

A MUSICOGRAPHY IN SIX MOVEMENTS

I. PRELUDE

It seemed as if every time my father encountered a piano, he'd sit down and play the power-chord introduction to Rachmaninov's *Prelude in C sharp minor* with a massive broad-handed tone. Then he'd stand up and walk away. He had studied at Julliard under Alton Jones, who was a student of Edwin Hughes, who was a student of Theodor Leschetizky, who was a student of Carl Czerny, who was Beethoven's student. Instead, my dad chose to become a businessman. He continued though, to surrender himself completely to the music of Gilbert and Sullivan. A tearful rubato on the piano often accompanied his rich, crooning baritone on the tragic-comic love-ballad, "Tit Willow" from *The Mikado*. One time, decades after his death, I quoted a brief line from one of their operettas in the presence of his brother and sister, who both (in perfectly synchronized harmony) completed the song and later confessed that their younger sibling had rehearsed them unceasingly.

II. ROOT-TOOT-TOOTIE

My teacher and role model, throughout most of the tumultuous sixties, was my brother Paul. He was eight years older, so I was always too young to follow him on his more adventurous expeditions into the counter-culture. However, his insatiable musical eclecticism exposed me to many of its early sonic movements, including the inner complexities of finger-style guitar. After school, he worked at Gilman's Music Store in neighboring Springfield and for my eighth birthday, he helped get me my first real

instrument. Prior to that, I had been borrowing his old hand-me-down Stella. Now, I had a four-string tenor guitar I could call my own. I learned all five chords in the book, *50 Songs You Can Play with 5 Chords*, then I learned more chords. Soon, my parents bought me a six-string Norma electric guitar from W. T. Grant's department store.

III. MELLOW DOWN EASY

Eight records for one cent was a heck of a deal and, in retrospect, it was probably the best penny I ever spent. Among Beatles, Stones, Animals, Kinks, and Dave Clark Five LPs, I also received the first Paul Butterfield Blues Band album. By 1965, it was clear that I had no choice but to become a guitarist. By 1966, the mass-produced sound of young white males playing the music of Chuck Berry, Little Richard, John Lee Hooker, Willie Dixon, and Muddy Waters had completely captured my ears. By the time I turned ten, I was already attempting to copy the exemplars of that first native generation of electric guitarists, which included Mike Bloomfield, Elvin Bishop, Lenny Davidson, George Harrison, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, Keith Richards, Brian Jones, Roger McGuinn, Dave Davies, and Jimmy Page. Most of these musicians were barely out of their teens themselves. I can't thank my parents enough for paying the inevitable bills when they finally came due from the Columbia Record Club.

IV. ETUDES

Drawn first to the guitar during the "Great Folk Scare," I had been invaded by the British and then psychedelized. As a consequence, by the time Dick Allegressi hired me to play my first paid coffeehouse

gig as a sixteen year-old solo act, folk-blues had become my indigenous musical vernacular. Following private lessons with Muddy Waters' sideman Paul Asbell, and applied university studies with former Andres Segovia students Bill Gonzalez and Tom Geoheghan, I apprenticed with Hector Ford (a veteran NBC orchestra member) then worked as a sideman in a wide variety of musical ensembles, occasionally fronting smaller combos. I composed jingles and did voice work for Patterson Associates, and starred in a series of their regional television commercials. Then, I began teaching guitar for local colleges.

V. THE UNANSWERED QUESTION

I still needed a degree, so I studied composition and theory under Dr. T. L. Read (from Peabody Institute), orchestration under Dr. Peter Brown (cellist with Leopold Stokowski), and eighteenth century counterpoint under Dr. James Chapman from NYU. Jane Ambrose supervised my independent studies in historical musicology, and I was advised on my master's thesis in music aesthetics at Goddard College by Dr. Greg Pepetone (a Leonard Bernstein protege). I completed my practicum at Middlebury College Music Library and later worked closely with Florida State University's ethnomusicology faculty while writing my doctoral dissertation on the early history of jazz and blues in Florida. I taught music and the humanities at the post-secondary level for a number of years, and my applied guitar students graduated from competitive music programs including the Berklee School of Music, Florida Southern College, Stetson University, Florida State University, and the University of South Florida. Then, happily, it was back to the woodshed.

VI. EBONY CONCERTO

Over the years I've learned that if someone in my community ever asks me to play music, the answer should invariably be, "sure." As a consequence, I've enjoyed the pleasures of performing a Stravinsky concerto on electric guitar with the Central Florida Symphony Orchestra, Gershwin ballads on banjo with USF's Jazz Ensemble, and Basie arrangements alongside two of Stan Kenton's saxophonists, Benny Goodman's trombonist, a Grammy award-winning trumpeter, and the percussionist from Hammer's *Phantom of the Opera*. I've opened for the Dharamsala Narmgyal monks (from the Dalai Lama's order) and for Lee Greenwood. I remember singing a Blood, Sweat, and Tears medley accompanied by Dionne Warwick's horn section and a Will McLean duet with Cathy Dewitt for "Hold Back the Water." My mandolin arrangement for Outer Circle's "Tallahassee" premiered on WFSU6-TV's *Outloud* series and I debuted "The Legend of Skunk Ape" at the Florida Folk Fest. I also seem to recall accompanying Hawaiian-music icon Pablus atop Pier 66's spiraling penthouse, performing with Boecat alongside elephants and giraffes at Lowry Park, staging two "Inaugural Bawls" with Mickee Faust, and receiving a smiling thumbs-up from Peter Bartok, Bela's son.

There are occasional nights though, when the moon illumines darkly and I have vague recollections of a time when I once served as musical accompanist for a rodeo of costumed dancing horses. Then, I awaken.

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