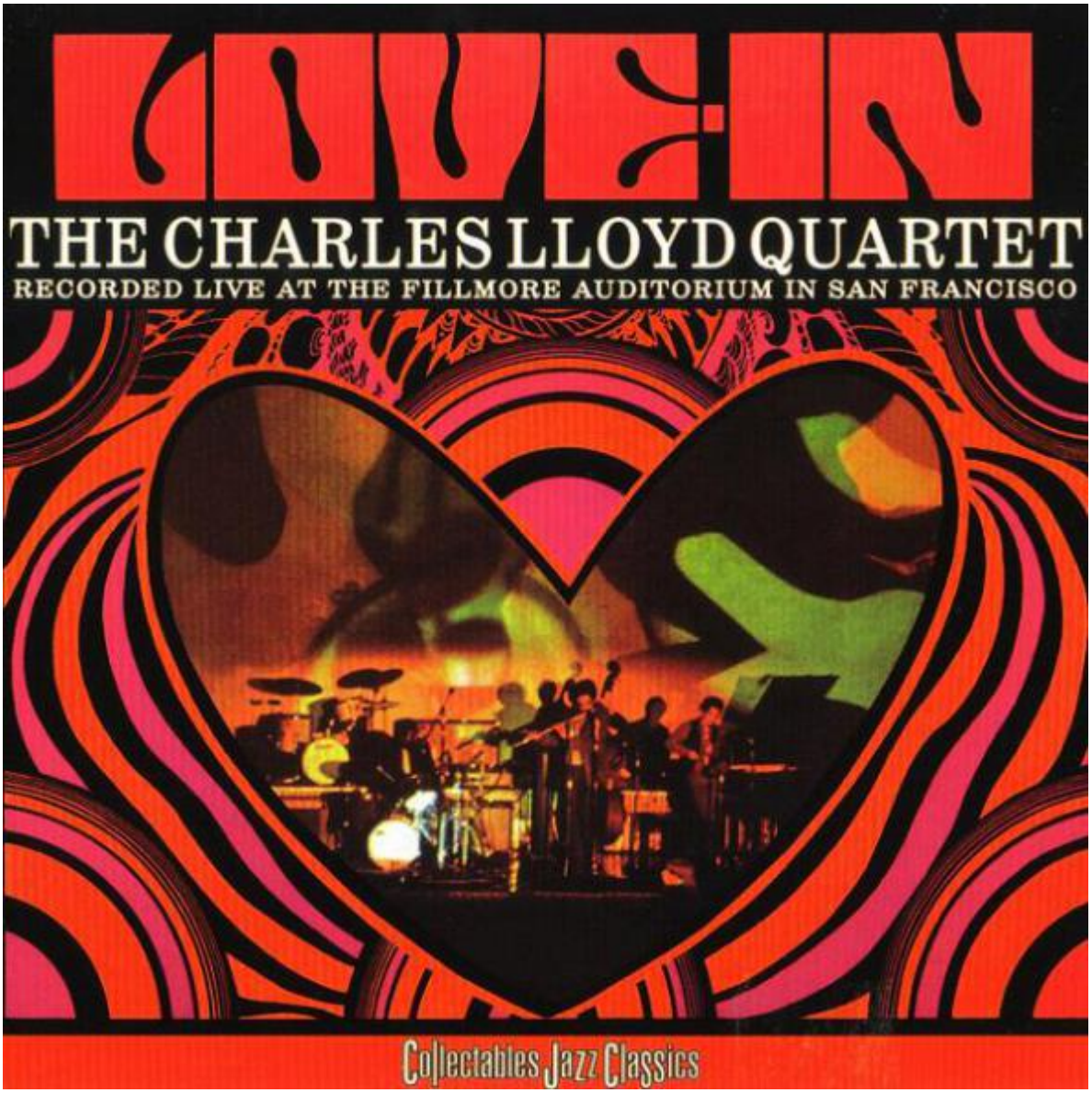
My Favorite World #38

After an outpouring of reader demand, The Writer is back with My Favorite World, a (purportedly) once-weekly feature that highlights some things that make this my favorite world. I had stopped posting MFW after week 37 because it seemed to be not so popular. However, the application of true cash money attached to a request to resume is more than I can deny.

So here: a piece of Terrible Beauty to herald the arrival of Trump.

Charles Lloyd has been on the scene since the 50s. It would be ridiculous to list everybody he's worked with because it's pretty much everybody who counts. His first group as a leader gave big breaks to Keith Jarrett, Jack DeJohnette, and Cecil McBee.<fn>If any of those names is unfamiliar, get to work!</fn> The Quartet was the first jazz group to play the Fillmore, appearing alongside Hendrix, Cream, the Dead, Joplin, Airplane, &c. For many a tripped out hippie, it was the first jazz they ever heard.



What else? One of the first million-selling albums in jazz history. Toured everywhere, including the Far East and the Soviet bloc nations. Lloyd, born in Memphis with heritage derived from African, Cherokee, Mongolian, and Irish ancestors, was one of the first "world music" explorers. He was, as the kids have it, the shit.

He has a new group – Charles Lloyd and the Marvels – featuring steel guitarist Greg Leisz, drummer Eric Harland, bassist Reuben Rogers, and some kid named Bill Frisell on guitar. He has a new album on Blue Note, *I Long to See You.* It is purely beautiful.

Lloyd has never shied from political expression, so on

Inauguration Day<fn>Black Friday</fn>, he released to YouTube a version of Dylan's "Masters of War" by the Marvels with guest vocalist Lucinda Williams. The song is 50+ years old and has never felt dated.

He released this statement with the piece:

> *Nations have been throwing rocks at each other for 1000s of years. We go through spells of light and darkness. In my lifetime I have witnessed periods of peace, protest, and uprising, only to be repeated by peace, protest and more uprising. The fact that Bob Dylan's "Masters of War" was written in the early 1960s and not during the last decade, makes it timeless and timely. It breaks my heart to think that there are current generations of young people all over the world who are growing up without knowing of Peace in their lives. The words Dylan wrote are a laser beam on humanity. This line, in particular, has stuck with me for over 5 decades:*
>
> *"Let me ask you one question*
> *Is your money that good*
> *Will it buy you forgiveness*
> *Do you think that it could*
> *I think you will find*
> *When your death takes its toll*
> *All the money you made*
> *Will never buy back your soul"*
>
> *The world is a dog's curly tail – no matter how many times we straighten it out, it keeps curling back. As artists we aspire to console, uplift and inspire. To unite us through sound across boundaries and borders and dissolve lines of demarcation that separate. The beautiful thing is that as human beings, even under the most adverse conditions, we are capable of kindness, compassion and love. Vision and hope. All life is one. Who knows, maybe one day we'll succeed. We go forward.*

Lucinda. I do love me some Lucinda Williams. When that woman goes for rasp she can sing the chrome off a trailer hitch. Her delivery here is terrifying and borderline ugly, ugly in that beautiful way that calls up and confronts the horror and fear many of us are feeling in these rickety times. It’s a clarion, a beckoning. Hear it.

Now, go plunk down your filthy dollars and buy a copy of this. You won’t be sorry.

Hell, it’s even got Willie Nelson on one track, Norah Jones on another. Whaddya waiting for?

My Favorite World.

This is What Democracy Looks Like

Friday, January 20, 2017, Inauguration Day, was one of the hardest days of my life. I felt, at turns, crushing despair and overwhelming nausea, mingled with a steady stream of red-hot rage at the people who brought us to this sorry pass.

Many friends refused to watch. I would not have missed it for the world.

A long-habituated politics nerd, I watched the proceedings, as I have for every transfer of power since Nixon rode his helicopter into the sunset.<fn>I also watched LBJ take the oath, but missed the incoming Nixon event. </fn> Every time, I have been amazed that this kind of thing happens, that an outgoing President can welcome his successor with grace, courtesy, and dignity, and walk away – voluntarily – to leave the office in the hands of someone eagerly prepared to undo as much of the standing legacy as possible.<fn>The transfer from Reagan to Bush an obvious exception to this dynamic.</fn> Not because it is written into law – it's not – but because it has become a symbolic dramatization of the kind of Republic this nation strives to become.

This is what democracy looks like.

Another reason to watch: this could be the last time it ever happens this way.

Try to imagine President Asterisk gracefully welcoming his successor. Go on, I can wait.

Trump and his crowd – and that includes pretty much the entire GOP at this point – has shown themselves more than happy to discard any of the established norms of governance that they

find inconvenient. Conflict of interest, naked cronyism, and – very likely – collusion with a foreign government to influence the election outcome<fn>A neat trick invented by Nixon, enhanced by Reagan, and perfected by this gang.</fn>, all of these decisions to violate established norms are a clear declaration: They will not be bound by anything other than a desire to impose their will.

The stonewalling of Merrick Garland, the steamrolling of Tillerson, DeVos, &c. – these are the tactics of a gang that has been given the power to do whatever it wants. And you can bet they are going to use it to the hilt.

This is not what democracy looks like.

But it's what we got.

For now.

Because as despair-inducing as Friday was, the next day was all bright-sunshine, despite the all-day rain and tornado watches. On Friday, we despaired. On Saturday, we marched, motherfuckers.

I'm a cynic about marches, street protest. Oh, I show up sometimes, and usually end up feeling embarrassed by the miasma of impotence that attends most such events. My standard experience: a pitifully small cluster of people waving unreadable signs, desperate to gin up enthusiasm by mandating choreographed theatrics and indecipherable slogans.

And despite the occasional horn toots of support, I generally felt like people were laughing at our pathetic gestures. Because if it was the other side doing it, I would be laughing at them, too.

So the day of the Women's March upon us, I was all set to stay home and bury myself in books and music. But Herself was determined to go, hoped I'd join her, gently suggested it

would be a good thing to do. I've been to too many of these things, found myself in a bedraggled cluster of a couple dozen earnest people, and gone home more hopeless than I had been before. And the forecast called for terrific thunderstorms all day. I pictured myself standing like a drowned rat with a couple of anarchists in Guy Fawkes masks. I demurred, opposed, argued.

I went. And man, am I glad I did.

We arrived about two hours ahead of the march. There were around a hundred people there, already way past my expectations. Alrighty then.

We ducked into Proof for a fortifying pint. It was nearly empty when we arrived.

The intrepid team

Twenty minutes later, it looked like this.

The pudding is in the Proof

And when we walked outside, we found this.

This is what it looks like

And this.

Let it rain down justice

And it rained. And people chanted, often unintelligibly, but with real fervor. We were not alone.

Beyond a certain size, it’s hard to tell from inside a crowd just how big it is. But when we reached the top of the hill and looked back, our scientific calculations gave us a precise answer:

Fucking huge.

Twitter let us know that it was happening pretty much everywhere. All around the globe, from Australia to Kenya (!) to Paris and London and Dublin. A protest organized on a ship in Antarctica.

And there was New York and Boston, Chicago, LA. Washington, DC.

Smaller towns, too, like Helena, Montana (population 30,000), which turned out 10,000 people. Tiny Mentone, Alabama (!), pop. 360, turned out 50 people.

Mentone, AL. The Bitter South. Hell yes.

And when it was all said and done, lil ole Tallahassee, Florida, population 190,000 or so…how'd we do?

Official estimate: 14,000-plus.

Hot damn. This is what democracy looks like.

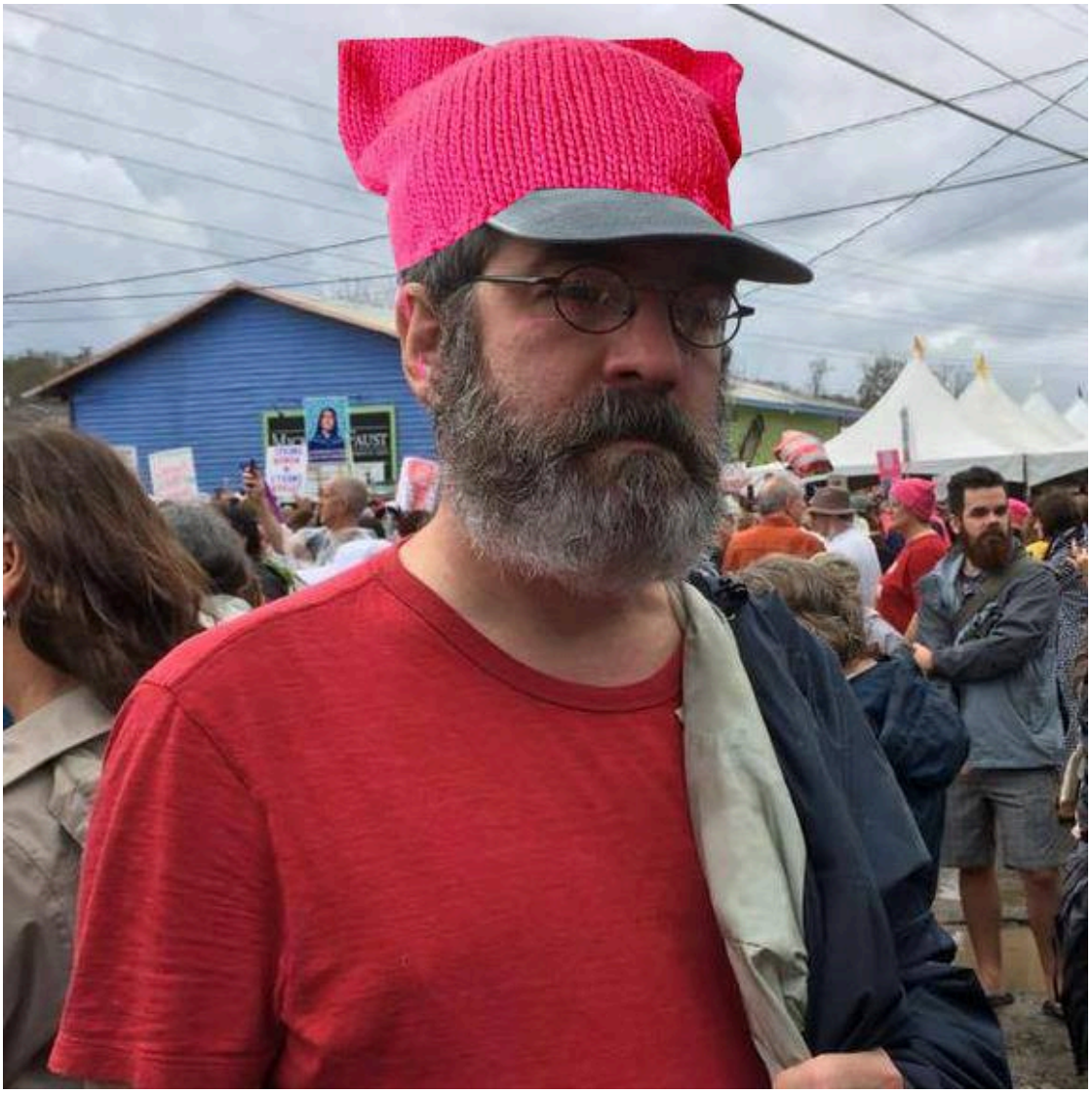
Real America

And it was a rainbow, a real picture of Real America. None of this rural white bubble that voted for Trump, but the Real America, people who stand for all their neighbors, who stand for people who may not look like them. People who stand for equality.

So the day after the end of the world, we find ourselves once again becoming acquainted with hope.

Make no mistake: all the levers of power are arrayed against us. But we are on the right side of history, and the more we keep standing up, organizing, and resisting in ways that effectively push back at the flood of bullshit headed our way, the better our chance of stemming the tide.

Don’t give up. Fight. It’s the Way of the Pussy.



Old Goat as Pussy Warrior

The Further Adventures of Stanwyck – Your Necessary Diversion from the Ascension of Il Douche

Hello legions. It’s been a while.

Today marks a transition. Obama to Trump. This is a damnably bitter pill to swallow.

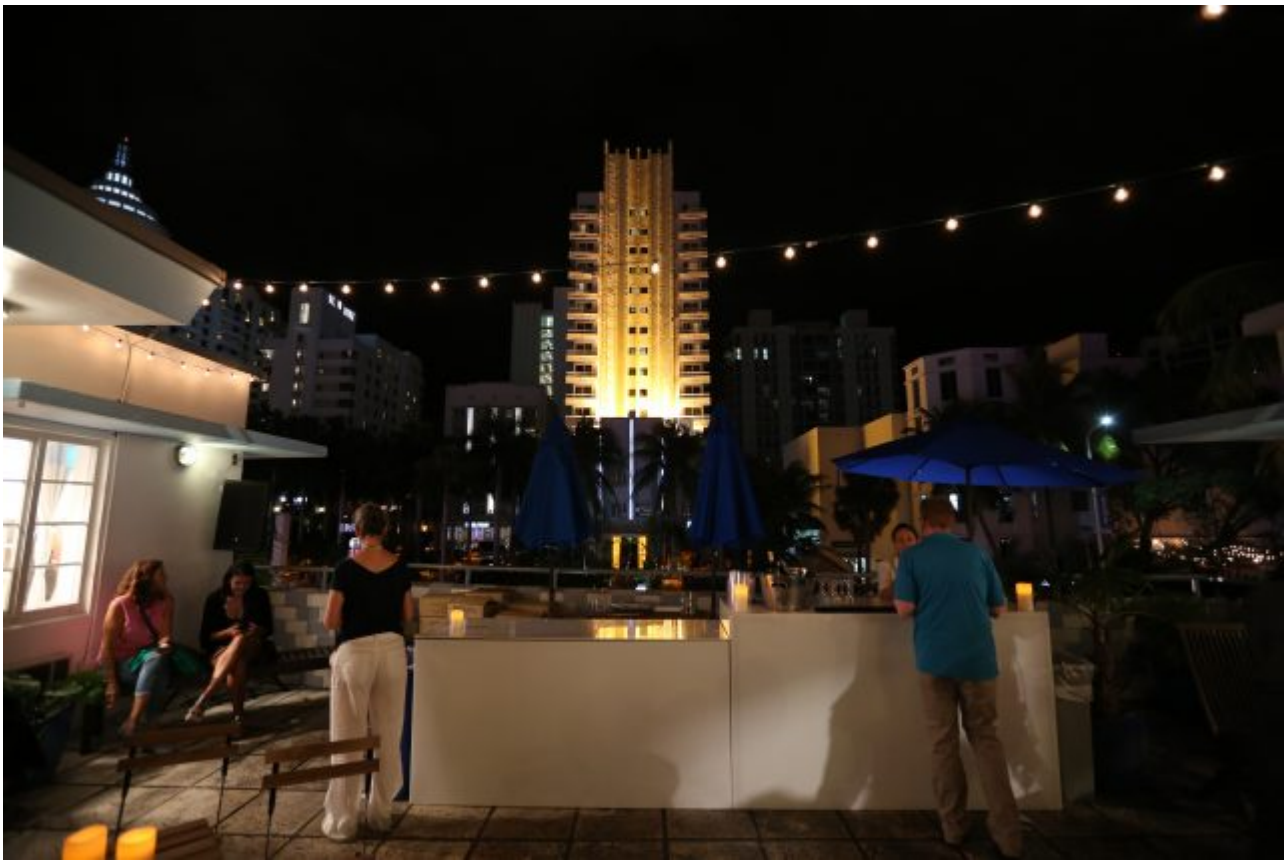
FFS

I barely slept last night. When I did sleep, I dreamt of a three-headed beast terrorizing me and my family. A little too on the nose, really.

Whaddyagonnado?

Here’s a mild palliative, a little something something that might amuse you. Bitter Southerner ran my piece about the Art Basel Miami Beach fair last Tuesday. It was nicely received, with a fair amount of enthusiasm about my trusty sidekick, Stanwyck. (If you haven’t read it yet, go ahead on: you have even more good fun to distract you from reality.)

Here’s an outtake, a part of the tale that did not make the final cut. Consider it lagniappe. Hope it makes today’s harsh medicine easier to take.



The All American Event Attenders

At the lower end of Ocean Drive are hordes of easily recognizable rubes from away – like me! – prime targets for aggressive shillery. Smart people walk down the beach side of Ocean Drive relatively unmolested, but the landward sidewalk is a treacherous gauntlet of garish sidewalk cafes, each with

its own bass-heavy soundtrack, volume set to stun, and a stadium's worth of neon and LED lights programmed to trigger seizures, all the better to help the customer realize how much fun she is or should be having. Employees – buff and exhibitionist – entice innocent wanderers with touts for two-for-one specials and all day happy hours. Thus did I find myself in front of a half-gallon of something that tasted vaguely like after-shave. It was delicious.

At this other end of the barfly spectrum, we found our bliss in a bucket-sized liver-ripper called the CoronaRita. It is apparently a favorite of some creature named Snooki.

Definitely NOT Stanwyck

What's in it? So glad you asked. Dump a can of citrusy soda, a can of frozen lime concentrate, and 12 oz. of crap tequila in a plastic fishbowl. Garnish with two upended bottles of Corona and a couple of jumbo straws. This drink makes the Hurricanes on Bourbon Street seem quaint.

Judgement: 12 shots of tequila and two beers in one serving, the CoronaRita is the ugliest enticement to vomitous excess I have ever seen.

I ordered one immediately.

The Bourbon Street analogy is apt. There is equivalent desperation at play among both employees and their marks. The vendors occupy some of the most expensive real estate around, and even at $42 for a jumbo fruity liquor drink, survival hinges on serving vast amounts of event-attenders vast quantities of near-toxic comestibles. The marks are themselves determined to have fun, dammit. The exchange is relentlessly logical.

Stanwyck ordered a martini, naturally, slightly dirty. Eighteen bucks. A bargain. It came in a red plastic martini glass. She was Not. Fucking. Amused.

“Drink up,” I slurred cheerily, certain that her ether stash was close hand.

Stanwyck glared. If looks could kill.

“You drink it. I got my pride,” she says. And she does, you know. She does. She dumped her plastictini into my drink bucket. “When are we gonna see some art, anyway? Watching you drink that thing might be performance…but it pure sure ain’t art.”

Everybody’s a critic. I went to work on my fishbowl – with martini booster – straining to ignore the glare of sheer hatred Stanwyck was throwing my way. It was Kigali all over again.

The rest of the night was a blurred swirl of Bosch-like hallucinations. More. Bigger. Louder. Splashier.

There was the Corona Electric Beach Party, with special guest DJ Matoma (yeah, I don’t know either), just steps from our café. Security looked lax. I crawled atop The Clevelander Hotel’s poolside roof to join the shimmy-shimmy dancers in their matching yellow spandex outfits.

The moment YN was seized by the terpsichorean muse

The crowd roared approval, but the bouncers frowned on my lithely gyrations. Cazart! Miami Beach might have a reputation as a fun-loving place, but the choke holds from those ruffians tell another tale.

I awoke near dawn amongst the other rough sleepers in Lummus Park. I was no more than 75 feet from my hotel. My pockets were emptied and my shoes were gone. This was where Stanwyck had left me to my fantods. Damn her.

While Your Narrator slept, Stanwyck claims that Heidi Klum dared her to arm wrestle Venus Williams at the *Miami Beach Magazine* gala. She sipped bubbly out of Pitbull's slippers at the Dom Perignon bash. The Bombay Sapphire Gin shindig, the Perrier party, the Perrier-Jouët soirees. She says she got into them all.

I sez she's a liar. She smiles quietly to herself. Over a

breakfast of eggs, sausage, and, for me, another CoronaRita, she flashes her phone. Pics of Stanwyck and Paris. Stanwyck and Sarah Jessica. Stanwyck and Madonna! She knows a move or two, that Stanwyck.

One more. Stanwyck and Clooney.

Damn her.