIL

Shakeup and Shadows

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 11, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ba8d33cd-57d9-4c11-bfba-e12a158ed2ae_1024x1024.jpeg

SHAKEUP AND SHADOWS

By Michael Erlewine

A lot of folks are kind of bottoming out these days with all the wars, violence, politics, etc. and etc.

There is a lot of intense solar activity right now, as well as a powerful planetary activity that may inflame or have exacerbated personal issues recently. This should be abating.

And, so, my suggestion, what I do myself, is weather the storm, stay the course, and learn, learn, learn. Make adjustments. I find I am doing that, using this quite difficult time to separate the wheat from the chaff. What's most important?.

For the last few days perhaps a bit of a rocky time, a time to clear off the cluttered task list and do a slight reset. Back to the drawing board. And for some of us, maybe a brisk slap in the face.

"Wake up, Wake Up Friend Owl."

Since there is little choice, I find this is an excellent time to let a lot of things go. So, how to begin?

As for me, I jettison what I can and allow what's left to reconfigure itself.

"Take it to the path" every time. That is the best medicine. Don't run from it.

We can't throw away enough, so why worry? It's probably time for me to delve more into photography again while some kind of house-cleaning collapse of my house of cards reconfigures itself. We each turn the wheel of the dharma, but this time the wheel is turning with me on it. With so much solar activity, this is a real case of, to get along, go along.

As to how does one turn oneself inside out? It's like the magician with the magic velvet bag, he turns it inside out and shows the bag as empty, then turns it inside out again, and shows the inside is empty, and then he pulls a

bunch of silks or a rabbit out of the bag. That's me. No matter how empty I feel, there is still more to let go of. Yet, how do we let go?

That's the hard one. We let go when we shrink back enough or get off our 'high horse' enough to recognize what is not essential. We realize that we can get along with less of our puffed-up self, just take a learning, and make do with less. That's one way that works for me.

Like the old statement "If you are given lemons, make lemonade." Or as that dharma folks say "Take it to the path."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

“SPARE CHANGE”

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 17, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/78ee293c-04c1-4113-8f4c-6155717f572a_1365x2048.jpeg

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.”

From W.B. Yeats, “The Second Coming.” These last few days have seen a bevy of four very strong solar flares, including an X-Class flare that is the largest since 2017. And these include a combined (layered) CME (Coronal Mass Ejection) from the three large solar flares that are Earth directed. The X-Class flare silenced some of Earth’s radio signals and did other damage, but that is not my focus.

These powerful flares and their combined wave of a coronal Mass ejection also affect us internally, and since science is just getting around to that kind of investigation, it is up to us to look for ourselves at what’s happening inside us.

And the Sun is such a powerful source of life that it does not only affect us with its sunshine, but also seats effects we can only realize are deep inside, where we don’t go... much.

One thing they do, although we may not have gotten around to naming it, is throw our inner winds and channels into chaos, powerful inner change that finds us without knowing it being forced out of our usual groove and wandering around for other possibilities in the turmoil. We don’t even realize we are doing this. And this just happened to me.

As best I can understand, increased solar energy that comes rather than in streaming sunlight, but in huge surges and packets way beyond our ability to easily accommodate it, somehow affects what in Tibetan Buddhism are called the winds and the channels. The winds and channels are delicate pathways and systems deep within us that are easily disturbed.

And once disturbed these winds and channels perhaps resemble the effects of hallucinogens, in that we find ourselves wandering beyond our normal groove in a kind of temporary out-of-the-body state, without realizing that we have

left our normal reservations. The sheer energy impulses of large solar flares causes this, IMO.

Certainly, I have been doing this recently, reoriented enough that I launched my astrology forecast service because it felt like the thing to do, only to go back a few days later to the merry-go-round of change and come out canceling that and, at least for now, taking another tack entirely. I'm still recovering from this game of 'winds-and-channels' musical chairs and it may not be over.

These deep solar charges affect us internally, changes that stir us deeply, pushing us beyond our limits, out into a kind of trance We are swept up in this pure modicum of change without being aware of it and are led by the nose hither and yon.

I'm working now with the aftermath of these recent powerful flares, and it's not even aftermath yet, because the hits just keep on coming. And we may not be done. And the solar sunspot cycle has another year at least to heighten.

Where does change come from? Ask yourself that. Yet, we all know it comes, invited or uninvited.

I'm doing my best here to keep folks informed, while at the same time churning in the same gyre as the rest of us. Obviously, I did not see the large X-Class flare coming and it coincided with a big change in my own life, within a couple of hours. So, don't tell me there is nothing deep in there that's moving around. It's moving all right, and it's up to us to get in line with it and use it or be used by it.

It's just a lot more change than we are used to. These are just my opinions on all this.

[Photo of an orchid by me.]

EMAIL

THROWN OFF TRACK

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 17, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4b136793-e3e4-452c-9af2-fbb50650923b_1010x1008.jpeg

As the result of a mental ‘Blow Out.’ Given the Vajrayana dharma path I am on, our mantra is “Take it to the path,” so I try to learn something from everything I do, and now is not the exception. What have I learned from my recent bout of forecasting astrology and then doing an about-face or complete reversal? There is something and here it is.

Power surges often blow out transformers on our city streets when an electrical storm comes through. I believe that intense solar flares and CMEs do the same for our inner guidance system, what the Tibetans call our winds and channels. Internally, we don’t seem to have much of a surge protector from the very powerful solar surges that come with intense solar flares.

And what I find a bit scary is that what little surge protection we have does not go bang-pop and explode as the street transformers tend to do. It’s all silent. We have no idea it is happening, at least this has been my experience.

Instead, it seems we just quietly wander off track into the suburbs of our mind and wake up far away from where we were and often feeling misguided at that. Solar surges can power us right out of our daily groove, what we call normal, and send us ‘believing’ that we can do what we cannot actually do or at least we cannot maintain that new-found direction.

And when the solar surge subsides, there we are on the shore of life just as the outgoing tide strands a piece of driftwood on the beach.

I don’t know much about how this works, but science seems uninterested for the most part in the effects of extreme solar influx on the human psyche and our emotional systems. There are those of us that have some awareness of all this, like the old Dylan quote...”Something is happening here, but you don’t know what it is, do you Mr. Jones?”

I can’t say that I do know, at least all that well, yet at the same time I am aware of something going on, so I can’t fail ignorance by a meter or a foot. Just as our cars, computers, and what-not have intricate electrical systems, the human condition is said to have a vast system of 72,000 channels and winds that itself is very delicate.

Perhaps it does not take much to blow out the stops and send us careening into the future but off our contacts. That just happened to me during these latest very powerful solar flares and influxes. It blew my mind a bit, at least enough that I found myself, or woke back up in the midst of launching an extensive astrological forecast system. It seemed like a good idea at the time. LOL.

Nothing wrong with such a forecasting system, and I'm the guy to do it, but as I came back into my senses, it was obvious to me that, even though I built the entire system and have it running, this is not the gig for me, at least not right now, because I have plenty of other irons already in the fire that need attending.

And so, when the bubble popped, I found myself just out there, launched and operating a full-blown astrological forecast. It was like waking up after a night of drinking beer and wondering... 'Wha' happened?"

And so, this leads me to venture to say or at least ask this question about solar influx: Do these solar flare power-surges blow our mind enough that we are easily thrown off track and end up blithely wandering off our normal reservation on a wild goose chase, only to wake up as the extra energy throttles back, leaving us, well, holding the bag of whatever we came up with from our wandering vacation.

I'm just asking and looking for discussion.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Happy Winter Solstice!

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 21, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/188e92ed-3533-4903-a29d-04edb269834b_1024x1024.jpeg

I'm taking a moment, perhaps even the full day, to celebrate the Winter Solstice, Thursday, Dec 21 at 10:27 PM EST. I'm not celebrating the darkest day of the year, but rather celebrating that the Sun has turned northward toward spring. And each day from now on will bring a little more light. I'm all about light, and Margaret laughs each year when I make a big deal of the increasing light, starting in December.

On another note, it's discouraging to see Covid increasing it's foothold on society once again, but it's happening. I'm still wearing a mask in public and glad I have. All around me, people (and also in my own family) are coming down with the virus all over again. Some people have had it four times. Lately I've even seen a couple of other folks with masks at the grocery store aside from me.

And I'm back to writing blogs, although I tell myself that when I run out of things to write, I will just skip a day or so. And at the same time, I am selling off a bunch of fancy camera lenses and adding gear, mostly some lights, to my tiny photo studio.

I have great things in mind for photography this winter, not because I have added some gear, but because as of late I've been humbled and come to see that my photography is very easy to see, and everyone gets it (or can ignore it) as they see fit.

Above all, my photos say what I want to say, where words are so much more finicky and easily misinterpreted. Perhaps photos are too, but I'm not aware of that. I see no reason that, with a little work on my part, I can't raise the bar for my photography. I will just go deeper. Whether or not I like it we will see.

So, let's celebrate the return of the Sun and the increasing of the light from here to the Summer Solstice and another midsummer dream.

Try things out.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

More Than You Want to Know...

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 22, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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Yet, that's what I do, say something about what's happening around here.

I've been running a low fever for the last couple of days, and it takes a lot out of me. It seems to be the result of monkeying with one of my implants, which lost its cap and it had to be torqued back into place, putting too much pressure on the area, which is now recovering. I'm trying not to take any fever drugs in hopes it's doing its fever thing on my body.

Where do you go when you have a fever except to bed. And I'm not quite ready for sleep, so that leaves me between a rock and a hard place. I don't really have the energy to get anything worthwhile done and as mentioned, I'm not ready to sleep. So, here I am.

My first two pots of bush beans are exhausted, having not produced more than about 24 beans in their two stages. I have two more 12-inch pots of string beans getting ready to bloom. I imagine they will produce about the same, not much. Not doing that again.

I also have three 12-inch pots of collards that have sprouted, yet they look pretty leggy. This whole idea of growing greens indoors in winter may just be a pipe dream and not worth doing. I had to find out, regardless. I'm finding out.

As for sunspots, there is a new sunspot (3529) that is growing fast and aimed directly at Earth and sunspot 3519 just blew off two CMEs as part of a M4.2 and M3.3 class of solar flare. So, the Sun has not forgotten about us and has plans.

It's hard to ignore all of the untoward stuff that's going on around the world, with wars, etc., and the U.S. political scene heating up and as stupid as ever. All of these 'goings on' hang over me like a shroud and it takes effort to shake them off. We have to live our lives with all this overshadowing us.

[Photo taken by me today of a Japanese Iris.]

EMAIL

Our Celebrations

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 23, 2023

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Japanese Iris

Diffuser Frame (white PVC pipes)

By Michael Erlewine

As to what 'Celebrations' we celebrate is where we agree to differ and find our differences.

Slowly recovering here. Spent the wee hours of the night building a couple of photographic lighting frames, a large reflector (43x79 inches) and a 3.5 foot square diffuser. I will show the diffuser here, since the large frame is embedded in an overhead loft at the moment. It is the one with the white PVC frame.

I built them out of PVC ¾-inch pipe with elbow fittings and pipe-glued them together. And then mounted on the frames I put a thin diffuser on the smaller one (in the photo) and a reflector, with white on one side, black on the larger frame.

The reflector bounces light on the white side and absorbs light on the black side. The diffuser just cuts light. Together these two would cost about \$1100, yet my cost to build them was \$35 in parts. I had the fabric for them around.

As for what else is on my mind, I appreciate that we have passed the Winter Solstice and even if I cannot sense it yet, I know the light is building toward spring day by day. That to me is comforting. In my life, the Winter Solstice is my New Year. I seldom celebrate the calendar New Year unless I'm with friends that do, and with Covid such get-togethers are few if any. One of my favorite quotes about the Winter Solstice is:

"In the depths of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer." - Albert Camus

As for Christmas, we celebrate others celebrating Christmas, but we no longer keep a tree, but we will cook a special meal, so we do celebrate the celebration. If we still had kids at home, we would have a tree... at least if they were young.

My favorite holiday is the Summer Solstice and it's midsummer night's dream, although I'm sad to see the light begin to fade from then on. And for the Summer Solstice"

"Green was the silence, wet was the light, the month of June trembled like a butterfly. — Pablo Neruda

I count the days to the Summer Solstice, savoring each one, and dreading the moment when we pass over and the light begins, however so slightly at first, to diminish. I celebrate until the Summer Solstice, and when it passes, I find myself reminding myself to enjoy the light while it's there, yet that is small consolation, and from there on the hint of the coming winter is in the air.

I hate to be hurried.

[Photos by me.

EMAIL

Holiday Limbo

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 24, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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Yes, I have trouble with holidays and especially during the time between Christmas and New Years. And this comes from decades of running my own business and not liking that everything stopped or slowed down, the mail, contacts, shipping, and etc. I know. It's wrong and I am in the minority, but there it is. I like a regular time, no holidays and especially no made-up holidays. Forgive me.

And today, it's the night before the night before you know what, a phrase I heard years ago when my daughter Anne ran cross-country for Big Rapids High School, when on the 'night before the night before' across-country match, they would fill up on pasta and so forth because it would give them extra strength on the day of the race.

Anne went on to win the state championship for all high school women in Michigan and the following year she led her whole school team to a second state championship win, and received a scholarship to the University of Michigan track team, where she went.

"Those were the days my friend" as the song goes, and you know I have seen a LOT of track events, many taking most of a day. We would take the whole family (four kids), a picnic lunch, and some little tent or half-tent to rest in and spend the day. We travelled all over. And I believe Anne still holds the title for the fastest mile around here or one of those long distance runs.

I would say "I digress," but I'm not digressing. That's most of what I have to say right there. I don't have much else to offer. I continue to putter-around and build little things for my photo studio, and in the vacuum of time of these days before Christmas, Margaret wanted to watch the Cincinnati Bengals battle the Pittsburgh Steelers, and we did, some pro-football this afternoon. The Steelers came alive.

Today I've been at the table saw, the drill press, and especially the impact drill, my favorite tool; I have done some things.

Mostly, I'm trying to figure out three or four-point lighting in a small studio, especially since many days of late are cloudy with rain, and the studio lighting with natural daylight-settings indoors seem to work quite well. I wish I could turn on my own internal summer settings.

Of course, with photographing plants and flowers, I'm always fighting against the tide of flowers wilting, even if they are in a pot and watered. They wilt or as the garden experts like to say, "They are finishing up." I get that.

And that's about the size of it. My jaw is still very much trying to heal from the implant adjustment, and I'm trying to keep busy to not dwell on all that. Good luck!

Photo by me of Anne winning her first state cross country championship. Also flower photo by me.

EMAIL

Happy Holidays Everyone

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 24, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c5ed2ae7-9901-483b-a241-3fc78deef64d_1024x1024.webp

Just a little housekeeping first, and then I will quote a few words of sage advice that I live by from a great Mahasiddha on this night before Christmas.

More tales from the Covid in recent days. It is creeping back. I have managed to stay away from getting it so far, but to do that demands a price, and that's isolation and not seeing my loved ones as much as I would like. Margaret feels the same way. That would not be so bad, but as we are old now, contact with our grandchildren is at a premium. There is little to no more, more.

And what about those I know who have had Covid three or four times. What does that do to our body and system in general? I don't believe anyone really knows and by the time they do know, everyone will have had it, so I hope the long-term effects are not lasting. And I do have something to say about long-term effects and the past in general, if you will bear with me on this eve.

MY NOTE

Needless to say, this current time we are living through is not what I grew up with. I feel intense sorrow for those younger folks who perhaps will never know life as it was in the 1950s, 1960s, and on up until fairly recent times, especially since Covid came on the scene. Yes, we had scary things back then, like the polio scare and the school drills where we were forced to cower under our tiny school desks in case the Soviets attacked with nuclear bombs. IMO, those scary events left indelible scars.

Yet, it seems that today freedom is so confined compared to those days. We were ignorant. We had fresh air. Fresh water. Freedom to roam the fields and woods without the specter of Lyme disease and other things like that. And before Covid, we had the freedom to assemble and be with others as long as we wanted, with no masks or worries of encountering anything worse than perhaps occasionally someone's bad breath.

And those who are young now, my grandchildren, are being brought up in a world we can all see is very different than before. The world is starting to resemble a scene out of the original "Blade Runner" with Harrison Ford.

Covid makes it difficult to even see my kids or grandkids without precautions, masks, and all that. I imagine that freedom is relative to the times we are brought up in, and what we have never known, we have never known. My grandkids don't know what they are missing, yet I know what they are missing and even my kids don't know what we knew back in the 1950s as freedom. And so, I have this to say:

As mentioned, never mind my grandkids, my kids have little idea what change has brought from the 1950s into the present. I am again reminded of this poem by W.B. Yeats:

MEMORY

"ONE had a lovely face,
And two or three had charm,
But charm and face were in vain
Because the mountain grass
Cannot but keep the form
Where the mountain hare has lain."

That poem, like much of Yeats, is a little too maudlin for me, but those last three lines, are unavoidable, "Because the mountain grass cannot but keep the form where the mountain hare has lain." That's telling.

Yes, we are left with the imprints, our impressions,
the indents as to where and who we were back then. They linger in the mind.
How can we communicate what our grandchildren have never known? They have no idea what we are talking about. That's just Grandpa's memories, his stories.

The world as I knew it has not expanded, but rather seems to have shrunk, desiccated, and many freedoms have dried up and blown away, freedoms that only can be described and yet we know words themselves cannot hold those memories. And it's not all the far political right that's a cause. We are increasingly rule-ridden by the left, as well.

And no amount of old photos has captured the expansive freedom that we have lost, freedoms that have expired as we soon will ourselves. It seems that nature keeps all things fresh because there is no one left to tell the tale of the truth of what we have lost. We agree to forget what we find so hard to remember.

Freedom is always of the moment, what we have now, what we have not yet lost, and not what we have freely forfeited, what we put no value on until it was no more. We try to remember, to recall, yet that's an effort. Time heals all wounds. We forget.

And we can't quite re-member a memory, much less reanimate it and have it walk the earth again. That's what memories are, 'memories', images that sound like this.

It seems that memories are a somewhat desperate attempt to recall what has already slipped through our fingers like water through a sieve. Too late have we thought to gather and bottle this up for the future, for those to savor and celebrate who are yet to come. It can't be done, yet we try.

Is that what storytelling has been about all along?

Memories, a 'will-o-the-wisp', phantoms of the mind, that like fireflies, flicker on and off, and then vanish in the night of time.

Looking at old photos, home movies, only captures the outer shell of something much more. Again, the Yeats's poem, and the line "Because the mountain grass cannot but keep the form where the mountain hare has lain." And now for the sage advice I mentioned earlier. These words of advice are all the dharma we need.

THE ADVICE

Is this why the great Mahasiddhas like Tilopa point out "Don't Prolong the Past," because you can't prolong a past that is already busy vanishing away. It's like trying to carry water in our hands. It runs through our fingers. The past cannot be resuscitated. And this, without hope.

Tilopa's admonition to not prolong the past is not just good advice. It keeps us to the present moment and our attempts to appreciate or measure the past and keep it in mind are futile. Don't prolong it.

And Tilopa's next admonition is just as direct, "Don't Invite the Future." There is no point in that because the future does not exist yet. Try it. Expectations can't define and we can't expect to find. That's the nature of the mind.

And so, the moral of this story, at least for me, is that we are confined to the present moment, kept there, like it or not. And there is yet another admonition from Tilopa that addresses the present moment, and this one is just as devastating:

"Don't Alter the Present."

There is nothing we can do to dress up or improve the present moment, no alteration that will not just further obscure this moment. Like the old blues song “Take your fingers off it. Don’t you dare touch it, because it don’t belong to you.”

And then, the finale, the last of Tilopa’s admonitions rings out and is crushingly decisive:

“Relax, As It Is.”

Good luck! For me, these words of advice are the essence of the dharma. These precious verses, worth more than silver or gold, contain a lifetime of wisdom inset and embedded in just a few words.

If you relate these admonitions of the Mahasiddha Tilopa to what I said earlier about memory and the past, the inability to re-member anything, then perhaps you will catch my meaning.

This is our heritage, a blank slate, and our ability to forget is what prevents us from being ossified by time immemorial.

We agree to forget what we find so hard to remember.

Given all that, I do wish all of us a Merry Christmas.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Moving On

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 27, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ca5b81bf-635b-4962-b1d3-a23e909d1831_2272x1704.jpeg

Forward motion starts by taking our foot off the brake and just letting go. And then it is one foot in front of the other, straight on till morning.

As mentioned in an earlier post, these are what I call the Limbo days, the days between Christmas and the New Year. They are empty of regularity, days mostly lost to me, but that's my problem.

They remind me of 2004 on one of our trips to Tibet, when we travelled 217 miles on the road to the town of Yushu (Jyekundo) in the Qinghai province in China, and the road from Xining to Yushu still follows the Qinghai-Tibet Highway which includes crossing three of the high passes in Tibet, like one at 17,160 feet. At these high passes, you will often find nothing but a small stupa with long strings of prayer flags tied to it all around, the entire ground strewn with white scarves, and everything just blowing in the wind. And perhaps a few other travelers are also paying their respects.

On those high passes, one does not stay long. Breathing can be difficult. Say a few prayers and climb back into the van, bus, or jeep and lumber on down the mountain into the next valley or plateau.

There are no trees up that high and large birds (hawks, etc.) walk around on the ground. If you are on a large bus, most get out and walk as far as they need to, yet still in plain sight, and take a pee. Women have special dresses that create like a little tent to hide themselves. You have never been so high, and you don't stay there long.

And often it is very cold up there. And the light up that high is fierce, the difference between standing in the sun where you can burn and standing in a shadow a few feet away which is freezing. No, it is not Mount Everest high, but it is as close as I need to get.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me, and a photo of me in 2004 walking back from a bathroom break on the Qinghai-Tibet Highway, taken by a friend W. Jang.]

EMAIL

Sweet Potato Heaven

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 28, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/16030d1b-2b99-49b7-b3df-261c93727a41_2048x1657.jpeg

Here are a collection of sweet potatoes, several varieties, including the delicious Japanese sweet potato. They remind me of a hot tub on a cruise ship.

Anyway, I'm bungling on through these extra five days from Christmas to New Year to complete the Earth's 360-degree orbit of the Sun in the year.

And I've been busy shaping my small photo studio, moving things around, hanging and rehangng studio lights until I see a workflow emerging. It's coming along. However, lately life has been a little touchy, IMO.

For on, it's been unseasonably warm of late, almost like spring, but you can't fool me. I know that winter is just around the corner. Of that, I'm sure.

Am I happy? Not really all that much, but who's counting? I'm learning to live what life brings, or trying to, even if I don't like it much. What a rag-tag bunch of life it has been since Covid came along. I wonder if things will ever normalize again. Or is this what they call the 'new normal'?

The Sun comes up each morning and I still put my pants on one leg at a time. Other than that, it's anyone's guess where these times are headed. All around me, or so it seems, everything is swirling, and I've stopped noting the complaints I have and instead do my best to count my blessings. And what times these are!

I don't recall having so many problems to sort out every day, and I just keep on sorting. There's a certain beauty to it all or, more accurately, I'm certain there is a beauty to all this, if only I could find it. It's sobering, for sure.

"These are the times that try men's souls" as Thomas Paine put it in December of 1776, and it seems we all get a share of that trial this December some 250 years later.

And as for more change than we ae used to, we probably have as much as another year before we reach the peak of the sunspot cycle, at which time these intense solar flares will begin to decline. Until then, it's all uphill with the solar flares and CMEs; hang on to your hat.

We will have to withstand shocks outbreaking, continued solar flares torquing our insides until that time.

[Cellphone photo by me.]

EMAIL

Housekeeping

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

December 29, 2023

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/af7c182a-e4ba-48f0-9151-11a4e053c400_1365x2048.jpeg

[Photo by Me]

By Michael Erlewine

It's Handy Mike, back again. This time I'm crawling into the attic to install a HDPE Polyethylene vapor barrier over exposed fiberglass insulation, wearing gloves, glasses, and a face mask.

The ceiling is too low to stand up, so I'm kind of going on my hands and knees to get to the way back where the insulation is exposed. There are things I'd rather do and I'll be using a staplegun and wide tape to get the job done. The joists are 10-feet and they are spaced two-feet apart, so those are the dimensions. Not all of the attic has to be covered. As mentioned, most of the work is way back in the crawl space.

Putting housework aside, everything of late has been a little too much, IMO. So many knives out around the world. It's like an elaborate game of Pick-Up-Sticks if anyone remembers that, where each step has to be made very carefully.

Most of us are just wherever we are, doing our regular routines as best we can, and trying to not be distracted by all the upset in the world. One foot in front of the other is my refrain. Don't let it run you ragged.

Yet, a bit ragged we are, at least I am, with just this continually invasive political strife all around us. And we have almost a whole year of politics coming for us, and it's already started.

IMO, we don't need a dictator for president. I like the U.S. Constitution just fine and the liberties it guarantees. I have been to China twice and for weeks at a time at that. No thanks to that either.

Nevertheless, it is hard to ignore what's going on around us politically, nationally, and internationally, not to mention Covid and its wake which rumble on.

Even in my own family and extended family, people are still coming down with Covid and some perhaps have Long Covid, not getting really well after months.

And so, where are the days when we could freely gather and hang out, have extended family events, without masks and/or waiting for days to be safe? In these times, Covid is the curse of growing older, a time when we need contact with our family and can't have it, unless we want to play Russian Roulette with the virus.

Meanwhile, I'm spinning my wheels here searching for a solution to this Covid situation. It does not seem to be going away or even receding into the background, with the probability of getting Covid as small. The news says that it is increasing in strength now that winter has us trapped inside.

Anyway, it's hard not to deal with Covid when it is right there all the time, the moment you leave home. And I can't invite you in unless we agree on certain precautions. And so, we will be seeing one another in person not at all.

So, getting around all of that, Covid, politics, wars, unrest, etc. leaves little room or leeway for alternatives to coping with all the above. I may see some of you on Zoom.

[Photo by me and Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Happy New Year

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 1, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/95b8f737-e98b-403f-ab10-c9efbc06766c_1554x2048.jpeg

First, Happy New Year! And I actually have some words to share about what is going on around us.

I've been writing these daily blogs for something like 16 years. And my guiding principle has been to share where I'm at and say something about what I'm going through as clearly as I can. And as you all know, I write a lot.

However, lately that well has run dry. At first, I assumed this is just me, and it still may well be. Yet, more and more, I believe it is SIGN of these times, rather than something personal to me. And my well running dry is sending me a message over and over that I have to hear and listen to. I believe we all do.

To repeat, lately, in the past weeks I have kind of run out of threads that lead to writing. I have tried to wait it out, but I've waited long enough now that it looks to me that I have to write about, as I always do, what's happening for me and share that. This is that share.

From what I can see, given my best understanding, is that in the coming time, this next year, words alone are not going to cut it, and I work words as best I know how. We must go beyond words to action, each one of us.

As mentioned, as of late, my intuitive threads have been coming up empty, over and over. And I have worked on this for weeks now and keep coming to the same conclusion. And so, I'm concluding.

I have checked and checked and checked, but I can't come up with the tip of the thread or even an edge that I can pick up and follow, meaning follow and get back to the way it has been for us until now. I see now this is not the problem. That's the message!

For me, the end of hope for the past is not a thread that leads anywhere. There is no 'next', 'more' that will lead back to the same as we have known until now. And this is because we are not somewhere we know. This is a new time, IMO, and we have to wake up to that. Waking up is key.

Because I can find no further reference and by that get back to what we have known as life, there is nothing there, no meaning pointing to what we already know or can remember. It's a memory and not a future.

And without a reference there is no meaning, no next step, because we are not somewhere familiar any longer. That's the point. These are new times.

And frustrating as it is, I believe it is a kindness not to be led on, but rather to remain right where we are, effectively going nowhere just now. In other words, we have gone all the way to nowhere and found nothing. And now that I am there and accept that, I'm also here again, and waking up. I'm accepting this change and that itself is clarifying.

In brief, the benefit of this thinking, these thoughts, is clarity, the lack of any reference pointing beyond this moment trying to find the past. For me, clarity is its own meaning.

Continually kicking the can down the road is the way of the past, this world of Samsara, endless reification and hyperbole. Where it stops, nobody knows.

And when it does stop, if we stop pushing that stone uphill, 'Clarity' is the result and we will have meaning once again. The lack of hyperbole, if we can get there and cut out the reification, putting lipstick on a pig, is self-defining, defined by itself. That, IMO, is a sign of truth. Self-referencing with no referral, no hope and no escape. Just being present.

I am convinced that we are entering a time not of words but of action, being present and true, and doing something about our situation, each one of us. This is a New Year.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

“THE TIMES THEY ARE-A-CHANGIN’ ”

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 1, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4281fa17-c098-4a0a-b9c2-4778dd0018be_1365x2048.jpeg

Come gather 'round people Wherever you roam And admit that the waters
Around you have grown And accept it that soon You'll be drenched to the
bone If your time to you is worth savin' And you better start swimmin' Or
you'll sink like a stone For the times they are a-changin'

- Bob Dylan

These times remind me of when I had my major stroke; I could not find a thread or way back into my own history, try as I might. It took weeks to reestablish some sort of history and reconnect.

And that's the way I have felt lately, that the pathways to our own recent past, perhaps before Covid, etc. have closed and are no longer easy to find. I can't in good faith invoke that spirit or way of living that was active only a few years ago. And I have really tried. It's shallow compared to right now. We can't go back.

And so, as mentioned in my New Year post, I cannot pick up the thread to those recent times, so that I might add to that history. It's gone void and rings false. I'm not one to beat a dead horse, so after many weeks of pushing that envelope, I conclude that there is a reason for my failure to reanimate the past. It's gone.

And that's because the past has passed, thrusting us into new times, times that require a new or different response or reaction on our part. I believe that's where we find ourselves now.

It's finally gotten my attention enough that I have ceased to beat the drum to resurrect our past way of being which we have enjoyed until a few years ago when Covid arose. We have changed.

What these new times will demand of us we have yet to determine, and it's very much up to us how we take all this. I have pointed out, repeatedly, that all this aligns with the peaking of the sunspot cycle in the next year or so, now bringing more and more intense solar flares and CMEs (Coronal Mass Ejections). They are running tandem right now, this sense of loss, and struggling against this time of solar inundation is, well, hopeless.

Better to work with the tide of change, whether enhanced by the solar cycle or not. To repeat myself, it is we who will decide how to take and work with these new times that are upon us. We can work with the rising tide or struggle against it.

It would seem best to use this influx of change following the old maxim "A rising tide raises all boats." That's my choice and I am willing to shift my view to work with the tide as I see how that can be done.

I'm an astrologer, not a fortune teller. I try to understand what the changing solar and cosmic conditions mean, and how we can use them. Here that means we, each of us, are going to decide how we react or respond to these changing times. Reaction we already are doing, and that's not so good. By responding appropriately, we have an opportunity to share these times as we are able.

I'd love to hear how each of you are taking all this.

[HOUSEKEEPING: Photo by me. Today was the day I, on my hands and knees, in the attic crawlspace, made it to the way back and put in sheets of 6mm vinyl over 10-foot rafters to keep the fiberglass from hanging out and falling down. Dirty job. Had to wash all my clothes and myself as well. At least that's done. Michigan Wolverine football today at 5 PM EST. Gonna' make popcorn, sliced apple, and watch it with Margaret.]

EMAIL

The Turn of the Screw

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 3, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/822e9d05-47ff-42e4-8b4b-745679264a08_1024x1024.jpeg

Life is always upping the ante, raising the bar. I just get kind of comfortable delivering to myself my own thoughts, sensing I'm on the right course, and a bit of chaos comes along, upsets the applecart, and scrambles the parameters all over again. And after the smoke clears and the fallout falls out, I find a new set of parameters in place, and they are always more strict, yet somehow also very authentic. The turn of the screw.

I cannot disagree with the new requirements and although they are more unforgiving, at the same time, they also are more integral. And integral is an offer I can't refuse; I am always game for the authentic. What is authentic?

If I can adjust and get used to the new rules, the raising of the bar, I come out of it a better kind of me, and that's a good thing.

The cost is some kind of re-tooling on my part, being more realistic, and exploring the rules of the new 'me', so to speak.

Yet, when it all calms down and becomes normal, I find that I am good to go, better than I was, more actually there, so who can complain?

I'm going through one of those times now, in the middle of all the chaos in the world right now, the wars, the politics, the Covid, and on and on. It's disorienting by definition, of course.

This amounts to realizing the uselessness, the ineffectualness, of my current view and state of mind, and just by seeing that is enough to pop the balloon I have been in, and shrink me down to a more efficient self-size, if you follow me.

Of course, this is a comedown from being more puffed up, a reevaluation, and requires a back-to-the-drawing-board session. The teardown is painful, yet there is nothing to regret because its been exposed by me as not authentic. And even I agree that's not good, and so, with no argument I find myself rebuilding my house of cards, once again, hopefully on a more firm foundation.

There you have it, pretty well expressed, so there should be little doubt what I am talking about here.

This is the power of a realization. Nothing more need be said. Once realized, reorganization follows automatically. No real choice because with realization WE are the realizer. It's doesn't get better or more direct than that. A realization is a direct experience. A realization is a taste of non-duality, and gives us an idea of what non-dual meditation is all about.

So, color me caught in my own vice grip. I've been served, and by me. I have no choice but to follow through. Does this happen to you?

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Endemic Solare Flares

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 5, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3a927176-5249-4b6e-b653-fef06e5f7dd1_732x732.jpeg

The increase in solar flares over the next year, as the sunspot cycle reaches a maximum, will no doubt release a slew of new everything: inventions, start-ups, trends, and all things creative.

Which of these will survive is another story, because the onslaught of solar change drives us forward, yet the direction of this energy depends on how prepared we are to launch anything. Many will skyrocket up and fall back down to earth as non-starters.

And it's not like we are bystanders, watching all this happen. The same change that drives entrepreneurs drives us and at the same time. So, we had best watch or mind our P's and Q's. because we are not immune from having to deal with this same surge of change. Change is like cash. Spend it if you have it, but whether you end up with a sound investment is another matter.

Most of us are just blown around by the winds of change and end up disoriented or overwhelmed by it. We ride these winds at our own risk or hunker down and wait it out. Left to our own devices, this rush of sudden change will pop us right out of our normal groove and into traffic. I have studied this for years, and I still fall victim to launching off in this or that new direction thinking I'm going places, only to come crawling back sometime later, searching for my normal groove.

Today, like many days lately, there was a strong, very intense, solar flare. You can watch it through a special telescope or wrestle with it inside us as it rips through.

I have tried to be pliant, flexible, and roll with solar change as it's beamed in. However, as they say, that and a ticket will get me a ride on the bus. I am easily victimized by false starts based on the temporary rush of change that I believe I can easily use.

I can use it, but it just as easily falls away leaving me stranded in a drydock of one kind or another and wishing I had just held on tight until the flare passed rather than try to surf it.

Anyway, already today (Thursday January 4th) has already seen a M.4-Class flare that erupted at 8:55 PM EST January 3rd, last night. CME (Coronal Mass Ejection) alerts have already been issued by the space scientists.

Perhaps you don't connect what's going on with explosions on the Sun with what's happening here on Earth, yet you might find that they match up very well. The Sun has been erupting all this last year or so, and you can measure for yourself whether you feel any effects from all the turmoil in wars, politics, etc. that we are undergoing down here on Earth.

I know. Scientists have not gotten around to looking at what solar intensity does to us internally, psychologically and emotionally, but they are starting to. And we, like or not, are going through whatever we are going through, whether science alerts us to it or not.

Space scientists are monitoring and still concerned about the effects on Earth of the huge solar X-5-flare that happened on New Year Eve. Radio transmissions are being absorbed, many blacked out or attenuated. These are caused by protons that were accelerated by the New Year's Eve flare, and are hitting our planet, funneling into the poles and disrupting shortwave radio. And these can go on for days.

However, these same scientists have not managed to get around to wondering if these solar flares also affect us internally or mentally. Yet, those of us sensitive to them know they do affect us very directly. It is easy for you to monitor the current state of the Sun/Earth relationship by using the following URL.

"Solar Ham"

<https://www.solarham.net/index.htm>

"Space Weather"

<https://spaceweather.com/>

There is no use in my parroting what the above URLs tell us, so if you care about this, starting monitoring what is going on up there with what you are experiencing down here. For me, such investigation is a one-way trip. Once we become aware of the connection, we value this information.

What are the psychological, emotional, and spiritual ramifications of these current massive solar flares? Since science won't focus on them, that leaves us to work this out for ourselves. And you won't learn much by looking outside at the photos of the solar flares. We have to look inside at what is going on right now with us.

It seems from message from my family and folks that the current inner state for many is disoriented, overwhelming, and for mosty, depressing. Why do you think that is and could it have any relationship to these pockets and blasts of energy coming from the Sun?

We have to figure this out for ourselves by actually considering what's going on inside us right now and begin to monitor our own inner activity. I don't see a choice. The government does not seem to notice anything. Like so many things these days, it's up to us to do it ourselves.

[Current photo of the Sun.]

EMAIL

The Little Deaths in Life

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 6, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e68c7099-7ee1-4717-960c-defb286d5c42_1024x1024.jpeg

Like the snake that sheds its skin or the insect larvae that molt, we do the same thing mentally and spiritually.

Whatever we are and wherever we are in our progress, we reach a point where we outgrow ourselves and have to cast off the current shell of our personality and inherit afresh a new exterior skin or View. We see things differently. We change.

I believe we vary as to how often this happens, how it comes about, and how unsettling it is for us, but the result appears to always be the same. We are, in a small way, born again or _____ are forced to have a new take on things.

However, much like birth, this is not a painless event for us, although we may look forward to it. We literally are turned inside out, turning the aging Self-view that we have had out, and allowing a fresh approach in to take over. It just happens. So, who are we, the old or the new, or both? One can only assume that the real death, when we pass on from life, is somewhat similar.

And this new 'skin', so to speak, is at first very tender, easily impressed and far too sensitive, at least until our new shell or personality toughens and can take the wear and tear of a life being lived.

As for me, no matter how I try, I can't see these shifts or changes coming, only that I know they come. The first sign of impending change for me is when my little house-of-cards (which I call my Self) takes a hit and comes tumbling down around me. In other words, I experience a loss, not a gain. The gain takes time, and comes later.

In this process, I become disenchanted with myself, and begin to see through the veneer I have gilded myself in, and having seen this, I begin to cast it off. I'm no longer authentic in my own eyes and opinion. Yet, it seems that I feel sadness or reluctance about losing the familiar, being upset, and forced to face change head-on, the mere fact that I'm changing.

It's a little death in life that we call 'change', change that's large enough that we can't escape witnessing and being in the midst of it. As mentioned, it

seems that my first reaction to the onset of this kind of change is a sense of loss, that I am losing something I know and love, that I am changing more than just a little, and into what I don't quite know. And we can't know, because that's what's changing, our 'me, myself, and I'.

Yet, having done this many times now, it seems I always come out of it better, with a fresh view, more apt and able. Nevertheless, it seems that birth of any kind, even on a small scale, is very disrupting if not downright painful.

Perhaps, it's just the fear of the unknown or the uncertainty of change itself and facing it. I believe the word 'molt' expresses it clearly. I am not totally changed, but I do molt or cast off my previous personality to a marked degree, and reform or reassemble myself afresh. Yes, I'm still 'Michael Erlewine' alright, and yet I'm different too, at least until the difference settles down into the same, and becomes a new normal.

As for what happens to my old Self, the one that's passing away, it seems we agree to forget what we find too hard to remember. It's just easier that way.

I mention this just to see whether anyone out there also does this. I would imagine we all do, in one way or another.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Sunspots Turn Earthward

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 19, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/9d9bd5c3-85b9-437c-b101-ff4fe6ccb8e2_864x1376.jpeg

The sun has been very quiet for about a week now, but some large sunspots on the far side of the sun will be turning in Earth's direction soon, and some of them are very active scientists tell us.

We have had solar flares with us as part of our Earth-life equation literally forever. It's not that flares are new or anything like that. We not only live with them, but also live off or from them. Sunlight is essential for life here on Earth. Additionally, solar flare energy surges, allow us to draw inspiration and creativity from large solar influx. Solar flares are the main arbiter of large-scale change for those of us here on Earth.

As a group, society is not aware of solar flares and the flares insistent influence on us other than outwardly as scientists study, physically. Yet in time, I believe understanding of solar flare influence on our emotional and psychological well-being will emerge for what it is, that flares from the Sun force change upon us and it's up to us whether we are able to use that change productively or just ride out the increased change as best we can, hanging on to our hats.

The huge disparity between normal sunlight and the packets of energy that Earth has to digest in times of solar flares and the resulting CMEs (Corona Mass Ejection) is something that space scientists are studying in terms of their outer effect on radio signals and power grids, but they have yet to seriously look into and answer the question as to what this intense solar emission does to us mentally and psychologically.

To say there is no effect, IMO, is ridiculous. How many more years are we going to wait for someone to look into this? Some of us are already doing this.

Solar energy packets affecting us psychologically and even spiritually and are just another one of those things that science will ignore until it is unavoidable, at which time suddenly space scientists will reverse their opinion and declare solar flare emission an important, even key, factor in human creativity and change.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Mixing: Stirred But Not Shaken

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 22, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/48ce00a2-c795-4074-96ea-14bb57b26633_1365x2048.jpeg

My photography has come a long way from when I was doing nature photography at the level of field guides. I started with close-up photography in 1956, using a Kodak Retina 2a, a light meter, some close-up lenses, and a tripod loaned to me by my father.

And then, over the years, I got more and more detail oriented until I mastered a photo technique called 'focus stacking', where a single photo could be made up of 100 or more single photographs until everything (at least all that you wanted) was in focus. I have taken close to 1,000,000 photos over the years, many of them being the stacks or layers of photos I mentioned.

However, in recent years I have begun to mix in a single photograph, areas of precise focus, while leaving the rest of the photo in a profusion of out-of-focus colors, sometimes called 'Bokeh' in photography or 'Bouquet'.

It's my way of seeing or reminding myself that our world of vision is something like a sea of light in which float various rafts of focus or consciousness. Or it is like drawings that great draftsmen have made, pencil drawings that are unfinished or like M.C. Escher's pencil sketch named "Drawing Hands."

I like precise detail in recursion, focus floating in a sea of bokeh, more or less like the photo included here that I took today.

I like the feeling that we are knee-deep in creating our own world, quite busy detailing chaos or creating detail in chaos.

Or is it that many of my stacked photos have points of focus everywhere, so there is no one point of focus as traditional photos have, no single point drawing your mind consciously or unconsciously to itself, a point of view. In a stacked photo, everything can be in focus and the eye is free to look wherever we wish because there is not one point of focus.

Of course, I moved through that phase a while ago, and today I like, as mentioned, islands of focus that are awash or floating in a sea of sameness.

I am saying something by this, at least to myself.

In my photography, I don't want to just spell it all out and call that a day. I want to suggest or peek at detail that itself is like a salt crystal forming within a jar of brine.

In other words, the detail or point of focus is not where we start or what gets pointed out to us, but rather it is the last to form and the first to dissolve, that is: if there is a point at all.

There is no point to life. No beginning and no place to end up or be. There is no permanent or existential being, again, no point at all. Dharma is a process of diss-a-point-ment.

The best I could say is that the process itself IS the point of it all, and that the way we travel is where we are traveling to. Or, if you have to have a point, then there is no real point to a process other than itself – the process.

And everywhere we look, recursion rears its head.

This darkish poem I wrote back in my youth, as a child of the 1960s:

“Look at yourself, first yet first,

No better, and yet not worse.

Now get yourself together in a bunch,

And call what carriage as you may your hearse.”

I like walking along the rim or edge of sense, not losing touch, but also staying aware. And by ‘touch’ I mean immersion, and full immersion at that, and staying aware as well, at the same time or in aseamless succession.

Do I believe my photos express something? Yes, I do, yet it may not be something you enjoy like I enjoy. I like the tightrope between being and non-being, which is called ‘becoming’, the borderline where sense and nonsense touch each other and then let go. And the reason I like that is, as best as I determine, is that’s the way it is.

I like the sampling, the immersion and then letting go, absorption and reflecting, like a heart beating or the breath breathing.

[Photo taken today as an example of what I am explaining here.]

EMAIL

I Ain't Doin' It!

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 23, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/dddab594-7d69-4519-ae4e-53042d971f06_3024x4032.jpeg

Whatever it is, I ain't doin' it, at least not today. I am not doing all my weight training. I'm not taking a shower, and I'm not even going to brush my teeth, at least not for a while.

And I am going to make a big breakfast of potatoes, onions, a couple of fake sausages and perhaps some green peas....browning them up in a saucepan. And I will have a cup of ersatz coffee with barista oat milk.

And I have not written a blog and perhaps won't, other than this, which becomes my blog.

I might not do anything worthwhile unless I feel like it and threaten to perhaps even watch a reality TV show.

The solar flares are back and amping up. The bitter cold is abating, a little bit. Plenty of snow is still everywhere around here.

I don't know what I will do today. Anyone else ever feel this way?

EMAIL

"The Tribe Has Spoken"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 24, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3c58c6c7-a85e-4ccf-9c9c-0ef93fce19b1_750x500.webp

I don't have time for a thoroughgoing review, but if you can hold your nose and ignore everything you don't like about the 'Survivor' series, you can learn something; at least I have.

"Survivor" is a good name because the show has survived for decades and is still going. It is said to be the number one reality show on TV. I'm sure many Media PHD candidates are writing their theses on "Survivor." And so, what's so good about it?

I like reality TV, the more 'real', the better IMO. I am tired of fiction and movies and tend to like all kinds of reality stuff. I manage to garner information and experience from things others might not be able to stomach.

A good example, as mentioned, is the "Survivor" Series that is still streaming, now in its 45 season or so. If you are interested in social psychology, 'Survivor' is ripe with information. One could go to school on it and learn. I have.

True, I have to be a little forgiving (and not too critical) if I want to watch it. The host, Jeff Probst, has hosted game shows in the distant past and doesn't like the role of salesman, yet of course he is, a bit like a used-car salesman.

When asked, he describes himself as a "student of the human condition" and in particular a 'storyteller'. And one of his endearing features is that Probst himself is not exactly even tempered, and his edge is often visible just under his skin.

I have watched him flicker and flair up and it's obvious that he wants to object to all kinds of behavior that the tribe members expose him too, especially if a contestant wimps out or quits. Probst does not like his contestants giving up, and every now and then the show can be a little cruel and hard to take.

Like the time Probst brought the spouses and loved ones of his contestants all the way from the U.S. to the jungle, and then would not allow them to see their kids or family (except from a distance) unless they chewed up and swallowed things like a dead tarantula, a large mushy dead water beetle, live grubs, a spoonful of ants, and a lot more – all of them.

Some of the parents and family could do nothing more than gag and throw up. Some just refused. It's one thing to ask the contestants to do this, but quite another to make their kin do this if they want to see their kids, etc. Hard core.

Or, in Africa, shooting an arrow-like device into a cow, watching the blood shoot out into the air, then capturing and draining the blood, forcing the players to drink a large glass of warm blood. Things like that I find beyond the pale. Otherwise, Probst is lovable enough.

And the premise of the show is that there are two tribes of eight contestants each, tribes, that battle and compete with one another for rewards and immunity from going to what is called the 'Tribal Council', where they have to vote off one of their own tribe. Very painful.

And as to the quality of the players and contestants, I question, especially in the early shows. They either were hard up for contestants, or they purposely wanted to include folks that were incredibly unrealistic or naïve. It's not like many had any real experience with surviving or were even game for it. Many of the younger ones seem they are more there for a social party or just because it's cool, with little skills and zero knowledge as to what they are getting into. Especially kids that grew up on "Survivor." It is some kind of lark for them

In other words, a great many seem to look at the show as some kind of cool vacation, a place to hang out. And there are all ages present on the show, everyone from the so-called 'Silent Generation (circa 1925 to 1945), to Baby Boomers (circa 1946 to 1964), and Generation X (circa 1965 to 1980), Millennial Generation (circa 1981 to 1996), to Gen Z (post-Millennial) (circa 1997 to 2012).

A lot of the younger generations apparently don't want to work 'for the team' or be directed in any way as to how to survive, and especially being told what to do, even if the instructor is trying to help them build cover, find water, and food..

For example, one of the players was an ex-Navy Seal, who knew tons about how to survive in the jungle. Seeing how naïve many of the younger players were, he tried to organize and instruct them, only to be voted off the island because he was too bossy. They should have used his talents to get shelter, water, and food and then vote him off. Instead they were miserable, with no shelter, not water, and no fire.

Or the famous NFL football coach, 67-year old Jimmy Johnson, voted off without letting him share much about what he has learned. This happens a

lot, that those who try to lead or organize offend the others and get voted off the island early on.

And the same with those who excel at anything, or are handsome, pretty, and too sexy, especially young women. “Get them off the island” seems to be the refrain, especially those with promise or who appear powerful.

This happens constantly, and unless they are control freaks or con artists who can assemble a harem of followers quickly, and magnetize/hypnotize them, they are soon gone. In other words, to a great extent, the ‘common denominator’ ends up ruling in ‘Survivor’. And it gets pretty ‘common’.

Many naïve players’ philosophy is to do very little work and lay around much of the day chit-chatting, like it’s a party or a social event. And no amount of warning them that the show is called ‘Survivor’ for a reason seems to help.

And of course, torrential rains, even cyclones, arise and wipe out their lodging or lack of it. They can’t sleep because of the rain, and the sudden cold nights, with few clothes, leaving them shivering in the rain, with no roof, and very little water or food. If they can’t find water, they can’t boil it to drink.

The tribes, at least in the beginning, have no way of having a fire, unless they can rub two sticks together, which few can. And there often is so little food that losing 30-40 lbs. of weight in a month is common. And they are covered with pimples and bug bites from head to toe, often getting infected.

And what little tools they have can be soon lost, like fishhooks, or losing their fish spear in the surf, accidentally burning up their camp, ripping their clothes, and on and on. And they steal from one another, and lie, hide key tools, or bury them.

Personally, one of my favorite features in Survivor are the jungle-like habitats where they take place, places like the Amazon rain forest, the Australian Outback, the African Veldt, Marquesas Islands, Thailand, Panama, Guatemala, Cook Islands, Fiji, Gabon, Samoa, Nicaragua, Philippines, Cambodia, and many others.

With my natural love of jungles, swamps, rain forest, and the plants and wildlife in tropical climates, something I like all by itself. Where else are you going to find 43-64 minutes of 661 episodes that, aside from the social psychology, give you a long look at various climates and their vegetation, moment by moment and day by day?

One thing that troubles me as a trained herpetologist is that in the later seasons of Survivor, small idols are hidden around the jungle, in the hollows of

trees, crevices, and whatever. Many of these seasons are in tropical forests and jungles, where there are a number of varieties of poisonous snakes.

And when these idol hunters go around sticking their bare hands into every tree trunk or hole in the ground and feeling around, it is a foolish thing to do. The chances of grabbing onto to a poisonous snake, centipede, scorpion, or spider, and so on is very possible. I would never do that, and they should warn each of the contestants coming in.

I don't see any warning happening... much... in the Survivor episodes.

The jungle is a very special place and has to be treated with care and caution. I have been to the jungles of Nepa where even the short walkways in our camp killed many folks each year from snakebite. I and have been into the Florida Everglades many times

And it's interesting (and a little scary) to see the constant maneuvering, deceiving, and all the outright lies that are told constantly.

And what is actually remarkable are the guys who attach themselves to a couple of young ladies who follow them. And powerful women do that same thing, mostly with younger women, yet with guys too. These blind followers are called 'goats'.

And the con artists lead the ladies around and tell them who to vote off the island. And most of the time it seems that it never occurs to the ladies that they outnumber the guy(s) and could vote them out and have their freedom. They don't.

Occasionally a group of women will realize their power and vote all the lying manipulating guys off the island and strategize on their own.

I probably have watched too much of this show and gotten good at it. I soon got tired of all the stunts and games carried on, either for some kind of reward or for temporary immunity.

Aside from the jungle environment, what interests me are the social interactions, the magnetism and downright hypnotism taking place, and the follow-the-leader mentality, like lemmings off a cliff.

This show is very much a microcosm of the world we live in, more than I at first could have imagined. A bunch of players struggle to be honest despite their own hypocrisy, but failing, either getting carried away with themselves or purposely misleading those under their spell. One of the most famous 'evil' was "Johnny Fair-play," who took wicked pleasure in deceiving others on the show.

And the reason for this, which is always in the background, is winning a million dollars. And of course, there are a few who are openly delighted with taking advantage of others, like taking candy from a baby.

And of course, there are a few, usually older folks, who feel responsible for the welfare of their fellow tribe people. And some of them are treasured, knowing they will never win when it comes down to the final two.

And one element of beauty is that after the two tribes merge into one, all the contestants previously voted off the island, together, become the final jury who will vote on which of the two remaining players gets the million dollars.

And each member of the jury, often really pissed off, gets to ask questions of the finalists and tell them off if they choose, and they choose. And after that, the jury votes for the winner from among the two final contestants.

“Survivor” is a full-sized TV series. Even the first season had 80 full-time staff, while more recent series have over 1,000 people on staff. The show includes the latest state-of-the-art cameras, lights, booms, drones, and everything else. In the beginning the staff stayed in make-shift tents, while today they have good housing, regular and good meals, and an entire camp of their own.

Every one of the 16 tribe members has their own camera person to follow them around, and at night they have a camp camera person that stays up all night in case there is something to photograph, and if it rains, the camera persons have no shelter and just have to wait it out, soaking wet or with whatever rain gear that will work.

Perhaps it is just me, yet I have learned a lot from the “Survivor” series, almost a diabolical microcosm of modern life.

Other than that, “I’VE GOT NOTHIN’ FOR YOU.”

EMAIL

Reversing the Wheel of Existence

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 26, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/923c0abb-9f1f-49c8-b73c-147e5e6671b6_816x1456.jpeg

For me, most of the European philosophy that I studied back in the 1960s leads to or points to the end of itself. It is unapologetically too intellectual, all conception and no experience, much less any realization.

Of course, and in fact, everything intellectual is just that, intellection. What a fistful of Catch-22 that is!

And in the case of intellection, it's a web that we do not weave, there being no suchness or viscosity to conceptuality. Instead, there are just concepts that are nothing more than pointers beyond to experience itself.

And all these language-induced pointers, all this conceptuality, says or points to one simple meaning: "Go LIVE!" Actual life experience is the answer to intellection.

And of course, I read all the philosophical words, always searching for meaning, hoping to feel and taste whatever has substance, what is substantial. What is that urge?

Language, like an onion, layer within layer within layer, all resolve to a center which is nothing at all, empty of substance. In other words, there is no point to it at all and thus no point to be attached to if we will just let go.

Our being is becoming; it has never yet 'been'. And that is what has to be understood, experienced, and finally realized.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Let's NOT Make a Deal

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 27, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b928ef06-a99b-4127-89bb-972eb0cbaeb7_1456x816.jpeg

I doubt that we can make a deal with life, much less with other people or loved ones, one that is not subject to change, and that's because change (as they say) is the only constant. Contracts and 'deals' are the province of lawyers, which most of us are not.

Such 'deals' are only invoked when there is no inherent trust between those involved. I suggest that we work on the trust part of the equation and not depend on deals made or understandings agreed upon. Why? Because I find that because of the nature of change, we cannot but alter and change with time, and we all do.

Instead, to my understanding, the place to emphasize is trust, trust in ourselves and trust in others, especially those we know and work with in life.

"The Art of the Deal" is a book by Donald Trump, which should tell us something right there. Again, we are not lawyers, and there is seemingly no end to legal contracts, if you have ever had a prickly one. And even if refined, such 'deals' are essentially just threats to make us behave in a certain way.

This also holds true for friendships and especially for marriages, IMO. Work toward mutual trust rather than good deals or agreed upon arrangements. I know that marriage is said to be a contract, yet I question that. If we are responsible for one another, we most of all have to find trust. No amount of agreements or 'deals' will ever work as well.

If you have a problem with me, tell me. I don't suggest a lot of discussion, because discussion too easily falls into 'He said, she said' or 'let's make a deal' and understanding can typically spiral down into argument and mistrust. Just tell your partner what the problem is and trust that they will respond accordingly. Don't argue it, is my suggestion.

And give them time to consider and respond. Build trust for mutual security and not agreements or deals. Above all, learn to trust one another.

I don't find too much discussion helpful. Most discussion end up as arguments and often they spiral down into dealmaking or worse. Deals are for lawyers.

Say your piece and allow your partner to think about it and give them a chance to rectify it or do the right thing. Same goes for your view of their response. Give it time and consideration.

In the end, we are responsible for the welfare of others, especially our loved ones, and naturally want to do the right thing, and the same for them to us.

This is why it is so important to have a basis of mutual trust and NOT try to make a deal or agreement that is subject to change. True responsibility does not lend itself to deal making.

Both men and woman are victims of deal-making, and women in particular have historically been subject to this. IMO, nothing good comes from lawyering human relationships. Mutual trust is the key.

This is just my opinion, yet I have studied this in my own way, as well as prayed and sought spiritual insight. And one thing I have learned is that in general, women in this country (and the world) have had a tough and unfair go of it. Many have had to do what they can to survive, having to go along and make do with situations no one would ever have chosen. We can do something about this.

It's up to those of us who understand this historical situation to protect and care for those (women and me) who need our care, as well as for all other human and sentient beings.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Much Ado About Less

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

January 30, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4d40fa8b-9159-43b4-90b7-5932f36e1e38_1525x2048.jpeg

Gray day. Nothing is happening other than more solar flare effects hitting Earth. As for me, no inspiration at the level of writing. Working on photography.

One thing that strikes me is our increasing attachment to samples, as in sampling audio (CDs), sampling video (DVDs), sampling light (LED), and a multitude of video formats.

Sampling simply tells us that we can throw away a lot of the audio and throw away a lot of the video and still just hear and see just fine.

And LEDs show that we can throw away a lot of light and see a continuous light stream when in reality there is only flickering.

And what is interesting is that in meditation they are telling us the same thing, that sampling the nature of the mind can also result in what appears to us like a continuous stream of consciousness, which in reality, is a form of sampling, immersion and reflection, immersion and reflection, and so on.

What then is a hologram? Or is our world of sampling just enough for coherence, for us to continue cohere.

Cybernetics is concerned with how any large-scale system, like the solar system, galactic system, or even our own bodily system communicates with itself enough to maintain coherence, to hang together.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

Nine Hundred Miles from My Home

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 8, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b653ec1d-ea3d-4cfd-aa73-324a196d4086_1024x1024.jpeg

“I’m walking down this track,
I got tears in my eyes,
Trying to read a letter from my girl.
If this train runs me right,
I’ll be home tomorrow night,
I’m nine hundred miles from my home.”

I’m walking the rim of time these days, half in and half out. Not wise to stay here all the time. Too out-of-the-body for health. Time blows us out anyway, so hang tight is my advice.

And the large solar flares are back again. Apparently, one called a ‘Full Halo’ flare event occurred on the opposite side of the sun. It’s called a full halo because the explosion is so strong that its halo embraces the entire sun.

This far-side event is a very large explosion, one we have not seen so far in this cycle to my knowledge. I have not been writing about it because I have been so busy.

I am doing my best to surf the wave of solar flares this round as so much is happening in my life. I might as well. As mentioned in recent blogs, my life is changing in some significant ways.

Sure, I will blog on here, yet I have a vision of doing more with photography, thus liberation through sight and seeing. As mentioned, it was through just that, visual experience with photography, that I first gathered something about the nature of the mind and how I might become familiar with it and put it to use.

Heaven knows I have worn out the welcome of my words, done the best I can, and of course not been able to express what is most important to me. I give words a workout; that’s for sure.

And so, I am very busy rearranging my tiny photo studio, sorting through piles of photo stuff, and setting the scene for the arrival of a new (used) camera.

And with some outside warmth this February, Margaret and I have been walking and starting to get the kinks out of what winter does to a body in this climate.

Every winter I struggle wake up from the physical impairment that being in the house for six months or so. Each year it is more difficult, yet I will do it.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Massive Solar Flare

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 10, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/819c3a8c-4cc0-4604-a215-c00b38b45a98_512x512.gif

On February 9th UT time, a very large solar flare (X3.4) occurred at 07:14 PM on February 8TH, the largest solar flare in many years. And so, we are catching the effects of it just now.

“For the second day in a row, energetic protons from the sun are raining down on Earth, a ‘solar radiation storm’. We can actually *see* some of these protons. Take a look at this SOHO coronagraph movie of the sun hours after the flare: ”

And this huge X-Class flare happens just at the point I find myself in the midst of real personal change, so I can’t wait for this flare out. I’m right in the middle of it.

I’ve got this solar flare by the tail, so to speak, and I have to work it through. My whole ‘whatever’ is reorienting. Isn’t change great?

These packets of intense solar change inundate Earth, including us. It’s not as simple as that we feel it emotionally. We are fully immersed in it and can’t monitor it because we ourselves are changing.

EMAIL

The Minimalist in Me

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 11, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/886c7824-b3e9-4304-81fd-2d1142970914_2048x1432.jpeg

It's ironic that I love minimalism, but and surrounded myself with very busy and endless detail work, documenting millions of music performances, films, rock concert posters, and many other huge collections. My CD collection is no at Michigan State University and number (I am told) 800,000 CDs. I no longer have access to it.

All this time I have been on a long journey into the future. I started with photography back in 1956, armed with a Kodak Retina 2A, a light meter, 3 close-up lenses, and a tripod. I'm always looking for the 'beautiful' in nature and life.

Many years ago, I got into focus-stacking images. This was before it became accepted, much less popular. The various photo forums I was on, generally, made fun of me. Somehow focus-stack was considered 'cheating' back then. I soldiered on.

When I was able to post on focus-stacking without negative remarks, I concentrated on perfecting my focus-stacking technique, in particular the retouching aspect of it. It just takes time. I have done more than a million photos for focus stacks.

Then I wished Nikon would implement pixel-shift and envied those cameras that did that. I bought three early Sony cameras and didn't like any of them. Today's Sony mirrorless seem very much better. I have always loved their video cameras.

I can see by using the Nikon Z8 (which just added pixel-shift) that a simple pixel-shift of even four images is a great improvement over a single shot. In my dream-world, what I need is an in-camera resolution of four pixel-shift images and the ability to do that and then focus-stack each layer simultaneously. That would be the best.

However, we don't have that, so I am swimming upstream and into Hasselblad's 100mpx sensor and the ability to stack those images.

The Hasselblad X2D has a built-in focus-stacking feature for up to 1000 images at a time, so I am trying that. Of course, this huge sensor size means it gets

slower and slower in processing, but it still gets the job done. And of course, photography (for me) burns money like nothing else I know. It's endless.

And so, I intend to escape some of the 35mm camera woes and see if I can't make progress with the Hasselblad X2D Medium Format camera. I will continue with my Nikon cameras, D850, Z7II, and Z8 work.

Actually, there are two trains running, the first I just described. The other is that it's just time for me to relax and have more fun with photography instead of being driven by the impossible.

I am hoping the X2d will provide that. I don't mind it's minimalism because I am a minimalist by nature, in love with the Zen view of simplicity, and Scandinavian minimalism is right up my alley.

I don't even have a single photo on the wall other than one baby picture.

[Part of our living room, a bit minimalistic is it not? I built that table.]

EMAIL

The Yang Wood Dragon Year

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 12, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/091e8983-020a-4c1e-a773-3f6e6dedf138_1363x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/9a3fc716-925c-40be-b0fc-7b561c853511_2318x1360.jpeg

Yesterday, February 11, 2024 was the celebration of the Tibetan New Year, 'Losar', always celebrated the day after the New Moon on a date That varies from year to year, always in January, February, or March.

Not only that, but the various Tibetan lineages, Kagyu and Gelug, plus China can vary from each other, never by more than one month difference. The Chinese New Year can either agree with the Tibetans or all three can agree with one another. This year Losar in the Chinese, the Kagyu Lineage, and the Gelugpa Lineage all fall on the same date.

"The New Moon which actually took place on Friday, Feb. 9 at 5:59 p.m. EST (22:59 GMT .). This Losar on Feb 10 th celebrates the Male (Yang) Wood Dragon Year. This card illustration is one of several sets of the sexagenary (60) cards I designed over the years for this event. I include on set for reference.

For children born in the Yand Wood Dragon Year, the traditional interpretation is:

MALE WOOD DRAGON

"The Wood Dragon is a skilled artisan, highly educated, and very eloquent. They are easy to get to know. They will have above average wealth and be envied by others. Their average lifespan is 66 years and they will face six obstacles. Few children."

For example, I was born in 1941, the Year of the Yin Iron snake, and my personal interpretation is:

"The Iron Snake are very sharp and skilled in all the arts. They are very critical of others and can incite theft and create enemies due to association with bad friends. They will have more wealth later in life, than when they are young.

Their average lifespan is 78 years and they will face six obstacles. They will be three children.”

[Images designed by me.]

EMAIL

The Oxherding Pictures

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 13, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/eb81d98a-2085-488f-b7cf-7ea1581317ec_1782x1075.jpeg

THE OX HERDING IMAGES

Of course, I saw the ox-herding images early on, probably in the late 1950s. What to think of them? I could think them through and only come up with a conceptual understanding following the classic Zen quote:

“ In the beginning, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers; later on, mountains are not mountains and rivers are not rivers; and still later, mountains are mountains and rivers are rivers ”

The Zen master Dōgen is quoted:

“ Before one studies Zen, mountains are mountains and waters are waters; after a first glimpse into the truth of Zen, mountains are no longer mountains and waters are no longer waters; after enlightenment, mountains are once again mountains and waters once again waters.”

In the beginning we are encapsulated in Samsara. In the middle we rise above this at least in the mind of conceptual understanding and envision the emptiness, and at last we are able to do both, live in the real world of appearances and at the same time realize that the appearances around us are the emptiness arising. We realize that we have been doing this from the beginning.

EMAIL

Wrestling the Hasselblad

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 16, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/dc67af27-8cdc-495f-aab0-46815ae7a8a1_2048x1536.jpeg

I'm still moving ahead each day, learning more and more about the Hasselblad X2D 100mpx camera and how to use it. I'm on the phone with technical support, emailing back and forth, incrementally advancing hour by hour. I pretty much can handle the X2D by now, do most of what I need to do and I'll kick the can down the road on the rest while I have at it.

I also managed to mount the X2D on a technical or 'view' camera and test out a number of large-format lenses. The photo here is an example using the Schneider-Kreuznach Macro Varon 85mm f/4.5, one of about five view-camera lenses I worked with today.

And I finally managed to get the Hasselblad X2D to work with strobe lighting rather than continuous lighting, so that's in the bag, so to speak.

Quite a snowstorm swept in around 6 AM and dropped four or so inches of very heavy wet snow, which by now has been cleaned off. Meanwhile, the solar flares rumble along at a fair rate. I am physically tired and going to bed early.

Tomorrow is another day.

[Photo by me using the Hasselblad X2D Camera.]

EMAIL

Solar Flare, Flair

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 17, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a453b768-1069-405a-8f01-3a3e8813fdc4_730x438.png

It's hard to get away from the large solar flares because here they are, time and again. Spaceweather.com reports today:

"AN X-FLARE FROM 'THE DANGER ZONE': Big sunspot AR3576 erupted on February 16, 2024 at 01:53 AM EST, producing a spectacular X2.5-class solar flare. This sunspot is entering 'the danger zone'--a location on the sun which is magnetically connected to Earth. Additional X-flares this weekend could trigger a full-fledged radiation storm. Full story @ Spaceweather.com ."

Since I started writing this there has been another M3-Class flare, so there seems to be no let up.

As to what I'm doing through all these flares is what I have been writing about of late, getting to know and use the Hasselblad X2D camera and lenses. Same today, running another set of Large Format lenses that I have through the X2D. It's not spring yet, so I have very few indoor plants that are blooming other than the Cyclamen, and there are probably only a few more shots of those plants that I can show you.

[This composite was created by Senol Sanli of Bursa, Turkey, using data from SDO.]

EMAIL

Recursion is Immersion

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 18, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/dfe3871e-ca1f-4649-be63-408e87ae2b2e_944x1264.webp

How deep is deep? I wrote this poem years ago.

TIME OUT

“What if at every out,

I set an “in.”

I said:

What if at each out,

I set on in.

And in on in on in on in ...

And if on in,

I'm lost within?

Time is sure to see me out.”

That’s about how I feel these days, not lost within, because, as mentioned, I know that time will see me out no matter how far in I venture. There is no in or out.

I am, however, cut loose from my touchstone, having shoved off from the secure banks out into the stream of time.

I have not forgotten and am not unaware of this moment, not a kite without a tail.

The mundane is not mundane, but as sacred as anything else. That’s what immersion is all about, letting go of attachment, and being unattached. The training wheels come off the bike.

Who knows whom or where?

Recursion is Immersion.

Immersion is Recursion.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Who You Are

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 19, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b2c385ab-05ed-4897-bbc0-393b74913f54_960x1200.webp

“If who you are is who you will be,

And who you will be, will be who you were,

Then:

“Who you are is not who you were or who you will be.

“So, who are you?

The above is a poem written long ago.

As for today, more of the same. Winter is hanging on, having perhaps a last blow, and perhaps it is going to wind up early this year, soon, I hope.

As for me, same thing, different day. I continue on with photography, although I have kind of segued into cleaning out the whole studio and its large walk-in closet. Didn't plan on that yet I knew it was coming. And it's here.

I dug out my label maker which tells me something. A lot stuff is going on the Ebay auction block. That much I can see.

As to how it feels getting back to working on 'stuff' and not writing so much, well, it's different.

The guide rails that writing provides me each day don't exactly extend beyond their scope. “Hey, I'm over here Michael...” crosses my mind.

Guide rails and muscle memory are so much a part of keeping me in my groove that stepping outside of that can't but trigger new experience. And it's not schizophrenia.

The old Lojong dharma saying of “Take it to the path” takes on new meaning. Yet, how do we take getting off-path to the path? It's a bit like an out-of-the-body experience. I'm right here and I'm not.

Who is it that's cleaning this closet?

More and more, I'm naked of the 'clothes' that identify me as me. Is that, OK? Who is the ventriloquist and who is the dummy?

And it's not a migration, transformation, or a case of the emperor's new clothes, but rather one where the emperor vanishes and becomes invisible. He does not want to wear those clothes anymore.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Wandering Off-Script

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 20, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/db24be05-7886-44f3-b248-0668d31c51f4_928x1232.webp

Oh, ‘President’s Day’, Oh, ‘President’s Day’,

I hardly knew ya’.

The big news here is the sun is out and the weather report “No sun.” And while I’m here, have you noticed that the weather report is not what it used to be?

It used to be accurate, for the most part. Now it’s not even 50/50. I can no longer count on it and don’t. Is it that the weather is now, for some reason, more unpredictable, or are today’s weathermen and weatherwomen not as diligent or has the measuring apparatus itself gone screwy? I wish I knew.

Anyway, just came out of the basement and a half hour of struggling to get some old staplers working for stapling stiff cardboard. I finally got one of the three to work. Now let’s see if it does the job, something Margaret is working on.

Meanwhile, where was I? Oh yeah. I am working in my little studio, culling out things to auction off and placing the rest of stuff in containers that are dust and airtight.

My goal is to have, should we ever have to move, all the photography stuff in closed airtight boxes rather than some of the sloppy plastic boxes with lids that don’t fit and stuff bulges out. Not dust or airtight.

Other than that, not much news here. The sunspots keep rumbling along but at a lower level for a few days. Continued cold.

I’m keeping up with my daily bench workout and rowing machine. Trying to figure out what my body wants to eat, but every near spring it’s not clear what I should be eating.

Nevertheless, I’m still wandering off-script and aware of that, yet this is becoming a way of life.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

"It's All Good!"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 21, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8b9b7a07-7161-4f18-bf36-cddf6ca546c_1024x1024.webp

The insight here is that the mundane and ordinary are also sacred and that nothing is that different, and positing difference itself is a miss-take. The Zen Buddhists point this out. Or, as we say, "It's all good."

As for me, I keep ending up with the inside turning itself inside-out, and it is said that such inversion nurtures the soil of life. Either way, I keep finding myself leveling off on a vast level plain where everything is equal. Everything ends up here. It's all one.

And where is here? Here is where we are.

"Don't differentiate" is the theme. Don't bother with that. Walk it back without effort if you can or just let it lapse on its own. Get beyond the great divide of duality and dividing. It's what all dharma practice points to.

There is no difference out there worth remembering. Take everything to the path, good and bad.

And it's not about loving the mundane or common for its own sake. That would be just another mistake. It's about not taking notes, not keeping track. Voyeurism. Don't be the great divider. Let that go. Give up on that because it's just another bad habit.

In other words, we have to bend it the other way for it to come out straight. As the Bible says, "Straight is the gate and narrow the way." And deification is still deification.

The end of the special is the common, the ordinary. It's all special or it's all common. Today the uncommon is also quite common, perhaps all too common.

There is no difference, no place to go, no way to get there, and no one is going.

To recap, what do we do when we are no longer special? Are we free to go (and where), when we have picked the special out of us?

For that matter, what's special got to do with it? It's not a badge of honor, but just something else to do something about.

What's special about commonness? Specialness is not common, which is why it is special. When special becomes common, everything and everyone is special, and commonness itself also becomes special. We fear immersion.

That's the state of the world today, everything and everyone is special, leaving no room for what we have in common, our commonness. As mentioned, commonness becomes special, looked up to, and to be longed for.

Asleep, awake, by night or day, specialness has become common and commonness special. That's how turned around we are. The thirst for special has become common, and commonness very special. To be unadorned, not pointed out, is a freedom now quite rare.

Everything is flipped on its head. Go figure!

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

ALL THE NEWS THAT I CAN STAND

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 22, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/552dc8fb-5e76-45cc-8234-b3fd52a1d36a_1024x1024.jpeg

I'm headed for the dentist, about an hour away, to work on two implants done some months ago. It's not my favorite thing to do, yet at my age there are all kinds of health-related things that are almost regular. I grin and bear it, happy that it's not worse, and every once in a while it is worse. LOL.

To relax, we tried watching some new releases of our old streaming favorites, but either they have changed, or we have. I used to love "Curb Your Enthusiasm," and am trying out this new season to see if it is as I remember, or is Larry David just a bit off his mark, yet I should talk. I am probably older than he is.

The same goes for Jon Stewart, who has returned to the "Daily Show." Funny? A little bit, yet it seems we can never go home again. We may watch it, yet it seems some of the thrill is gone.

As for "Real Time" with Bill Maher, he still delivers the kind of vitamins I need, although he may be drifting just a little from old times, but not that you would notice. He now wears glasses and is also getting older as we all are, a bit of a caricature of himself. Still, he's a class act.

As are David Axelrod, Christiane Amanpour, and Fareed Zakaria, the best of the bunch. Most of the anchors have just become a little too comfortable with themselves for me, yet I watch some anyway... sometimes.

I don't have a 'news hour' or anything like old times, but I do have CNN or whatever news shows I feel like bubbling in the background on my email computer, with the sound off. If I see a headline that interests me, I may turn up the sound, or I may not.

And if that political hack's photo is on the screen, I scroll him off.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

A Different Drummer

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 25, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c5e713eb-893e-49de-859d-afacc42ff719_1373x2048.jpeg

Someone said to me in the middle of the night “You are staying up late,” and my response was not that I was staying up late, but rather that I was getting up early, because this is when I get up each morning, work for some hours and get some additional sleep. Before the Industrial revolution, people used to sleep as I do, in two parts, at least in Europe. So, in the wee hours I am up and working.

Here is a photo I just took since I got up. This is using the Hasselblad X2d camera.

I am or have been primarily a wordsmith of some sort, and this goes way back. Yet, photography goes back at least to 1956, which is when I first began to create with a camera, both technically and artistically.

And it was through photography that I had a very major dharma insight and not through my writing. There is that to consider.

I find that there are two trains running here. Anyway, although I love nature and nature photography, much like photos you might see in a nature field guide, there is that second train that is also running and that train knows no bounds, meaning it is not bound to appearances the same way a naturalist’s photography is bound to a field guide.

Call it the “Zen” of photography or my spiritual drift, whatever floats your boat. My photographic ‘reach’ appears to go beyond the acknowledgement of just physical reality.

And by that, I mean that, photographically speaking, the inspiration of color and composition dance to a different master than my day-to-day reality, although the two are very much related.

For me, the beauty of nature is related to the nature of the mind itself, perhaps beyond just the nature of outward appearances, or better put, getting at the actual nature of the mind itself with its ingrained conceptual duality, but also freedom from that, immersion in non-duality and into joining or becoming one with this reality.

The quote by Sir Edwin Arnold from his translation of the Bhagavad Gita “The dewdrop slips into the shining sea” is what I am pointing at with words here. Yet, how can we say the same thing with images, and images indeed may be worth 1000 words, as the old saying goes.

I don’t find myself caring whether all this makes common sense or much sense at all. Yet, I don’t consider it so vague as to be nonsense, either.

Pointing beyond words with images is what I am doing or attempting to do. Whether that makes sense to anyone other than me I am not so worried about. I believe in the old saying “Touch One, Touch All,” meaning that if I please or satisfy myself with a photo, there are others who may also resonate at that frequency with me. I can’t worry about all that much.

I am not worried about others appreciation for my work the photography for that matter. I passed that road mark years ago. We each march to our own inner drummer, IMO, with apologies not needed to anyone else. That’s my view.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

More with Less

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 26, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c759a38b-c83e-4b4d-b2fb-6feb003e73be_1024x1024.jpeg

I never expected that I would every get camera lenses that are sharp enough for my work, yet I have. It's not that I am no longer interested in the sharpness issue, but rather that other issues rear their heads and are also worthy of consideration.

Like what are my photographs for and for whom? Of course, they are mostly for me because even my family doesn't want to see more than a handful at a time, and I have thousands and thousands.

At what point do considerations of composition and beauty compete with sharpness? Or is sharpness the most important part of my photography? And is pushing the limits of equipment more interesting to me than photos as something to look at by themselves? And is gear more interesting to me than what it produces? I have always assumed that gear was valuable for what it can produce rather than as a thing in itself, yet is it?

I'm asking these questions of myself thanks to the addition of a hundred-megapixel camera I acquired, the Hasselblad X2D. How has this camera rocked my photography boat? And it has.

Believe it or not, it actually took me a few days to figure out what to do with the X2D. I only know what I know, so of course I tried out all my little tricks, but with this larger sensor. Interesting, but not all that convincing.

It takes time for the sun to come up, and it has taken me time to move beyond what I know into a new realm or dimension with this camera. And there is one, a new dimension.

As a focus-stacker, of course I wanted to check that out, and the X2D has a built-in focus-stacking feature as well as something similar for exposure bracketing. I have not tried the exposure bracketing.

As for focus stacking, large stacks on the X2D don't seem as easy to handle as on the Z Nikon cameras, and I don't mean sheer size. Short stacks, of just a few layers, which I usually cherry-pick what I want in focus, work just fine.

Although the laws of diffraction know no difference from camera to camera, nevertheless, it seems to me that this 100-megapixel camera allows me to use smaller f/stops without it looking so obviously bad or washed out.

In fact, I am finding that I enjoy taking a single-shot photos with the X2D and pushing the f/stop to f/11 or even higher without regretting it. It is obviously not a sports camera and has no video at all, which is fine by me. It does have face recognition, but is not the camera for wilderness, the tracking of animals, etc. Landscape, yes.

The X2D is a camera to slow down with, create your composition, check the lightning, and so on. Then take the photo.

It's not the only camera I need, at least I don't think so for now. It is a special camera for people, places, and close-up work. I find I like taking photos of anything, any old thing, with this camera.

The X2D is a minimalist camera, both in terms of its appearance and also its menu and controls. It has but a few buttons. A lot of things are missing, just not there, like a thumb joystick. There is none.

And so, I have a lot to learn, and I am learning a lot.

[Not a photo, but a Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

What A Differential Makes

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 28, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/8d3bfdb8-a62d-43e1-9075-f2ff377633e0_1024x1024.jpeg

Where is the differential, the difference that differentiates? What if I can't feel any difference? Or a more crude way of saying this is "Nothing makes any difference anymore."

Can we be aware of no difference? What if there is no difference for us to sense or feel? What then?

And this is not just some abstract construct to understand. Real immersion is real immersion, hook, line, and sinker, as my dad used to say. We are 'all in' and we are not even "We" anymore.

If we live on the edge and by the edge, if we can no longer find the edge, we have lost our ability to know by that.

For me, it's getting more difficult and easier at the same time. How do we explain that?

It's getting more important (and thus difficult) to not touch the walls of time and create friction that slows me down, which friction is the cause of Samsara at least in this analogy.

As to 'easier'. If I don't create karmic friction, my life gets easier. There are two reasons. Going deeper into the difficulty may be helpful.

I realize that reification, exaggeration, puffing things up (which most of us do) is what creates Samsara, and it's me doing it. And it's not as simple as just not referencing the Self and if we do reference the Self, creating yet another layer of patina to obscure inner clarity.

It's more about not leaving the body and indulging in out-of-the-body experiences, dualistic conceptualization not grounded in common sense experience. I need to get down to Earth and stay there.

Promising myself "Pie in the Sky when I Die" and other forms of hope for the future also are just obscuring habits that lead to nowhere.

The same goes for preoccupation with the past, what is over and done with, also just another obscuration to dwell in.

Yet, the main issue that is to me a red flag I mentioned above, my getting on a roll that, while not exactly a rant, amounts to the same thing.

I am reminded of the admonition of C.L. Ingalls:

“If wisdom’s ways you wisely speak,

Five things observe with care:

“To whom you speak, of whom you speak, and how, when, and where.”

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

February Out Like a Lamb

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

February 29, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/58c534f8-78f7-499a-a9a9-88d586a8292d_1536x2048.jpeg

Yesterday it was bitter cold. I was trying to fill up my car at 6 AM and the wind was blowing over 50 mph. I could barely stand up and ice pellets were being blown into my face. I had to get back in the car even before I got the credit card in the machine. It was that bitter.

Today is better. Sunny at Noon and about 26-degrees out. Getting stuff done that I have to do. Doing my taxes, finishing them up. Running errands. Shipping packages. And tomorrow March 1 st and the days that follow are supposed to be increasingly warmer.

Almost everything I can think of that I have to do is done and up to date. Clearing my desk to do quite a bit of writing on major projects in these next weeks.

I like staying ahead of the wave of things to do and surfing it if I can. Aside from that, getting ready for friends to visit for the weekend and that will be fun.

And in between all of that, I am still learning to master my new camera system, which is quite different from what I am used to, so there is a lot to get to know.

Aside from using the three lenses I have for this new camera, I have an adapter that will mount any of my many Nikon-F mount lenses on the Hasselblad X2D, so I am doing that. I include one here using the Voigtlander APO-Lanthar 125mm f/2.5, a classic macro lens.

EMAIL

Touch Me If You Are

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 5, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e4384fe5-fa60-4870-95b6-4492dde67747_2048x1365.jpeg

Thunderstorm in the night. I saw flashes of lightning while doing some of my bench exercises and then heard thunder. It is 2 AM. I'm up as usual. I can hear the rain begin to patter on the roof.

Lightning in the night is strangely reminiscent of hearing the flocks of geese, high in the sky, heading north now and calling out to one another. Still so cold out and they are so up there. I don't know why I feel this way. Perhaps it is just sensing life going by.

There is no way of turning away or toward these moments. They just are, and I'm just here.

Such poignant moments are non-sequiturs. They come from nowhere and point toward nowhere. I'm caught in their nostalgia, their ennui. And what to do? Not anything I know of.

As mentioned, these moments are not harbingers of anything and they lead nowhere I can go right now. Yet they touch deeply and leave me aching from their sheer sense of aloneness.

As my first dharma teacher used to say, "Michael, this is it!"

This is it!

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

We Dream a Bridge to Hold Back What We Have

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 6, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/b7e96097-f6c6-4df9-82b0-23ade0a02985_1024x1024.jpeg

In photography, “Light” is light, yet it can be shaped. Shaping light is an art. It’s the same with the light of our mind. It too can be shaped. This too is an art.

Flat light, light with no dimensions to it can be shaped until it pops out and becomes three-dimensional. It’s what is called suchness. Expanding our collapsed view of the world until it takes on shape, as mentioned, is an art gained with practice. However, it still is a construct.

Where do we go when we take shelter in sleep? Not very far is my view. There is no refuge anywhere, IMO. It’s a flat world we live in, a world just short of shape.

Light and shadow. Light and shadow create the illusion we call life. And creating that third dimension, like an expanding paper accordion is the darling that we wish and try for.

Yet, our preoccupation with suchness, on having substance and being ‘real’ is the hallmark of how great is our illusion. All that to eclipse the realization that we are not really permanently here and have never been. Our being is still becoming, never arrived.

The ennui we struggle to muzzle and deny is the slipstream of something that does not even exist, that has never existed. How tired we are of it all, yet we are unable to face the fact of this emptiness we sense inside, how empty it is.

Reving up our internal gyroscope just to hear that roar of emptiness is no solution. Instead, we have to accept, accept, accept this as they are.

We dream a bridge to hold back what we have from vanishing, vanishing away. We are unable to let it go, to just let it go on. As if we could stop it anyway.

The ultimate futility of effort. Go with the flow.

The Dewdrop Slips into the Shining Sea.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Space Without Distance; Time Without End

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 7, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/684b0197-3d13-433b-80e0-43c51890a4ee_1024x1024.jpeg

Out on the vast plain of ordinary consciousness, where everything is the same and equal, there is no direction to go because we are already there, meaning here and now. There is no place to be other than here that I know of. And we are always right there.

Learning to live without a differential, without any way of measuring difference, I have written of this before. Nothing has changed, meaning nothing has not changed from being nothing.

Of course, the sands of time keep running through my fingers. And here I am, still walking out to the edge of nowhere to look at nothing. It's still there.

Always habitually looking for difference, some way to measure time and space, I come up empty. Emptiness is everywhere the same. I have to stop looking.

There is nothing to find and nowhere to go because, as mentioned, I am already there by virtue of being right here. There is no more or any other "more."

"Enough or too much" as the poet William Blake put it.

'Too much 'is anything more than enough and enough itself fills me to overflowing. It's all I can feel or measure. Overflow is just that, more than enough. Beyond that we don't know and can't see a difference. This is no more difference.

As Mentioned, I'm not going anywhere because I'm already there. And that's a puzzler. I've come to a standstill if only because I am here now.

I've arrived at the here and now, yet the here and now is not a place to go to because, as mentioned, we are already there, but rather an endless process that frustrates any desire we have by absorbing it, bringing it back to rest, to zero. Who would have guessed that?

And it's not a place to be because there 'IS' no place to be, nothing permanent, no end because there was no beginning, never a starting point. We have yet to begin, so we can't end up. That's the confusion.

Because this is beginningless; it is endless. It just IS, without beginning or end!

How did we get here? We got here by the exhaustion of direction in any direction. We are at a standstill, again meaning a process, not a static place.

We just are and it just is, both nothing and nowhere.

Space without distance. Time without being or end.

Where do we go from here? Nowhere. And this is because we are already there. And what is there to do? Nothing.

Rest As It Is.

Just STOP.

Let go of everything we are attached to.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Spring Ahead

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 8, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d6f1c097-5e2a-4a2a-8da1-a7dee38fb855_2813x2048.jpeg

Spring is pending and I'm busy getting out the yard tools and figuring out what to do first, which is settle and dig out some new raised beds in the side yard, which is fenced in so that the deer can't lunch on the seedlings.

I show here one of my black Canadian and waterproof boots. It is years old now and I wear them whenever I am doing muddy, cold, and wet outdoor tasks. Canada makes good boots because they have the weather to guide them, although these boots are wearing out. I have to keep waterproofing them.

I went online to see if they still make these boots and could not find them. Lucky, I bought a second pair years ago and they are still brand new. I often wish I had some piece of gear or clothing that is wearing out, and they are nowhere to be found. I got that extra pair of boots just in case. Coming up soon.

Anyway, I am outside, getting the kinks out of my body after a winter of inside, and generally moving around a bit.

I have four raised beds to work on, two brand new that I just built and two a year old. We have eight raised beds in all. I have to get all the dirt out of two of them and replace it with organic soil and build them up using the Hugel method of layering wood, twigs, leaves, compost, and soil. I'm looking for some help but may have to do it all myself. My back is not as good for digging out beds as it used to be.

I thought Biden did well on the State of the Union address and would like to see our democracy continue intact. Freedom is a valuable asset and not something to be lost. History tells us what dictators can do.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

A Perfect Storm

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 10, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/399c0ad7-3c7f-43af-99b5-86858f49d6bc_2048x1278.jpeg

Cold again, some rain, and a bit of snow. My daughter Anne has been visiting for a few days, having waited out a couple of days to check for no covid, and now here, unmasked. Anne is an artist, having been inspired and taught by my mom, a wonderful artist too. Anne is busy painting and getting ready for the legendary Ann Arbor Art Fair this summer.

Lots of good talks and hanging out. We like to have our kids around.

Meanwhile, I've been checking out lenses for my new camera system to see how much depth of field I can get at the expense of diffraction, given a 100 megapixel sensor. The result is higher f/stops than I imagined, which is a good thing. As to what is not such a good thing, there is this that happened yesterday, a kind of perfect storm.

And I mean a 'storm' not of a good kind, and not just one direct hit but two direct hits in the same day, a double-whammy. No mercy. It was so awful I just had to laugh.

Of course, it's a tempest in a teapot, but nevertheless it is my teapot and all of that. It all began when I picked up my iPhone to make a call.

Up popped a warning that I had to enter my passcode before I could use the iPhone. Odd, I thought. I don't have a passcode because I don't like them and never use them.

I don't have financial info on my iPhone and don't use Apple Pay or anything. I have no secrets on my iPhone. Nevertheless, I could not use my iPhone until I entered the passcode.

A call to Apple support resulted in over two hours of time spent trying to get into the iPhone. I marvel how Apple can afford to assign a support person for hours on a single call! Why can't they improve the system.

In the end, they had to wipe out all of my data, my contacts, hundreds of photos, and every other bit of personal information I had start all over again with the phone clean in order to get rid of the request for a passcode.

As mentioned, perhaps a tempest in a teapot, but a pretty terrible thing to happen on an otherwise nice day, losing all that data and having to enter it all again..

And if that wasn't enough, in the middle of all of the Apple stuff, I received an email that was equally devastating. I had sent 25 pounds of rock concert posters, mostly the last that I have to an expert who agreed to buy them from me. The package was like 45-inches square, and I could barely carry it to the FedEx office because it was so bulky. And it cost like \$250 just to ship it.

Anyway, the long and the short of this is that the expert offered me but \$1000 for all of the posters. I could not do this because I can sell them one by one on Ebay and get a lot more back. So, the expert is sending them ALL back to me, and I have to pay the shipping again. What a colossal blunder and I have all that work to try to sell them individually.

As I explained to the expert, I would rather sell the best ones myself and give the rest to my family or to friends than give them up for \$1000. So, back they are coming.

Anyway, that was my day and, as mentioned, all I could do was have a good laugh and suck it up.

[Photo of my lens chart, busy trying all the different lens f/stops, one by one and seeing how they fare.]

EMAIL

Understanding, Experience, and Realization

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 11, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e9a42d24-fa56-4b47-8b98-963695b8bac0_1024x1024.webp

The Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche has this to say about the process that leads to 'Realization':

"There are three ways that we can know something. We can have understanding, experience, or realization.

"Understanding" is when you think about something through inference. Your mind is directed outward and you think, "Oh, it is probably like that." Is that understanding good?

"Of course it is, but it does not have the power to help us develop the ultimate qualities that we really need, so it is not enough.

"You might also know something through hearsay or stories. You might have heard someone say this is how it is: "They say that all appearances are mind."

"You might think some great lama or great scholar said so. But that is not what we need, for that is also merely understanding.

Of course, learning things through reading and listening to teachers is good, but it can't really produce realization. We need to experience and realize the nature of the mind for ourselves.

"Experience comes when we are meditating and we think to ourselves. "This is what the mind is like!" However, at first it is not stable. Eventually meditate on it and cultivate that experience; eventually it will become stable, which is what we call realization."

I find the above very helpful.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The History of Effort

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 12, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/498b469b-427a-4349-998b-8ed2f58a7588_1536x2048.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/f4d3d625-49e1-4e24-86e6-b3a56f111423_720x540.jpeg

[Helio chart for right now]

[Indoor pots of collards.]

[That’s all she wrote.]

[Empty pots turned outside for flowers.]

By Michael Erlewine

“Those were the days my friend, I thought they would never end.” For me, it’s more like “Those ARE the days” and these have been difficult days, with one hard-edged issue after another arising. Plus, there was an M7.4 solar flare on Sunday.

I brought my indoor-vegetable-growing attempt to a halt and harvested my small crop of collard greens, three very large 12-inch flower pots of them. We cooked the greens up and ate them, but they cooked down to almost nothing. So much for growing vegetables inside in winter. Nice try.

I’m about to plant some turnips and collards outside in the six raised beds I am preparing. We will see how that goes.

As for the “Me, Myself, and I” quotient, I feel like I have been buffeted by a hurricane, kicked around by events until I can’t see straight. I managed to

keep my sense of humor, although as to what's funny I couldn't tell you. The operative word is "Choiceless."

Could it be the exact conjunction of Mars, Venus, and Pluto at zero degrees of Aquarius heliocentrically, coinciding with Jupiter Conjunct Uranus, all making a Grand Trine Kite with Neptune Opposition Earth – seven planets in that Kite.

My internal gyroscope has done pretty well, when I stop to think about it and these vents have not managed to throw me off course but has been like riding a bucking bronco. I roll with the punches if I can.

I will spare you the ugly details, but they are there. One nice thing, my daughter Anne came to visit and stayed the weekend. That was good. Also, Margaret and I walked the woods trails along Mitchell Creek and sat down on the bank and watched the water flow by. There is that.

As mentioned, internally I would say I am doing well considering the series of events I have been marched through. If I can't get done what I hoped to have done, at least I have surfed the events that overcame me pretty well.

I have been working outside when it is warm enough and finally gave up on pumping up a bad tire on one of our garden carts and took it apart and replaced the inner tube. Remind me to get "no flat" tires on garden carts in the future, and no more inner tubes for me. They can't survive the winter outside.

As for "spiritual," whatever we could agree that is, I am doing OK. My mind is clear and my focus is stable.

One can't look for ripples on a still pond.

I am washing the history of dharma effort from my mind, day by day and bit by bit. Everything has to go and with effort there is nothing worth remembering.

What is left? Nothing and that's a good thing.

EMAIL

Ceasefire Between Israel and Palestine

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 13, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/57518768-d461-4df5-801e-302cf0b4d765_2048x1967.jpeg

I don't intend to write a whole lot about this because such discussions seem to break down into partizan politics. I can say that I support a ceasefire between the two countries and the need to STOP bombing Palestine citizens by Israel and Israeli citizens by Hamas. Both sides have a point that cannot be denied. There is a need to work this out other than to destroy one another's innocent citizens, in particular mothers and children. Tragic! [Image from the "red pin" to represent ceasefire as seen at the Oscars.]

The Queen of the Night

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 18, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/72705bf9-140e-4871-9fb0-ba7464d3b0b0_1595x2048.jpeg

From a single tiny seed, the only one that sprouted from a Datura I grew inside several years ago, came this glorious flower, after months of care.

Using grow lights in midwinter were not enough and the tiny plant was dropping leaves like crazy. I got some bricks and elevated the pot closer and closer to the grow lights. The leaves stopped dropping. And she grew.

Today, still a smallish plant, she has managed to produce one large flower, a flower that only blooms one time at night and then is gone.

And the smell of these flowers is unlike any other flower I know aside from the Night Blooming Cereus, which is similar. A sing whiff of the flower cuts deep into the brain, striking deeper than any smell I know. There is no getting away from it and you don't want to get away from it. It's like a perfume you could never put a price on. It is unique.

I'm up through the night photographing it while I have the chance. Alone together in the wee hours of the morning, around 3:00 AM right now as I write this.

And of course, as most of us know this plant is deadly poisonous. I have to be careful not to even touch the leaves. As for smelling it? I can't avoid smelling it because it fills the room with its scent. And it is captivating, lovely.

Who is this all for? Apparently, the flower and scent are for a form of hummingbird moth that services the flowers, like the pink-spotted hawk moth (*Agrius cingulata*). Not going to happen here in a second-floor studio in a north-western Michigan winter.

These flowers are one-night only in duration and who knows whether this plant will produce another. I've given it all the indoor sunlight I have and babied it for months. The only reason it is doing OK is the return of the sunlight as the sun moves northward toward spring. That additional light coming in a window was, IMO, a key factor.

As mentioned, I have one other plant of similar type and it is not poisonous, the Night Blooming Cereus, the big sister to the Datura.

[Photos by me.]

EMAIL

Happy Spring Equinox!

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 19, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/16771d2a-6629-4f8a-899e-a2c5bd196b75_1024x1024.jpeg

Spring is here Tuesday March 19 th , 2024, at 11:06 PM, EDT, although March and spring is acting more like the legendary lion than a lamb. Either way, Winter's days are numbered as we shiver in the cold. LOL.

Of course, I'm still moving forward toward warmer weather. It's not like I'm just getting through the end of winter, but we all are moving through a sea of sorrow as most politicians have ceased doing what the country needs and refuse (or cannot manage) to work with one another in a constructive way. And we are among the victims and hopefully not the cause.

I don't really want to rehash the current news and politics here. That's all too available. I'm more interested in what people like us can do to weather all this and to keep moving forward with our lives in a meaningful way while all around us chaos and things like Covid still reign.

Like most of us, I am trying to live my life as best I can and in a meaningful way. And it seems that the only thing open to us is to live our personal lives meaningfully with love and care, nurturing and honoring our family, friends, and relationships with one another.

And it's hard to believe that right now we, people like us, may be the beating heart of this nation we live in, while most in power delay and fritter everything of value away.

Is this why and how whole and great civilizations have foundered and decayed because no one was at home, no one driving the car so to speak.

It seems to me that it's up to us to maintain some sense of balance and continuity, an inner gyroscope, as our leaders fail to do so.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Expense of Sun

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 21, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/72d0479f-e688-4689-8dfc-4b8049fc8a17_2048x1597.jpeg

Yes, there is sun today but at the expense of 11 degrees above zero, which freezes out the clouds, so in this still early spring you can't win or even break even.

I was out to the grocery store first thing, before there are any customers, and of course wearing a mask. Still.

And I have things to do which I am not doing and am doing things I don't have time to do, like taking photos of flowers, although I don't have many around. Here are some Japanese Iris trying to bloom outside in the weather. I salute them.

As mentioned, I am skirting the edge of the things I have to do, but I AM getting around to them, just letting them marinate for the moment, so to speak.

As to where I'm at on the inside? I can say I am very much driven by the sun and its shining to make my days, whether it is cold or not outside.

I have been doing a lot of painstaking work the last days, photographing and developing photos of rock concert posters as well as measuring them and pricing them for eventual sale on Ebay.

I need to move these posters out. Most are not posters I chose to keep but ones that were given to me or that I ended up with somehow.

So, cold, cold, cold and stay inside for now.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

Medium Format vs. 35mm Camera Systems

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 22, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a7bbc37c-4979-4943-8bb8-87b2081b2932_1955x1536.jpeg

More camera blog, as I still have visions of Hasselblad lenses floating around in my head as I discover what they can do. And they can do a lot.

In fact, it is almost as if Hasselblad lenses are a kind of lens unto themselves and don't compare all that well with the great many (over 100) lenses I have tested and worked with over the years.

I have not figured out what the Swedish have done to design these lenses. I know they assemble the Hasselblad cameras by hand, or at least that's what I have read. I read that they assemble many of the lenses themselves as well.

Anyway, the Hasselblad lenses that I have worked with, at least a few, are highly corrected and IMO in a league of their own. Each one of them is not only very sharp but combined with the color science built into the Hasselblad camera, photos taken by those cameras are almost immediately recognized as from that brand.

No, I don't work for Hasselblad, nor have they ever done anything kind to me personally other than produce a good product.

And Hasselblad cameras are not designed to be sports or wildlife cameras. They are not fast, but rather slow, so a photographer has to carefully design the kind of photo that is taken with a Hasselblad.

Hasselblad excels in still life photos, photos for fashion, food, advertising, and products in general. They are perfect for landscapes, fine-art documentation, and whatever requires care and attention. They are very expensive to boot. And the lenses cost a bundle all by themselves, as I have found out.

Hasselblad is a medium-format camera, meaning it has a larger sensor than the 35mm DSLR cameras, giving them superior image quality, low-light performance, shallow depth of field, and a larger dynamic range than smaller sensors.

Medium format cameras have found their niche in the world of photography, mostly at the high end of the game in the fashion industry.

The real difference between medium format and 35mm DSLRs is the size of the sensor. To my mind, the larger image sensor dictates all the rest, the quality of the lenses, the shallow depth of field, low-light performance, the extended dynamic range, and the incredible image quality of medium format photography. And medium format is very expensive compared to 35mm cameras.

The X2D Hasselblad camera I am using has a 100 mpx sensor. That's large.

Also, until recently, medium format cameras were much less sophisticated and tended not to have all the bells and whistles we now see in 35mm DSLRs. The expense itself is why many photographers shy away from buying into the medium-format system.

I had an early Hasselblad mirrorless camera, also expensive, but it was not ready for prime time and lacked many of the conveniences I was used to in Nikon 35mm system. I soon sold it.

Over the years, Hasselblad has continued to improve its mirrorless systems, until today the Hasselblad X2D 100mpx DSLR is competitive with 35mm DSLRs as to many features. And today any lack of features in Hasselblad cameras has morphed until their sense of minimalism, which has become a feature not a liability.

The expensive divide between medium format and 35mm cameras still exists, but medium format cameras have come down from \$15,000-to-\$40,000 to around \$10,000 or even less.

As to what my opinion is about medium format compared to 35mm DSLR photography, I believe I've made that clear. Medium format systems are not good gear for sports or tracking wildlife, so my Nikon system can do that quite well.

Medium format cameras like my Hasselblad X2D are a specialized or 'niche' camera. However, this kind of photography is right up my alley and perfect for most of the work I now do or have done for decades. It is immediately useful, IMO.

My guess is that medium format cameras like the Hasselblad X2D will continue to drop in price as time passes. I bought my current X2D used and not new, thus making it almost barely affordable provided I sell a large number of lenses that I already have. I am doing that.

Do you need one? Probably not. Too expensive and good for only a special kind of photography. Do I need one? You bet.

EMAIL

What Are Technical Cameras?

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 23, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

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https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/ca7df2ca-1245-453a-95ba-cdb5cab5dded_2048x1109.jpeg

Some folks asked, what is a technical camera and what does it do. I can answer that because I have had a whole series of technical cameras over the years, some weighing like 14 lbs. or more. This Cambo Actus Mini “G” does not do everything, yet it is portable and does not weigh AS much. It does what I need it to do.

A “technical” camera is similar to what is called a “View” camera, although usually more compact and lightweight. Both View and Technical cameras offer movements such as tilt, shift, swing, and rise/fall. These movements allow photographers to control perspective, depth of field, and to focus precisely.

This technical camera, the Cambo Actus-Mini G, allows me to mount Hasselblad, Nikon, Nikon Z, and Sony mirrorless cameras on the rear to serve as digital backs.

In this photo, I have the Hasselblad X2D mirrorless camera mounted as a digital back. On the front is the legendary AP El-Nikor 105mm F/5.6 enlarger lens, although I have a dozen or more Large Format lenses that can substituted.

By using a technical camera we can angle-up and get just the perspective we are looking for. Or we can view a field of flowers and adjust the plane of view so all the flowers are in view at the same time.

I often use it to shorten the view when I stack images so that fewer layers are required. The uses are, like life, unlimited.

I also include a photo of my shelf of Large Format lenses that go on my technical camera, many are very specialized.

And finally, I asked ChatGPT to point out the various uses of technical cameras, and this is what she had to say:

A technical camera, also known as a view camera or large format camera, is a type of camera primarily used in professional photography for its versatility and control over perspective, focus, and composition. Here are its main features and uses:

- **Large Format Film** : Technical cameras typically use large format film, usually 4x5 inches or larger. This large film size allows for exceptionally high-resolution images with fine detail.

Large Format Film : Technical cameras typically use large format film, usually 4x5 inches or larger. This large film size allows for exceptionally high-resolution images with fine detail.

- **Bellows Design** : Technical cameras feature a bellows design, which allows for extensive movements of the lens and film plane. This enables precise control over perspective, depth of field, and distortion correction.

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- **Movements** : The camera's front and rear standards can be shifted, tilted, swung, or rotated independently. These movements allow photographers to control perspective distortion, depth of field, and focus in ways not possible with other types of cameras.

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- **Lens Options** : Technical cameras often accept a wide range of interchangeable lenses, providing flexibility in focal length and perspective control. These lenses can include wide-angle, normal, and telephoto options, allowing photographers to choose the best lens for their specific needs.

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- **Precision Control** : Technical cameras offer precise control over focus and composition. Photographers can adjust the lens position and film plane with great accuracy, ensuring tack-sharp focus and precise framing.

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- **Architecture and Landscape Photography** : Technical cameras are commonly used in architecture and landscape photography due to their ability to correct perspective distortion and achieve precise focus throughout the scene. The movements of the camera allow photographers to control converging lines and maintain sharp focus from foreground to background.

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- **Studio and Still Life Photography** : Technical cameras are also used in studio and still life photography where precise control over perspective, focus, and composition is essential. The ability to manipulate the lens and film plane movements enables photographers to create highly detailed and visually striking images.

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- **Fine Art Photography** : Many fine art photographers prefer technical cameras for their ability to create unique and visually stunning images. The large format film and precise control over composition allow photographers to capture intricate details and create images with a distinctive aesthetic.

Fine Art Photography : Many fine art photographers prefer technical cameras for their ability to create unique and visually stunning images. The large format film and precise control over composition allow photographers to capture intricate details and create images with a distinctive aesthetic.

Overall, technical cameras are prized by professional photographers for their exceptional image quality, precise control, and versatility in capturing a wide range of subjects with unparalleled detail and clarity.

[Photos by me.]

EMAIL

Betwixt and Between

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 25, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7d418f6d-46dd-4521-b211-3876787f4228_1024x1024.webp

The two ends meet because they form a circle or cycle.

So, it's not like the flat-earth view that we go one way until we drop off. Instead, we go one way until we find ourselves coming back the other way, again: a circle or cycle.

This is all relatively obvious until we find ourselves running out of attachments, at which point we are STRUCK by the same in everything, sacred and profane. There's no difference.

And that's when we start to realize we are suspended in space and time without a beginning or end. We are just there, which is always right in the here and now.

Getting along without our attachments is like the emperor's new clothes. We are naked and vulnerable, just out there standing in the spotlight of time.

Once realized, there is no going back on realizations. They are permanent because they are eternal and true.

Detachment is humbling, to be sure. I'm reminded of one of my favorite Freddie King songs, "I'm Tore Down," which goes like this:

"Well, I'm tore down, I'm almost level with the ground. Well, I'm tore down, I'm almost level with the ground. Well, I feel like this When my baby can't be found."

Listen:

Freddie King: "I'm Tore Down."

And the 'baby' can't be found.

Mind our own gyroscope.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

May Erlewine in Grand Rapids

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 26, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0cbf5f76-e4f9-4de3-97ba-b6f14292ee83_1536x2048.jpeg

From Spaceweather.com:

“THE DANGER HAS NOT PASSED: Yesterday's severe geomagnetic storm is over, but the calm might not last. Giant shape-shifting sunspot AR3615 poses a continued threat for Earth-directed solar flares. NOAA forecasters say there is a 25% chance of X-flares today, tomorrow, and Wednesday. If the sunspot blows, it would give sky watchers in Europe and the USA a second chance at auroras this week.”

A day off and a day down the road to Grand Rapids and the “Midtown GR” a performance venue that is embedded inside a large building complex to hear my daughter May Erlewine in concert.

Although we had snow the day before, the roads were clear and the sun was out. We wanted to eat some Ethiopian food and Grand Rapids has three Ethiopian restaurants. Of course, we picked the worst of the lot and eating in our car (because we can't sit down inside because of masks and Covid) with the sun streaming in our car windshield we discovered that both cooked greens were way too salty and not really edible. There was some cooked cabbage we could eat and some injera (flatbread) that was a little off, IMO.

Anyway, that was that and we drove twenty minutes (each way) to get to the place on top of it. The rest of the day went much better.

May was coming in on a frantic schedule. She and her friend and guitarist Packy Lundholm had driven completely around Lake Michigan (a Great Lake) from venue to venue and were coming downstate from Marquette, Michigan in the UP, a six-hour drive in itself!

May did two complete shows, one at 6 PM and one at 9 PM. We saw the 6 PM show (which was sold out) and it was incredible! May was wonderful and Packy Lundholm on guitar was the very best accompaniment and guitar playing I have ever heard. So tasty!

We drove back later that night. In rebellion at having had a lousy meal I ate two large cookies on the drive home, one of them chocolate-chip with big

chunks. Of course, the caffeine in the chocolate kept me awake much of the night.

What a great concert and May and Packy played Ann Arbor's "The Ark" as their final stop on this tour the next day.

Here are some photos and clips of music by Nicolla Covery who was at the concert:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/519895789211817/?multi_permalinks=1122097368991653&ref=share

EMAIL

The Terrible Crystal

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 27, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/3ac7af1f-1f90-4611-853f-1b2c70deee63_1024x1024.webp

We have learned to use what we call our ‘mind’ and it can think up all kinds of ideas and ways to do things. As mentioned, we call it ‘our’ mind, but it is just the mind itself that we have learned to use, our limited experience with it.

And aside from the mind being handy, we don’t know the mind all that well, which is exactly what meditation is about, becoming more familiar with the nature of our mind as something other than a one-trick pony, a thinking device.

In fact, it’s just the other way around. The mind is not the thinking end of things; ‘WE’ are the thinking end of the mind, being what we so conveniently call our Self. The “Self” itself is little more than a frayed bundle of attachments, none of which are properly grounded in reality.

In fact, this is just what learning to meditate teaches us, that what we call “We” is the exception rather than the rule. In other words, we are the odd-man out (or woman), the nether end of the mind itself.

This is true, such that an eventual realization does give us pause to reflect rather than just blindly march on toward oblivion. Such a fragile thing life is, “Much Ado About Nothing” as Shakespeare put it.

And so, in the meantime, we cluster or gather around what we might call the campfire of the Self, when in reality it is like this rather dark poem I wrote years ago about our Self or personality.

Sorry about the darkness, but welcome to the realization.

PHOENIX

Personality,

Bright beauty of the night,

That terrible crystal,

Burning in the darkness,

At the very edge of time.

Watching,

In rapt fascination,

Fires,

Impossible to ignore,

Forever frozen,

On the face of age.

It is a dark light,

Indeed,

Funeral pyres,

Signifying nothing,

But impermanence.

This is a fire,

That does not warm.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Chasing the Wild Tchoupioulas

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 27, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/7ee5eb8b-e7f3-4bb0-a817-4c58530f1bdd_768x1024.jpeg

For more photos, here is a link:

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/THE%20INTERVIEWER.pdf>

Getting at the roots only goes so far, yet it is farther than a White boy in 1950 knew. And oddly enough for many of us back then, IMO this ‘farther’ was not found in White music but rather in Black music, at least for me.

I hate to embrace a cliché and say that the fate and history of Black Americans are the source of the life vitamins that I (and perhaps many) need, but they were. These great blues musicians were the fathers and mothers of my soul and I sought them out to absorb what I did not know but could only wonder.

I had started out in the folk revival of the late 1950s and early Sixties, hitchhiking and traveling with people like Bob Dylan and we were all doing our best to revive White folk music, with perhaps a sprinkle of country-blues from Black artists.

And to my shock, there came a time when I discovered that Black music needed no revival because it was alive, well, and playing on the other side of town behind a racial curtain. That for me was an earth-shaking discovery, a life changer. What I thought was in the past lived.

As it turned out, it was me who needed the revival and not the Black blues musicians and their music that I subsequently witnessed on trips to Chicago’s South and West Side in the mid-1960s.

And for me this all came to a head at the first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in Ann Arbor, Michigan in the late summer of 1969. I was not only present at that festival, my brother Dan and I (plus all five brothers and father) ended up being responsible for food and drink for all the performers at the festival.

We actually operated out of dad’s station wagon backstage at the three-day festival (August 1-3). And in the process, I morphed from being a player and student of blues music into an interviewer and documenter of Black blues and jazz and eventually this expanded to include all recorded music when I founded the All-Music Guide (AllMusic.com). However, let me back up a bit.

That first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969 changed my life. I was 29 at the time and that event became one of the most important in my life, a pivoting point, where I turned from whatever I was doing at the time, more toward what I became and still am today, an archivist of popular culture. As they say, “Who Woulda’ Thunk it?” Not me.

If there is one of those times where we feel like we are living in our own dream, that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival was that. Imagine.

Suddenly, in one place, were almost all of the heroes of my life at least for the recent years, the great blues players, assembled in one place, with all their sidemen and some with their entire family.

Not only was the general public (read: mostly White people) introduced all at once to most of the great living black blues players, but equally (and perhaps more important), those scores of blues players, their sidemen, and families were assembled together in what turned out to be a kind of celebration among themselves.

So, as the public was overcome by this profound blues music perhaps for the first time, with that many blues players present, there’s was somewhat of a celebration and reunion going on with the blues players themselves.

It was epic and cosmic, IMO. And there I was, not one of the university-folks who planned the festival, but an on-the-ground guy who knew some of the players and ended up in charge of artist “hospitality,” which means providing all these players and their families with food and drink, and “drink” was all about alcohol in those days. My family and I were very popular serving these folks.

I was there with my brother Dan, who was equally interested in all this, and also our other three brothers, Steven, Phillip, and Tom, plus our father. We served the booze out of my dad’s station wagon and my dad spent most of the time hanging out and drinking with folks like Roosevelt Sykes, Big Mama Thornton, and some of the other blues greats.

As for my relations with my dad, I seldom had connected all that much with him about whatever I loved, but we connected that weekend through introducing him to all these players. It was, so to speak, a bit of the divine, a taste of heaven on Earth as far as I was concerned.

There is so much I could tell you and probably should, especially to those few of you who are transported by the music and life wisdom of these great black blues players. What I can do here is show you some of the photos that came

out of that event, many by the great photographer Stanley Livingston. Stanley Livingston and I published an award-winning book on all this some years later.

And hidden within that event, like a seed, was my future as an archivist of popular culture. I never saw it coming, but I was always into organizing and documenting what I most loved, and I loved the blues and those players!

After that first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969, came the second blues festival in 1970, which was more of the wonderful same. And then, after the University stopped sponsoring the festival, there was a year of no festival, (1971) and then the festival was reinstated by music promotor Peter Andrews (who brought a lot of music to Ann Arbor) and poet and blues-expert John Sinclair, with the “Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals,” which were held in 1972, 1973, and an unsuccessful festival held in Canada in 1974.

Andrews and Sinclair expanded the venue to not only include blues, but also jazz and Rhythm & Blues, with performers like Ray Charles and Miles Davis.

Years later the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz festivals resumed and I was on the festival board for some of those years.

I was also on-site for the first two of those blues and jazz festivals, again handling hospitality and doing even more interviews, this time with audio and video. I eventually became the official historian for the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festival.

Well, the long and the short of it is that from those seminal blues festivals, both the Ann Arbor Blues Festivals and the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals that followed, I became aware of how precious and fragile that time was. And I came out of those festivals with an intense desire to protect and preserve America’s musical heritage.

This manifested some years later with my founding the All-Music Guide (allmusic.com), which today is the largest collection of music data on the planet, millions of pieces of information all organized. Of course, I did this assisted by an incredible team, that eventually numbered (before I sold it) 150 full-time staff, and over 500-700 freelance writers, all working together.

And later, with my company, AMG, we founded the All-Movie Guide (allmovie.com), which is one of the two largest film databases, and the All-Game Guide, which game-guide was eventually abandoned after I sold and left the company.

I also founded the first major Concert Music Poster site called, “Classic Posters (ClassicPosters.com), which is still going today, and other collections, etc. I

went on to interview scores of rock poster artists, some rock players, and so forth.

I have been busy these last years divesting all of these archives so they are not swept into memory anytime soon. These include:

My Rock Concert Poster data has been donated to: University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library

The Haight Street Art Center (non-profit) in San Francisco

My collection of music CDs is now at the Michigan State University, some 800,000 CDs.

My collection of astrological books, magazines, and so forth are now part of the permanent collection of the University of Illinois, one of the largest ever assembled.

A large collection of Tibetan Buddhist teachings, thousands of tapes, are at the KTD Monastery in upstate New York.

Plus, a collection of some 500 pen & ink line drawings by Bhutanese artist Sange Wangchuk are now a permanent part of the Ruben Museum of Oriental Art in NYC.

And there you have it, a quick overview of the first Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1969.

[Photo of me interviewing Muddy Waters.]

EMAIL

Using the Hasselblad X2D Camera

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 29, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/0ae9de32-4d81-4a70-b79c-1f7a3818f7c6_2048x1024.jpeg

The Hasselblad X2D is a special camera with special lenses, so for me it's not my only camera system. I have a robust Nikon system to use as well.

After some time using the X2D, I realize it is designed for landscape, fashion, and product photography, and of course every book on the X2D could have told me that. This camera is made for situations where we want to get as much detail in focus in the landscape or product as possible.

And with the X2D, that's achieved through and with the 100 megapixel sensor and the special 'color science' that Hasselblad has perfected. This camera has face-recognition and autofocus, but not on the level of the Nikon Z8 or Z9 cameras. I don't need fast autofocus. Most of my work is with still life. Nothing moves.

Oddly enough, and this is quirky, I find it easier to use my Nikon F-mount lenses on the X2D through either a technical camera (Cambo Actus Mini 'G') or by an adapter that matches Nikon F-mount lenses with the X2D, than I do using the natural Hasselblad XCD lenses. I have to explain this to myself.

Since most (or many) of my F-mount lenses are APO (apochromatic) or highly corrected and have wider apertures than most XCD lenses, the bokeh or out-of-focus areas of these F-mount lenses are easier for me to work with than with the actual XCD Hasselblad lenses. I already know them for decades.

It seems that the Hasselblad XCD lenses are sharp to the point that too much of the background of my still life photos are in focus, while I prefer the background to be slightly blurred. I have not yet figured out how to control my XCD Hasselblad lenses to achieve that effect. XCD lenses are for the most part not fast, meaning they tend to bring everything into focus rather than trail off into a lovely blur. I have to figure out how to deal with this.

And so, I'm left with realizing that what I need most is this 100 MP sensor, since with it I have more control (at the moment) with my old Nikon F-mount lenses, and they seem to benefit from the 'color science' that Hasselblad offers.

The X2D also has a 5-axis image stabilization system (IBIS) in the camera itself which claims seven stops of stabilization, and this feature is not average, but rather very powerful. It allows the photographer to take clear stable shots handheld at shutter speeds I never thought would be possible. It is quite remarkable and makes the X2D a great walk-around camera.

The X2D provides a 16 bit 102mp sensor with 15 stops of dynamic range, which is a broad range. Too bad that I don't walk around much taking photos. Perhaps I will start! I use a tripod even if I don't need it and for focus stacking of course I use a tripod.

The XCD Hasselblad lenses number at this point about 12 and adapters for earlier (and other brand lenses) are available. Of the twelve XCD lenses there is only one macro lens (1:2) at anything close to macro range, while all the rest have reproduction ratios of 1:5.2 or greater. This is a problem for me as a close-up photographer, although because of the sharpness, even with the more limited reproduction ratio, the 100 MP provides usable close-up crops.

This cropping is actually interesting as it resembles a canvas larger than the proposed resulting photo, one that we can work with and around, with lots of room to crop out a solid image. I like that.

And so, to recap:

I have taken a vow to get out and walk around with the X2D and just photograph as well as to get out with a tripod and do more landscapes. We will see how that works out.

Otherwise, as mentioned, the main takeaway for my work so far with the X2D is that 100 MP is very much useful, so I can stop rationalizing why I don't need that large a sensor. I need one.

That being understood, then I have the choice between Hasselblad XCD lenses and some of the many "APO" lenses in Nikon F-mount that I have. I already know how to use the F-mount lenses and they as a group, as mentioned, are much faster lenses, meaning they have low f/stops and offer great bokeh.

The Hasselblad XCD lenses are overall very sharp, or as Larry David of "Curb Your Enthusiasm" might say, "VERY, very sharp." I like the XCD lenses but would like to keep them from sharpening the far background of the photo, so I can have some bokeh, some lovely blur or out-of-focus areas in the shot. There's the rub.

I agree that I have much to learn about the best use of the Hasselblad XCD lenses of which I am only now learning how to work them. It may be that in

time I will figure out the knack of getting what I want from those XCD lenses for close-up work.

Or I may find that they call them “landscape” lenses for a good reason and are not meant for closeup work that often requires a blurred background. And I should mention ‘adapters.’

I am glad that the Hasselblad X2D is not ‘fussy’ about adapters. It seems to handle them very well indeed, so I see a future in using my favorite Nikon F-mount lenses on the X2D as well as using the X2D as a digital back for technical cameras like my Cambo Actus-Mini “G” camera.

I don’t mind doing manual work with a digital camera and don’t require auto-everything. I am used to rather painful layer by layer manual focusing and even tend to like it because it slows me down and relaxes me. The process is like a form of meditation.

I share this here because I find it hard to follow a lot of what passes for gear discussion on the various photo forums these days, and they don’t seem much interested in what I do. Fair trade.

[Photo by me, with the Hasselblad X2d and the Zeiss Otis 55mm lens.]

EMAIL

"All Hat and No Cattle"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

March 29, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a3128ffe-f64a-4c9b-9861-7505f74e928c_1024x1024.jpeg

Not really a thought, but bliss and lack of distraction is the pointer rather than thinking. Feeling. We have to experience, feel life.

We feel our way along.

"What goes up must come down,' meaning that experiencing rather than 'thinking' is the point here. Don't get stuck up in the clouds.

All of us tend to 'think' before we feel when it is probably better to feel and experience, and then see what thoughts arise. Like the old blues song lyric:

"Take your fingers off it. Don't you dare touch it because you know it don't belong to you."

Or as the dharma masters put it: "Don't alter the present moment."

Unfortunately, I often can hear in other's voices that they are tripping the conceptual ceiling and that what they say is not grounded in actual experience, much less realization. They are just reading from their understanding like we would read a book. In short, they don't yet know what they are talking about.

It's not often helpful to point this out to a conceptualizer, unless you can help precipitate the experience that goes with their understanding. It's hard to talk someone down from their ivory tower, when they don't realize that this is all thought and no experience.

I wonder if whole civilizations have died out through lack of actual experience, preferring to live in the mind rather than in the world of experience. Living from the top down rather than from the bottom up is difficult to impossible. We need our roots.

It reminds me of the old saying about city cowboys, that they are "all hat and no cattle."

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Camera Sensors Do Matter

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 2, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/2e1dd837-f1d5-415e-a160-09d8abb99679_1092x2048.jpeg

[I have been writing articles on photography forums, so I am posting some of them here, but they may not interest many folks here.]

At least, that's my opinion. I got into a large sensor because I was curious about medium-format cameras and was able to pick up a used Hasselblad X2D at a reduced price. And even at that price (with a few lenses) I have to pay, pay, pay, and I am selling some fifty lenses and other equipment to do just that. What follows here is for the very few that are interested in focus stacking in some detail.

I have written elsewhere on this forum something about my experience with the Hasselblad X2D, which was a good one, so I will spare you the details here. Instead, I just want to discuss the obvious effects I see in using a large sensor, in this case the 100 MP sensor in the Hasselblad X2D.

Up until now, I have thirsted for a larger sensor from Nikon, but they have not obliged, so I've been stuck with the 45.7 MP stacked CMOS sensor (35.9x23.9) that are in the various Nikon Z cameras.

Of course, Sony now has a 61 MP mirrorless, etc. Nikon has not delivered anything more than 45.7 MP so far. Perhaps they will bring on one this year, 2024!

With that withstanding, while I could opine on the helpful features of the Hasselblad X2D, as mentioned, here I am just determining how a larger sensor helps my closeup photography and in particular focus stacking. And in particular how I can salvage for use all my old F-mount lenses!

To begin, the Hasselblad X2D has the following ways to shoot closeup and can take the following adapters.

First of all, there are the native Hasselblad lenses, the XCD class of lenses, some 13 or so to date. These work flawlessly with the XCD. There are adapters for the older Hasselblad lenses, but something is lost and my reading of many blogs on the subject suggest that it's not worth going for the older types of Hasselblad lenses, like the HC/HCD, HX, and so on.

You can read about how these earlier lens systems disappoint and make life difficult (IBIS does not work, vignetting, and on and on). I'm not even going to try this approach.

I am sticking with the native XCD lenses, an adapter for Nikon F lenses, and purchasing a Hasselblad X2D adapter for my technical camera, the Cambo Actus-Mini (G), where the X2D becomes the digital back, and we can put whatever we want on the front end of the technical camera we wish.

I very much like the Hasselblad XCD lenses, yet the ones I have are not very fast and I miss the fast wide-open APO lenses I collect. I know, there is the XCD 80mm f/1.9, but I am still saving my pennies for that one. Yet, even if I had all of the XCD lenses, they are not geared for close-up photography and don't have very closeup reproduction ratios.

Even the only macro lens in the XCD set, the 120mm f/3.5 has a reproduction ratio of 1:2, only half the way there. Here is the list.

HASSELBLAD REPRODUCTION RATIO

120mm F/3.5 1:2 at 1.41 feet

45mm P F/4 1:5.2 at 13.8 inches

65mm F/2.8 1:5.4 at 1.65 feet

90mm F/2.5 1:5.8 at 26.4 inches

135mm F/2.8 1:5.8 at 3.28 feet

38mm F/2.5 1:6.2 at 11.8 inches

45mm F/3.5 1:6 at 1.31 Feet

28mm F/4 1:6 at 8.7 inches

55mm F2.5 1:6.4 at 17.7 inches

80mm F/1.9 1:6.4 at 2.3 feet

21mm F/3.5 1:9.6 at 1.31 feet

30mm F/3.5 1:9.6 at 1.31 feet

35-75mm F/3.5-4.5 0.15x (bad) at 1.

Lloyd Chambers in a personal conversation wrote "XCD lenses are all engineered for rigorous performance. Totally opposite of Leica SL lenses."

OK. I can see that from my use of them, so how am I going to let a little more light on the subject and get wide-open lenses? That's what I am looking at here.

As mentioned, it's not going to be through the set of XCD lenses, so I'm going to have to improvise, something that I have been forced to do a lot of in my photography over the years. I like it.

NIKON F-MOUNT ADAPTER

A good first step is to pick up the adapter for the X2D that allows mounting any of our old F-mount lenses. Of course, I have been busy adding the new Nikon Z "S" series lenses for use with my Nikon Z7II and Z8 cameras. Well, none of those lenses will be any help because they can't be mounted on the Hasselblad X2D, not ever.

There is something like a small difference between the Z and the XCD lenses which give us about zero room to adapt anything. So where does that leave me?

One good thing is I have a lot of really good APO quality lenses with the older F-mount, lenses like the Leica 100mm Elmarit R, the Coastal Optics 60mm, and so on. These all fit nicely on the X2D and while they don't electrically work, if I fiddle with the controls available to me, I can have all their virtues on the X2D, and do. Very helpful.

And so, I'm busy digging through my old lenses for lenses fit for the X2D, even rescuing a few from Ebay sales, because I put them up for sale.

Suddenly I have a bevy of fine lenses that will mount on the X2D Nikon adapter for F-mount lenses. Wow. Glad I didn't sell these beauties! I even mounted my Zeiss 135mm f/2.0 lens (to me an Otus) on the X2D, one of the sharpest lenses I know of. And there is another treasure trove open to us as well.

And that is via technical cameras. I have had technical cameras for years, a whole line of them, all the way back to the 14-pounder technicals I could barely mount on the tripod.

I got rid of those and settled for the Cambo Actus-Mini (G) camera which has an adapter mount for the Hasselblad X series cameras. It does not have all the bells and whistles that the really heavy cameras do, but has more than I need, tilt, shift, and all of that.

With the Hasselblad X2D as a digital back on the Cambo Actus-Mini (G), I suddenly have a wealth of options, including my whole collection of Large-Format lenses that fit in Copal this and Copal that.

In addition, many of the small Nikon F lenses will also fit on the Actus Mini's front standard, another group of lenses that produce good images, which brings me to my last point here, the basic methods of focus stacking images.

I also had a Mamiya RZ67 and a bunch of lenses back in the day, so I've flirted with medium format over the years.

I've been focus-stacking for decades and can well remember NikonGear forum when folks used to argue whether it is cheating to stack focus? We've come a long way since then!

It is important to remember that it makes a difference (to the stacking software) how we stack the photos in the first place. There are three popular ways to photograph stacked layers, and some are more artifact-prone than others. The key is to move the entrance pupil of the lens as little as possible.

If you are going to stack photo layers, there are three basic ways to do this, each successive one is better than the last, so here they are, starting with the least adequate method:

(1) WORST. Mount the camera and lens on a focus rail (which is on a tripod) and gradually move the unit (camera and lens) along the rail toward the subject being photographed. This is the least efficient way to focus stack and is liable for the most artifacts. (2) BETTER. Mount the camera and lens on a tripod and turn the lens barrel (helicoid) in as 'fine' a way as possible. Lenses with a long focus throw make it much easier to do this. If the focus throw of the particular lens is too short, we are forced to use the rail method. (3) BEST. And finally, the superior method (that will cause the least artifacts) is to fix the lens on a bellows (on a tripod) so that the front standard with the lens is fixed and mount the camera on the rear standard of the bellows. Then move only the rear standard (and camera) to focus. This method holds the entrance pupil in the lens stationary and moves only the camera. This is the best way to stack focus.

So, there you have my plan moving into the future. Of course, I like the Hasselblad X2D and its take on color. Yet that alone is not what I am enthused about. I see a great future for many of my old Nikon-F lenses although it involves a fair amount of fiddling on my part, which I am happy to do.

It seems I have been fiddling with photo gear since 1956 when I got my first Kodak Retina 2a, a set of closeup lenses,

a tripod and light meter.

EMAIL

John Sinclair RIP

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 2, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c6e12b5a-acb7-40c7-b701-d77343ede53a_1662x886.jpeg

I was informed that my friend John Sinclair died at 7:58 a.m. on Tuesday morning, April 2nd, 2024 at Detroit Receiving Hospital. Heart failure was the official cause of death, but John had not been in good health for some time.

John and I go way back to October 1966 and the Grande Ballroom. I was with our band the "Prime Movers Blues" band and John was managing the MC5. Our two bands played on the same gig many times.

In more recent years I backed up John a number of times while he recited jazz and poetry and was part of his team the "Blues Scholars." I played amplified harmonica behind him. And John was a visitor to our center many times.

While John is a noted poet, marijuana advocate, and activist. What Sinclair and I most shared was a love of blues. John was an expert on the subject, IMO. I dedicate this little poem I put together to John.

GOOD FRIEND

We can't replace,

What there is,

Only one of.

I will try to write more on John Sinclair at another time because I have extensive interviews with him.

I interviewed John a number of times, but here is my favorite interview with John, where he talks about how he discovered Black music and their people. This is a deep interview.

Interview with John Sinclair:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vnqp1HCCIk0>

And here is John Sinclair playing with members of my family and extended family at Library Hall, part of the restaurant my family and I had, the "Two Sisters Cafe."

<http://spiritgrooves.net/pdf/e-books/John%20Sinclair%20Interview%20DONE.pdf>

Interview with John Sinclair

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vnqp1HCCIk0>

Saying prayers for John and a safe transition.

The Last Archive

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 3, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a93b67e8-b63a-49ba-95a7-215fdc44ce56_2192x886.jpeg

Well, as of a few days ago I have placed my last archive in good hands. I'm not signaling I'm ready to leave this world, but I can rest in peace in this life knowing that all of my archived material is safe at last. What a journey! No use in doing all that work and not passing on onto the next generation for their possible use.

In this case, I have donated my extensive photography collection of images into the safe keeping of the Ann Arbor Public Library new archival section, thanks to the help of Amy Cantu, IT/Productions Librarian, who has worked hand-in-hand with me.

I have over a million photos, but we are starting out with a solid 500 or so, most of which are all flowers, plants, and critters in hi-res and all available free-of-charge to the general public. I believe folks should have access to photos if we will share them, and I am happy to.

You will be able to go onsite, browse the photos, and download ones you want to have for home use, and for wallpaper on your laptops, mat and frame a photo and put it on the wall, etc. There is no charge other than to credit me if the image is published anywhere.

Images want to be free and be seen, IMO.

These are very large images, but hopefully we will offer them in different sizes for ease of use.

I will be adding to this collection for some time, if the good god is willing and the creek don't rise.

EMAIL

Imagine What I Don;t Know

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 4, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/39e634e4-4798-4c0f-82a8-1b1378ece955_1024x1024.webp

What we don't know intimidates us, when we could learn to know and then we would know.

It seems that the known world is dwarfed by infinity, all that we believe we don't know.

IMO, this is just a mental block, not a reality. We are used to what we can measure and gauge, when there is a whole nether world out there unknown to us, be it tiny or grand. In either case, we don't know, and it is that 'not-knowing' that I am talking about here.

We don't know and we know we don't know.

What we don't know, we imagine is infinite, when it only has to be known and then it becomes finite, known.

I love the old chestnut "What you fear shall come upon you," because it points out that we fear the unknown and that with fear, as the other old saying goes, there is "Nothing to fear, but fear itself. "

It is that "fear itself" that we are looking at here. How is that dispelled? Is it like a will-o'-the-wisp flicking in the dark of our mind and how does it come upon us?

And if it does, how do we dispel it? When we succumb to fear, it seems as if there is always something shadowing us, a darkening specter, something out there that is foreboding, hanging over us, especially if we are like a child about it.

Oddly enough, it's not like this, and it may seem there is something we can go out and battle. Good luck if you try. Rather, this is something that we solve inside us, rather than on the outside.

It is, as they say, fear itself that we fear rather than something specific. Call it foreboding, something hovering out there that we must solve from in-here, from in the mind itself. And we do this by becoming familiar with the mind itself through what is called 'meditation.'

Familiarity can dispel, dispel, dispel.

Here are a couple poems I wrote long ago, just for fun.

IMAGINE WHAT I DON'T KNOW

Imagining what I don't know,

And I don't know,

I imagine what I don't know.

I know what I imagine is what I don't know,

And what I know is not what I imagined.

That much I know.

I can only imagine what I don't know.

NEVER KNOWN

If I know,

I don't know I know,

And I don't know I don't know I know.

I don't know what I would know,

If I did know.

That's how I know I don't know.

So, I don't know,

I know I don't know,

And I know I know I don't know.

I have never known.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Turning Point

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 5, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/20cef54a-2d40-4f35-808a-e552b0579fc3_1024x1024.jpeg

It's like brushing off mosquitos, removing old habits. And it's tricky too, not using effort to remove the efforts we have made.

It's like a perpetual karma machine if we fall into that effort habit, a hall of mirrors, infinitely regressing recursively.

We just want to be free of what binds us, removing the effort to remove effort to remove effort, ad infinitum.

It is not, 'not wanting memories', but rather being free of all traces of even the traces of traces... and so on.

There comes a point when we start walking it all back, undoing the knot we have tied ourselves up in, thread by thread.

Life is a palindrome. It reads the same forward and backward, a perfect reflection. This is the great mystery of life, the point of no return. I wrote this poem years ago that says just what I mean here.

The Point of No Return

A Poem for My Daughter Michael Anne

The point of the "point of no return" is that:

When you have reached the point of no return,

From which there IS no return,

The point is to turn and return.

That is the turning point.

Every life has a turning point,

Whether it's in the echo of age,

Or in the very midst of life's prime.

As we reach our point of no return,

We pause,
Then we turn.
And, in turning,
We begin to reflect.
In our reflection,
And rising into view,
Perhaps for the very first time,
The Sun.
Where before it was we who were seen,
And others seeing,
Now we are the mirror in which they see themselves,
And we can see our self in them,
What we once saw shining before us, as youths,
That which we gladly embraced in our prime,
And what we now see etched in the mirror of reflection,
Is our eternal Self
The Sun,
Ever burning in the darkness of our life.
That's it.
I understand this.
What I find harder to understand,
Yet still believe is:
We didn't know it then;
We don't know it now.
We never knew it.
In truth,
It never was.

IT NEVER WAS;

It never will be.

It is not now,

And still, it is.

It still is:

This most brilliant illusion,

Shining in the mirror of the mind.

Feb 14, 2006 2-4 PM

Grand Sextile Helio

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Michael Erlewine Promoted to President of Elderly Instruments

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 6, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/25fbbb83-5579-4dc8-aff8-dcd381d22e90_1059x1268.jpeg

I am really proud of my son Michael, who has just been made president of “Elderly Instruments,” one of the premier vintage instrument sales and repair shops in America, and Elderly Instruments just was awarded (2023) the top small business company in the U.S., citing its ability to innovate, adapt to challenges, and stay true to its heritage. My son Michael has been instrumental in the changes that have helped to shape Elderly.

Michael’s mom and dad couldn’t be prouder. Michael was one of our kids that was born at home and also (like his sister May Erlewine) home educated thanks mainly to his mother. And like his dad, Michael is very much self-taught and followed his own interests from an early age.

Among other things, Michael mastered video game playing at an early age and competed at the national level, and in the process learned to work cooperatively with teams of players. This training helped him to work creatively and harmoniously with the team of employees at Elderly. Michael also plays the mandolin.

Here is what the press had to say about Michael and his promotion to president of a multi-million-dollar company:

“Michael Erlewine's journey at Elderly Instruments began on the sales floor 13 years ago, where he quickly pivoted to developing video content and established the company’s social media presence. Promoted to Director of Sales and Marketing in 2017, Michael merged the phone and showroom sales teams into a unified force, introduced a cutting-edge point of sale system, and formed a dedicated marketing team. His aim to bring the store’s intimate showroom experience online led to groundbreaking 360° instrument photography and an engaging, content-rich media approach alongside social media specialist AJ Glaub. Progressing to Director of IT and Marketing in 2019, Michael oversaw a comprehensive website overhaul, eased the transition to remote work in 2020, and orchestrated a major update of the company's digital infrastructure in 2023.

“Michael Erlewine's promotion to President comes at a crucial juncture for Elderly Instruments as the company continues to evolve and adapt to meet

the needs of its customers and community. Michael will oversee company operations in his new role, working closely with department leaders to implement strategic initiatives and drive continued success.

“Reflecting on his promotion, Michael Erlewine expressed gratitude for the opportunity to lead Elderly Instruments forward “It’s an incredible honor to step into the role of President. I look forward to working closely with our amazing team to build upon the legacy of Elderly Instruments.” said Erlewine “Our journey ahead will be shaped by the pursuit of continuous improvement, innovation, and a culture that values open and honest communication.”

“Michael Erlewine's heritage is steeped in music, tracing back to the Ann Arbor music scene of the early 1960s, where his father, also named Michael, and Uncle Dan were in The Prime Movers, a blues band that featured a young Iggy Pop on drums. Beyond their performances, his father went on to establish AllMusic, a comprehensive music database. Dan Erlewine has since gained fame for his exceptional guitar repair skills. Michael’s cousin Mark Erlewine is also a distinguished luthier, known for his care of Willie Nelson’s legendary guitar, Trigger. The musical legacy endures with Michael's sisters, Anne and May Erlewine, both of whom are respected singer-songwriters, adding their unique voices to the family’s musical contributions.

“On the heels of being named America’s Top Small Business in 2023, Elderly Instruments is poised for a vibrant chapter under Lillian Werbin and Michael Erlewine's leadership, deepening its legacy as a cornerstone of the musical instrument retail landscape.”

[Photo of Michael Erlewine with Lillian Werbin, CEO of Elderly Instruments.]

Note: If you would like to have access to other free books, articles, and videos on these topics, here are the links:

EMAIL

Winward

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 10, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/df93ad76-24d4-44e8-a2d2-2b9894ef3917_2048x1367.jpeg

I've cast off from shore and am on the journey of culling out all the interesting or usable photos from about a million photos. It's not going to be easy, and it will take weeks of time, but launched I am out on this sea images.

The goal is to categorize and make available (free to everyone and anyone) a large quantity of nature photos in hi-res format as well as standard resolution your choice of two sizes.

And you can use them for your own purposes, provided the photographer is credited.

[Example of one of the landscape shots by me.]

EMAIL

Liberation Through Seeing

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 11, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a8bac8ed-4349-484c-a2f2-e9c43536fce0_1365x2048.jpeg

What I hope to offer are little photo collections of a given plant or flower, with many images to select from.

I settled on this after years of consideration. All this particular kind of photography started with what I can only refer to as a breakthrough in meditation practice, a breakthrough after about 35 years of meditation with no real signs of progress.

For me that was a long time without much feedback, and then unexpected, it just happened.

Of course, it happened during what I call a perfect storm of difficulty, something that swept me off of my feet and found me hurtling downstream in trouble.

So, it was not like reaching the tip of the top of a pyramid or anything like that. Instead, it happened when I was torn down about as low as I had ever been, and, for that matter, down for a prolonged period of time.

It seems that it took a massive humbling to get me immersed in life and in the matter of life enough to feel or experience something of the mind's nature. At that time, I was not a happy camper.

Yet apparently that is what it took to get me off my high horse and finally embedded in life enough to feel and realize anything. Up to that point, I tended to be a sky-tripper.

And so, in retrospective, today, here I find myself celebrating that breakthrough into insight, not by being able to share the experience except in words, but rather by offering the signature or sign of such an experience, which I do by sharing some of the photos that derive from my familiarization with the actual nature of the mind.

And perhaps I will celebrate this forever after, just as a potter who finally learns how to throw a pot, turns out practical pottery that others can use.

I have worked tirelessly over the years to put into words the nature of the mind, but to no avail. Sure, I probably offered some slight scent or trace of

that nature, yet as the great meditators of Tibet point out, the nature of the mind is ineffable and can never be expressed in words. We all know this; however, we try, try, and try.

And as we all know, trying doesn't do it; doing does it.

[Photo by me.]

EMAIL

"Feel Like a Ballgame on a Rainy Day"

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 12, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/454a399f-d782-499c-8d36-c3270470eb77_1815x2048.jpeg

[I am just working long hours culling photos and organizing them. Nothing to it, but to do it.]

Meanwhile....

"April is the cruelest month" wrote T.S. Eliot," forcing us out of winter and yet still not with the warmth of spring. It's rainy and cold out here, And the "blues" are just one step away.

We all get the blues and they are not something bad or nasty. The "blues" are just a feeling, like the famous Chuck Willis song "Feel So Bad" sung by "Little Milton." Here it is.

FEEL SO BAD

"Feel so bad Feel like a ballgame on a rainy day

I tell you I feel so bad Feel like a ballgame on a rainy day

Since I lost my baby I shake my head and walk away Walk away...

Sometimes I wanna stay here Then again I wanna leave

Sometimes I wanna leave here Then again I wanna stay

I just can't make my mind up I shake my head and walk away

Alright, Well since I've got my clothes packed I'll catch a train and ride away
Gonna ride away"

Again, the blues is a just a feeling that can overcome us from time to time, like on a rainy cold day in April.

Some of us sing about it.

[Here are just a few of the many All-Music Guide books I have worked on and produced...this is just blues and jazz and only some of those...books that we published before the entries got too large for books and had to go online, where they still are today.]

EMAIL

The Sound of Music

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 13, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/cffc494a-6167-4c4e-a3fe-f2654d716ac4_1024x1024.jpeg

The outside temperatures are at last creeping up, but taking their own time as they always seem to do in spring. What's on the surface is the coming of spring jump starting itself.

If I just rest real still, meaning allow myself to rest like that, perfectly still, the clock keeps ticking and time passes by. I'm aware of that. Tuesday follows Monday and then it's Monday again. What else is new?

These days I am carefully examining many thousands of images, one by one, and labeling them.

What's always new is the well of the present moment if I can stand it. It seems I'm all too often lost in the past or trying to figure out the future, what's coming. The present moment is difficult to just rest in by itself, although it's all there is and has ever been.

Complete abandon to resting is required to stay in the groove of the moment. Otherwise, we slip out into the past or future wondering, which is mostly where we all are, and we just can't manage to stay within the groove. We are not in the groove, that's for sure.

The groove will keep us if we can manage to let go and allow it to, which most of the time we can't. Other than through resting, it's impossible to stay in the groove. We pop out.

Like a mobius strip, inside is outside and outside is inside, and either or and neither nor. Hopeless if we try or make effort.

Our internal gyroscope is made to steady and holds fast given the opportunity. And we all have the opportunity yet we just have trouble letting ourselves go long enough so that we can groove.

In other words, we wait on eternity to dwarf us, to humble us enough to allow full immersion in the moment.

That's what we have music for.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Emptiness and Joy of the Tedious

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 14, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/6a80a39e-0d7d-4e3e-b5e1-136ec2229bd8_830x1200.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/c63de94e-c769-4123-aa0c-d44d64f18552_863x1200.jpeg

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/a524cb70-67a4-4ecd-8c2f-288bbb22c4f0_1600x1126.jpeg

Yep, I've got the computer blues. I have spent about six hours working on trying to get a single program to work properly. It has not. And of course, it is the weekend and there is no phone support until Monday.

I had dared hope I might be done with this phase of the work today or tomorrow, but that's no longer realistic. I am out of luck, as they say.

And yet, I can't quit. No one else can do this work for me and I can't bear to leave all of this for my family to sort out if I decide to up and leave the planet, so I have to do it, and the sooner the better. I'm not getting any younger.

And so, I have to just settle in to doing what has to be done. I consider it a form of meditation, so the more relaxed I can get the better for the project and me.

So far, I have sorted out some million photos down to a single terabyte (TB) of finished photos. And now I am sorting that TB into categories like, Cyclamen, Iris, Landscapes, etc.

That is not easy because each photo is about 300 megabytes (MB) in size and all of the photography programs like Adobe Bridge, Photoshop, Photo Mechanic, FastRawViewer and the like can't handle that many 300 MB files at the same time, so I have had to create thousands of proxy files (one for each photo) of a smaller size, work with that, and then at some point actually make all the 300 MB photos also available to anyone interested.

Of course, I will also make a smaller size (2048 pixels) proxy for each photo also available. The trick is to manage all of this nitpicking stuff and I am. I had

a teeny-tiny moment of just giving up on the project but overcame that with the help of Margaret and a photo-friend and am back on track to finish all this. It will take a while, perhaps weeks, perhaps sooner.

When done, I will have placed the last (and one of my major collections), all these photos, in the hands of the public to do what they will with them. And all at no charge to anyone.

I believe that as much art and beauty that can be offered free is for the best and I have worked to that end.

So, for those of you that wonder where I am, that's what I am doing. If I can't manage other blogs just now its because I am busy doing this project, which is all hands-on at this point.

P.S. And I have not even touched my "Nature Field Guide" photos, all those photos of bugs, frogs, snakes, and all that.

[Photos by me.]

EMAIL

Change Itself Is Changless

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 15, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/4c6ef52d-a0fe-4743-ba83-13de962dd4fc_1024x1024.jpeg

The center and the periphery, like the center and the edges of a photo, given a good lens, have the same resolution and sharpness. As for the poet Yeats' lines in the poem "The Second Coming" that...

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity."

Those lines do haunt these times we live in, especially the line "The centre cannot hold." We will find out. We are finding out, because it has come to 'push'.

It is said that the only thing that never changes is change itself, that change itself is changeless. Yet, in that endless change in its sheer consistency, the invariable plane of the internal gyroscope of the mind, while endlessly spinning, is motionless in its steadying. That's where at the last there is rest, where things are at rest and changeless, in change itself.

That is clear if we just look. Even better, if we rest in that.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

Feeling Out of Sorts

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 17, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/d64d220d-b25b-45e4-9bc4-d6f0ed496aaa_1024x1024.jpeg

Being or feeling out of sorts. That state of mind, in my case, happens too often to be comfortable, when for one reason or another I find myself 'out of sorts'. It's usually something that happens to me or an exchange with someone else that I am very aware of. Of course, like most of us, I like things to go smoothly. And when a disjoint or disconnect happens, it can throw me off track or groove. I often have trouble getting it out of my mind. Whatever, it sits out there and festers.

Some factor is out of joint, and I add insult to injury by not forgetting it and moving on. I don't feel this is the way life should be. I should be able to be just fine even if one or more 'somethings' do not feel or go right.

Especially with getting older, something is almost always hanging fire, and not like what it's supposed to be or used to be, so I should move on from it. I'm working on that.

What bothers me about being bothered by these disruptions is that I can't just roll with the punches. I can't let it go. I'm doing better just because at least I'm aware of it. That's the first step, my being aware of it.

And the answer is, as usual, some form of compassion, my compassion for others or even theirs for me and this getting out of sorts.

If others have compassion for my state (or I for theirs), that seems to lead to the unravelling or softening of my stance.

[Midjourney graphic prompted by me.]

EMAIL

The Difference in a Day

By Michael Erlewine, *SpiritGrooves.net*

April 18, 2024

PHOTO LINK BELOW:

https://substack-post-media.s3.amazonaws.com/public/images/e061f8af-1d44-44ed-81c7-ea96873be4c4_1530x2048.jpeg

Busy day. Most of it spent processing some photos I took this morning, of which I include one, this is a bouquet of *Cannabis sativa*, part of a local agricultural project.

Meanwhile, churning in the background is my photo project, boiling down about a million photos into what are probably the best of the lot, numbering some 31,000 of the best photos.

Now, working with a friend who is writing some code to process these 31,000 photos as easily as possible, with the least strain on my time.

The original photos are so large, often 300 Megabytes each that my computer can barely handle the task, so I have had to break the collection up by using proxies, scaled-down copies of all 31,000 originals so that I could work on them.

After that, I have to link up the proxies with the originals in different sized formats for mounting on the web. In other words, it is getting more complicated in order to finally get more simple, if that makes sense.

And I actually have to make sense of all this as I go along and not lose track in the process. This is some detailed effort, not being able to work with the originals, but boiling it all down, like making soup of the soup of the soup by adding more water.

As mentioned, the computer cannot handle too many large files at the same time without slowing to a crawl. Very painful with seeming endless waiting.

Anyway folks, that's what I am doing.

[Photograph by me.]

EMAIL