

COVIDream #1



The nightly dreamscape has been wild of late. This series hopes to capture some of the weirdiality. Not necessarily significant. But damn...

I am on a business trip to Atlanta, sometime post-pandemic. I rent a car because I am told mass transit is impossible, and taxis are dead because Uber/Lyft killed them before they died.

I drive out to Chamblee (!) for my morning meeting. My car is stolen during the meeting, and the rental company has none to replace it. Due to so many car thefts, apparently.

My next meeting is in Decatur. So I start walking. And walking. It is hot as hell, then it rains, then it is even hotter. I finally realize it is too far to walk. I see a MARTA bus stop. I wait. When the bus arrives, I get on, fumbling for money. Dead silence falls.

I look up and everybody is staring. Everyone is dressed to the nines, and the bus is ultra-luxury. Leather seats, calm lighting. A waiter serves refreshments.

“How much to ride?”

The driver, in his very neatly pressed uniform, looks me up and down. I’m a sweaty mess, but I’m wearing a decent suit, so I guess he figures I’m sort of okay.

“You can’t ride without a swipe card. No cash allowed. There is a place downstairs in the building on the corner where you

can get one. If you can get one, you can catch the next bus. It will be here in five minutes.”

I scramble to look for the card vendor. The downstairs of the building has multiple storefronts and businesses. There are no signs. I keep sticking my head into places and asking until I find the place.

Suspicious stares. I ask to buy a swipe card for a ride.

“Sorry. We don’t sell single rides. Minimum one hundred dollars ride credit plus a fifty dollar card fee.”

“But I don’t live here. I’m just visiting.”

More suspicion. Another worker picks up a phone, whispering. The woman “helping” me turns on her best customer service smile, and chirps:

“It’s the best way to keep the riff raff off the bus. Keeps them nice and clean this way. It improves the customer experience.”

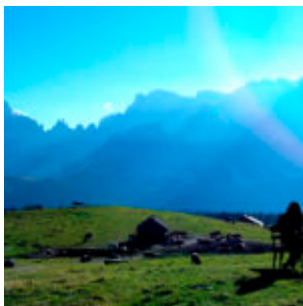
I pay. She hands me my card.

“As soon as your background check is complete, your card will be activated. Give it 24-48 hours. And thank you for choosing MARTA. I hope you enjoy your rides.”

~FIN~

The Opposite of Nothingness,

Part II



A quick addendum to yesterday's post made necessary because I am really out of practice at this so I forgot the main thing I wanted to share about Wu Fei.

Around three weeks ago, Wu Fei announced that she would present a piece of music every day through a subscription service. There are two options: You can pay a little bit per month to receive a piece every day, or you can take the unpaid option that brings you a piece every Monday and Friday.

Like most artists, Wu Fei faces a real challenge: How to continue to create new work, engage with an audience, and earn some income. Her solution, in part, is this subscription series.

The twice-a-week-for-free option is a no brainer. Just do it. [Click here](#) to take a listen to today's piece, "Green Plums and a Bamboo Horse".

If you can throw in a little coin, "[y]ou'll also be supporting a new way of creating music as a livelihood, and motivating me to compose or improvise an original piece of music every single day," as Wu Fei explains at her project site.

It's a mere \$8.88 a month for the full ride, around 29 cents a pop for a new sliver of beauty in your life every day. You can also give gift subscriptions to your pals who may be a tad short on the dosh these days.

Most days Wu Fei's new piece is the first thing I listen to. Today's piece has run through three times so far.

Sign up. Just do it.

The Opposite of Nothingness: My Favorite World #39 (COVID Series #1)



I danced around this piece all last week. With everything so upheaved, I felt obligated to deliver something with heft, depth, and consequence. To offer something that might offset the grim reality that plagues our everyday.

Writing essays about how the world is fucked up and bullshit are easy enough in normal times. Now it's just shooting fish in a barrel. And really, what's the point? Don't even get me started on the futility of coming up with something fictional when we are living inside some Mary Shelley/Camus/Kafka fever dream. We are all sharing the same streams of information, more or less, and unless you are gamboling around the fringier fringes of the internet machine, the news is stark: This shit is real and it is not going away quickly. That first rush of "I can ride this out standing on my head" bravado has withered and died. The long haul, we are in it, and sorry y'all, but it feels like so much nothingness I could just fucking scream.

Thus my bright idea to leaven the isolation by offering up some My Favorite World diversions. Share a few tidbits that might lively up yourself, shed light on some, perhaps, lesser noticed gems that make this My Favorite World.

But what a fraud! Who am I to suggest to anyone how to lighten the burden? Where does this Grumpy Gus get off chirping about MFW and cherishing the gems of culture as a shield against the darkness.

Because here's the the thing that I've been missing: Joy. It is staggeringly difficult for me to find true joy right now. Moments of contentment, perhaps, even moments where I almost fully forget the looming terror and disappear into a moment of – is that joy? – only to have it snatched away.

Oh the bitter irony of the person who forgets his own prevailing ethos! Because both the i2b / MFW sensibility comes down to one key verb: Choice. Always has done. Immunity to boredom is a choice along a continuum. Savoring the only world you have to choose from is damn near binary. But it remains: Make a choice. Doctor, heal thyself!

I turn then to an old Guitar Craft adage, the one that suggests when we feel we are not up to a task, or somehow unworthy, that we Assume the Virtue and go ahead anyway. In plain English: Fake it til ya make it.

So without further ado, here are a few gorgeous tidbits from this mixed up, muddled up, shook up world. It's my favorite, by the way. World, I mean.

First up, a master of the Chinese *guzheng*, a 21-string zithery thing that sounds like a room full of chiming twelve-string guitars.

Wu Fei means “opposite of nothingness”. And that, I reckon, ought to encompass everything, including the Joy that I seem to have misplaced somewhere.



I first heard Wu Fei at the Big Ears Festival in 2017. Her solo set summoned angels and devils and ghosts, and I've been a fan ever since. Her collaborations range from far edge new music improvisers like Fred Frith and Carla Kihlstedt to guitar virtuoso Gyan Riley (son of legendary composer Terry Riley).

The Wu Fei / Gyan Riley 2011 album *Pluck* is available over at Fei's Bandcamp page for a mere seven beans. Go. Buy.

Until recently, my favorite Wu Fei collaboration was this monstrous Duo for Guzheng and Freight Train. Chaos. Roaring Chaos, at that. And in the middle of it all a stillness, filled with Joy.

Here's the key thing about Wu Fei: Her music brings Joy. Even in the sad or dark pieces, there is joy in the suffering. And nowhere does the Joy shine more brightly than in her recent recording with banjo wizard Abigail Washburn on the Smithsonian Folkways label.

I caught this pair at Big Ears a couple years ago. Because I was ducking in out of the rain for “a song or two” before I moved on to something more something or other-ish. I mean, c’mon. On paper, the matchup has all the appeal of something cooked up for NPR fundraising week by a bunch of market driven pencil pushers, yet another in a long march of pedestrian world music mashups. I, I sniffed, am above such RiverDance-esque manipulations.

An hour later I was still in my seat, my coat still on, tears of sorrow and laughter streaking my cheeks. This was no bit of clever, audience-tested oatmeal. Fei and Washburn have been friends for years, ever since Washburn studied in China, and more recently as Fei has relocated to Nashville. And in the best tradition of pure folk music, they cooked up their stew jamming on the front porch while they tried to keep their young’uns in line.

The resulting album, produced by Washburn’s husband Bela Fleck, is one of my favorites in recent years. It is soulful and authentic and virtuosic and just so damned full of Joy I could just fucking scream. Happy scream.

So Much Joy

Go buy it. And while you’re at it, check out the cover story on Fei and Abigail in the new issue of Songlines, penned by my fine old buddy DD.

And while we’re talking about good old pals, there is nothing like hearing the voice of an old friend, even if he’s telling you stories you’ve heard a million times. Hell, these days, that might be the best medicine of all.

So here’s a kicking little Tiny Desk Concert from John Fogerty and his kids rocking a few old favorites. I especially love the actual baseball bat guitar he uses on ‘Centerfield’. There’s an old joke about Stratocaster just being baseball bats with strings. This one looks really uncomfortable to

play, but it sounds great.

And finally, just because this naughty little ear worm has been deviling me for days, a happy little ditty from 1970 by the Kinks. I was maybe ten or eleven when this came out, and while it took me years to realize what was really going on, I loved it right off. And that's the way that I want it to stay.

Pronoun Confusion is nothing new
Y'all be well and holler if the spirit moves ya. And as always...

LOVE EACH OTHER MOTHERFUCKERS!

It matters a difference.

PS – Click [here](#) for Part 2 of this post, because I forgot something really important that I remembered at 3 a.m. Mea culpa.

Live and Let Die



“Tut, tut, child!” said the Duchess. “Everything’s got a moral, if only you can find it.”

– Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland

A few days ago, our more-or-less president paid a visit to an

Arizona factory where they manufacture Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), in this case the N95 masks that are essential for health care workers and are pretty damn great for the rest of us who are trying not to die of the COVID monster. As the Great Pumpkin toured the site – without wearing a mask himself, at one point spraying his putrid drool directly onto a bin of newly-made product – a curious song blared over the loudspeakers.

Indeed, it was the James Bond theme written and made famous by Sir Paul McCartney. He was in a band called The Beatles for a minute back in the dark ages. You can look it up. and redone by the fleetingly popular 80s hair band Guns'n'Roses; it was their anticly screeching version accompanying the president. Late night comics had a blast, as did the twitterati, hailing the anonymous jokester who slipped this past the gatekeepers. Others japed that the hopelessly incompetent boobs on the WH staff were to blame; they just did not realize what the song actually says, yet another in a long-running GOP quirk of using songs that mean the opposite of what they think it means. *Born in the USA*, anyone?

All bullshit, sez me. I assert that the song was chosen with great deliberation and malice aforethought. This is the message the White House wants you to hear and internalize. "Live and Let Die" is as succinct and honest a policy statement as the Trump gang has presented in the three dark years they have been looting our national patrimony. It is the exquisitely logical culmination of disaster capitalism. These mafioso are damned if they are going to let this good crisis go to waste. And in a rare moment, they decided to not even pretend any more that there was so much as a passing interest in ameliorating the human consequences of the pandemic.

We fool ourselves when we fall into the trap of assuming the *capos* and *subcapos* in the White House are bungling doofuses. I believe they are, in fact, quite capable at the mission they have undertaken. They are there to hasten the dismantling of

the commons. They are there to reaffirm White Supremacy as the dominant paradigm of the American social contract. They are there to convert public assets into private holdings. They are there to ensure their friends are allowed to conduct business unfettered by inconveniences like environmental and labor protections, barriers to monopoly, and pesky annoyances like restrictions on abuse of power and foreign financial entanglements.

And certainly our betters do not deserve to be hampered by concerns over whether a few hundred or a few hundred thousand Americans get sick and die from a novel pandemic. Especially when such concerns might keep the hoi palloi from going about their designated roles as widget producers and consumers. The engines of democracy, what what.

America was built on the backs of expendables. From the beginning there has always been a surplus population that the sober-minded Captains of Industry and Capital have been hair-trigger ready to sacrifice to their own enrichment. Use them as one would any natural resource: Extract the value and cast the remains aside.

This is the mission of the Trump kakistocracy. It's a time honored strategy beloved by organized crime and hedge fund titans (though I repeat myself): Take over an institution and through concentrated malfeasance drive it into perilous instability. Then the looters are free to pilfer and sell off the pieces for personal enrichment. Fans of the Sopranos recognize this as the Bust Out.



Feelings make things
financially unfeasible.

The Trump family – so accurately described by writer Sarah Kendzior as “a *transnational crime* syndicate masquerading as a government” – has been systematic in its efforts to undermine governance. This has been apparent from the jump, and while Trump is indeed half-an-imbecile at best, efforts to dismiss this rampage as the product of stupidity leaves us helpless in the face of a harsh reality: The destruction of American governance and the evisceration of the rule of law are at the heart of the Trump project.

But wait. There's more!

Because the evangelical core of the MAGA movement is so inextricably wedded to theological White supremacy, there exists a huge swath of our fellow citizens who are actively and enthusiastically rooting for an apocalypse of any kind, just so long as it does the salutary work of ridding the world of apostates, degenerates, liberals, mud people, and pretty much anyone who does not buy into their christo-fascist revelations.

This sets us up nicely for a maker-taker / saved-damned parsing of the citizenry. The makers are happy to see the

decimation and further impoverishment of the takers, the better to more thoroughly control the resources that are – obviously! – the makers’ natural due. The saved are happy to see the damned scourged by hellfire, or virus, or whatever sword of god is close to hand. And anyone who falls to the sword – even those who thought they were in the maker/saved camp – has only gotten the comeuppance they so richly deserve. So how dare you tell me to take precautions on behalf of my or my neighbor’s health? Survival of the fittest!



We live in a reality where the federal government has made the utilitarian calculation that letting this pandemic “run its course” is more cost efficient than trying to fight it, that re-opening the economy is worth whatever death and suffering among the commoners might result. That this is both morally and economically insane is beside the point, because none of us matters in their accounting. They want you to know they feel that way. They want you to feel that way about yourself. Because once we believe it, we are done.

Democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts and

murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide.

John Adams, 1814

Are we done for? Maybe not, but as long as this syndicate runs the show, we are well advised to not expect any substantial aid – or even reasonable guidance – from our governmental institutions. We are being urged to get our economy rolling again – much as we were told to just go shopping after 9/11 – not because medical science suggests it is time but because the people who can force the issue are tired of not raking the profits to which they are accustomed. Even worse! The proles are getting money for nothing, just for sitting around and watching teevee.

Who the fuck do they think they are? Rentiers? Stockholders? Money lenders?



No. Not you.

I am depressed beyond measure as people rush to fill reopened public spaces, as people squander the gains made against viral spread over the past two months. Or has it been four? Or six? I lost track of the month this morning as I woke from yet another anxiety dream. I was sure it had to still be April. Maybe I'm wrong, but it seems likely that this hasty 'return to normal' – whatever the hell *normal* might even mean any more – is going to trigger another wave of infection. I hope I'm wrong, but any cursory study of the great pandemics of history

suggest it is inevitable. I will take no satisfaction in being proved right.



They keep coming back. They don't know why.

People like me are accused of wanting the shutdown to go on forever, and judging by social media comments, anyone foolish enough to want to protect their own health – by wearing a mask, practicing distancing & isolation, etc. – is some wretched combination of homosexual, commie, and victim of marital betrayal. We are One World, Soros/Gates controlled puppets, a flock of sheeple being led astray by “crisis actor” doctors and nurses conspiring to use the pandemic to make their Cheeto Jesus look bad.



A bunch of haters trying to make Trump look bad.

As I have done forever, I have been consuming a bunch of apocalypse narratives lately, and I really need to stop. Some of them, like the latest William Gibson novel *Agency* and Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*, are terrific page-turners that left me feeling hopeless. *Ducks, Newburyport* is a thousand page stream of anxiousness story about a woman who is certain global catastrophe is just around the corner. Thanks anyway, and it is indeed written superbly, but I'm more than capable of generating my own running commentary on the end times.

HBO's *Westworld* started off spiffy enough, but devolved into dreary slaughter and a bleak pile of body parts. The nod at redemption for Dolores was a nice touch, but not enough to counterbalance the grim nihilism. And however cool the exploding skyscrapers at the end of *Fight Club* might have seemed in 1999, *Westworld's* invocation of this image is at once lazy and pretty god damned tone deaf post-9/11.

It felt like I was chewing nails. I needed something light, a

little pick me up as 'twere. So I pulled down *The Plague* by Albert Camus. Yeah, I am a weirdo.

Amazingly enough, it was just the ticket back into hopefulness. First off, the writing is remarkably sharp. The tone steers clear of the dark spectacle that is common currency in dystopia tales. In its place is a heartfelt humaneness, a depth of feeling that refuses to hide its suffering behind narrative fireworks.

On the last page, the narrator explains that he wrote his account because he wished to...

...bear witness in favor of those plague-stricken people; so that some memorial of the injustice and outrage done them might endure; and to state quite simply what we learn in a time of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than to despise.

– *The Plague*, Albert Camus

We find a similar tone in Rebecca Solnit's *A Paradise Built in Hell*. This examination of community responses to five epic social calamities – from the great San Francisco fire to Katrina – paints a picture of how we might find our best selves in the face of crisis, how we might rise above our habitual indifferences to achieve something greater than the sum of our parts. We need look no farther than the front line medical workers for an example of what that might look like.

One post-dystopic book I'd like to read again soon Will he never learn???? is Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*. It paints a grueling struggle, but it is suffused with hope for a better future. No matter how dark, our heroes refuse to give up.

"That's all anybody can do right now. Live. Hold out. Survive. I don't know whether good times are coming back

again. But I know that won't matter if we don't survive these times."

Octavia Butler, Parable of the Sower

That pretty well sums up where I am right now. I despair for the choices and challenges facing my kids and their generation, and I grieve for the thousands who have and will die from the indifference the Trump syndicate has shown towards medical science and human decency.

My optimism is pretty much spent. But I remain too stubborn to surrender hope, no matter how unreasonable that may seem.

Top of the page, yo. Blog motto. It matters a difference.

Also, too: I'm going to bring back the My Favorite World series next week. Because there is still so much astonishingly wonderful stuff to celebrate.