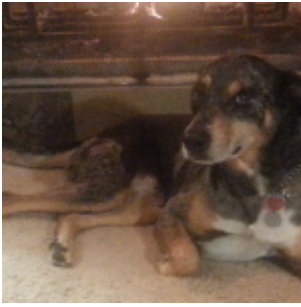


My Favorite World #5



My Favorite World comes at a good time this week. Sometimes the whole MFW ethos can find itself smothered by *stuff*. But then you just open your eyes, and there it is. MFW.

I just spent a long weekend with extended family, an even dozen of us. A generally good time sprinkled with the occasional fraughtiness, not unlike most family gatherings. Yesterday, a long day of travel that began at 9 am and was capped by weather-socked airports and a short train ride from the airport to friendly local bed space. Good job Delta, you almost got us all the way home.

This morning, up early, back on the train to the airport. J and the kids stayed with the plane option. For reasons too tedious to recount, *"Gadzooks,"* cries the reader. "Too tedious for *this* blog? Unpossible!" I ended up driving home from ATL. Finally arrived here cold, smelly, and tired a mere 32 hours after departure.

Shorter: travel during the holiday season is not in any way part of My Favorite World. Humbug!

Ah, but then I arrive safely at home and hearth, and there reposes Maggie, the Wonder Dog of Wonderment, holding court at fireside. This fine beast, who chose us by wandering into our driveway 8 years ago while we lived in the uncharted swamps on the other side of Ponchartrain, discharges all hint of negativity with the slightest nuzzle and yawn.

Maggie is a Catahoula Leopard Cur, the state dog of Louisiana,

and a breed that remains unrecognized by the poncey toffs at the American Kennel Club<fn>Those blackballing bastards, too busy sitting on their loathesome, spotty behinds squeezing blackheads, not caring a tinkers cuss &c.</fn>. This breed is known for its acuity as a herding and hunting dog, and is often trained in packs of three to chase down and subdue wild boar. That's one of these bad mammas:



This creature will fuck. you. up.

That's some serious anti-beast right there. I sometimes ponder Maggie, the WDoW, and try to extrapolate her enthusiasm for chasing squirrels into something akin to the fervor it must take to undo a boar. To no avail. Because let's be honest and ruthlessly so: Maggie the WDoW is more of an area rug than hard charging anti-beast killer, the gentlest of curs who wants nothing more than to get under blankets or snuggle with her favorite boy.



These creatures will not.

And then, too, also, too...I am back home with my fabulous wife and kids, our extra daughter, and my mom. It is pouring rain, the fire is crackling, and there is a cold IPA waiting for me to s(l)ink into the holiday season. With all that, what else could this be except My. Favorite. World.

And also, too, as well...thanks to everyone who stops by to read these rambles. The traffic has been much busier than I dreamed, and I appreciate the comments and likes and shares more than I should – but given my inherent shallowness, less than you might expect.

Merry Whatever It Is That Makes You Happy With What You Have To Be Happy With, and a Most Favorite Worldish New Year.

My Favorite World #4



The news of the world lately has been pretty dispiriting, making it difficult to remember that this really is My Favorite World. Two tried and true things you can do in the face of apparent hopelessness...cooking and listening to great new music.

Field Tested Fool Proof Granola

Looking for an activity that'll cure what ails you? Cook something.

Alas, my kitchen chops are just enough to keep me from starving, and to get myself in trouble once in a while, but there are a few go-to recipes that keep me from being a cliched, *Leave It To Beaver* era patriarchal putz.<fn>There are plenty of other areas where I qualify, but I'm nearly redeemable on this score.</fn> If you are generally kitchen savvy, this post is likely beneath your notice, save as an opportunity to point and laugh as I wobble on toddler legs through the world of food.

This one is an amalgam of lots of different granola recipes I've made/bungled/burned over the years. I've finally learned the guiding principles, though, and now I can whip this out at a moment's notice, as long as I have all the ingredients:



Oatmeal – 4 cups

Sunflower seeds – 1 cup

Flax seeds – $\frac{1}{2}$ cup

Coconut flakes – 1 cup

Tupelo Honey – $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (any other sweetener will do, but this is my fave?)

Vegetable Oil – $\frac{1}{2}$ cup

Salt – A couple two three pinches

Vanilla extract – A scoche

Then, if you're like me, you'll realize you forgot something, so off to the market to get:



Pecans – 1 cup chopped

Dried fruit – A fistful (cranberries today). DO NOT put the dried fruit in the oven or they will turn to stone.



Mix all the dry ingredients (except the dried fruit!!) in a big pan. You can substitute or add any kinds of seeds or nuts, but if you add much more than I use, you might want to add another cup of oats to keep the granola from becoming too seedy. Add the salt, oil, honey, and vanilla. Then stir like crazy. I use a pan with high side walls because I'm clumsy and spill a lot otherwise.

Put the mix in a 300* oven for 30 minutes. Make another pot of coffee after SOMEONE drank the rest of the first pot.<fn>I'm not naming names.</fn>

At the 30 minute mark, pull the pan out and stir well. Put it back in for another 15 minutes or so. Keep your eyes and nose peeled for any hint of burning.



After 15 minutes, or around the time your kitchen begins to smell like heaven's garden, take it out and stir again. Let cool for a while, stirring occasionally. Once it cools, add a fistful of dried fruit <fn>Exactly, no more or less. Be precise.</fn> and stir it in.

That's it. If I can do it, any prat can make it work. Half a cup of this mixed with a half cup of yogurt makes this My Favorite World.

Today's Music

This morning, Bitter Southerner posted their 25+1 favorite CDs to come out of the South in 2014.<fn>I wrote this last week, so the date's off.</fn> With just a couple of exceptions, I had not heard of the musicians on the list. So I pulled one up

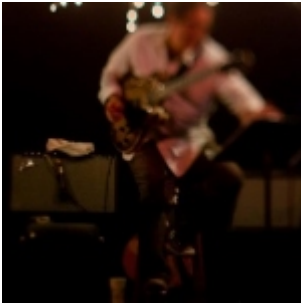
to provide the soundtrack for granola wrangling: Curtis Harding's *Soul Power*.

An ATL-based guitarist/singer, Harding serves an updated take on one of my favorite styles – late 60s/early 70s soul and R&B. Isley, Curtis Mayfield, Issac Hayes, Al Green...not that he *sounds just like* any of these folks, but that you can feel the through-line from the pioneers up to more recent R&B authenticos like Prince and Cee Lo. (Harding was in Cee Lo's band for a while.) He also reflects the great blues vibe of Muddy Waters and the like. And then comes "Cruel World" to wrap things up and I'm reminded of Los Lobos and the great guitar of David Hidalgo. All in all, I really love it. Just one more surprise puzzle piece that fits right into MFW. I'm sure it made the granola more better.

And now we're into Amy Ray's *Goodnight Tender*. I've met Amy in passing a few times<fn>Not that she'd have any reason to remember.</fn> and she's truly one of the world's good people. Loving this album, a heaping helping of pure country. And all respect for the incred harmonies that pal Kelly Hogan is dropping here. M. F. W.

I'm looking forward to checking out the whole list, especially the latest Lucinda Williams, whom I adore, yes I do. And if you don't know the Bitter Southerner, get to know them. They provided more than a little bit of inspiration for establishing this here little bloggy vineyard.

My Favorite World #1



Two articles for the debut of My Favorite World. What can I say? I'm enthusiastic.

Room

Nels Cline and Julian Lage

Mack Avenue Records

www.nelscline.com

Nels Cline is a 58 year old, self-described “fake jazz” guitarist known most widely for his membership in the band Wilco. Julian Lage is a 26 year old jazz phenom, the heir apparent to Jim Hall, with unmatched technique and harmonic sophistication. “Room” is their first recording together; if we're lucky, it won't be the last.

Straight up: this is music by and for guitarists. Anybody who loves quirky and beautiful music will like it too, but anyone with an addiction to the 6-string beast will listen to this over and over with head shaking ‘how the hell did they do that?’ amazement.

While Cline has a reputation for extreme sonic manipulations, the game here is pure guitar tone. Cline (in the right channel) alternates between a pair of Gibsons – a 1965 Barney Kessel archtop and a 1962 J-200 acoustic. On the left side, Lage plays his Linda Manzer archtop and 1939 000-18 acoustic (the latter featured in the recent Lage-Eldridge performance in Tallahassee). No overdubs, no pedals or effects – just a

couple of guys having a wide-ranging conversation with guitars.

It's hard to predict how 'normal'<fn>i.e., non-guitargeek people</fn> people will respond to this music. At times it is aggressive and dissonant; other passages are melodic, lyrical, and soothing. Crimson-esque angularity gives way to a ballad that Pat Metheny could have written, and here comes something that sounds like Ornette's harmolodics before we hear the ghost of Jim Hall. The tone and interaction also recall the great duets of John Abercrombie and Ralph Towner. The guitar chops are astounding throughout, but it's their ears that really do the work here. Lage and Cline are on their toes, keyed into each other's comments and asides in a way that often makes their free passages sound pre-arranged, with clusters and flurries mounting atop one another and relieved by sparse bell rings at just the right moment. And though their styles are distinctive, there are moments when the sum of the parts makes it impossible to tell who is doing what, moments when they sound like one instrument, one player.

In a recent interview with Premier Guitar, Cline described a compositional approach based on "squibs", "...tiny written areas of music to be connected with free improv. I would play an idea, Julian would harmonize on the spot, and we'd take it from there before going completely free."

Lage: "The squibs are distinctive in nature. Even if only four or eight bars long, they're very directive and can sustain long improvisations. Nels writes in such a way that leaves so much room for spontaneous composition. It's so cool that, in this setting, nothing is off-limits—a strong backbeat groove is given equal consideration to something more fluid. It's really a shared concept, as Nels says—a tip of the hat to Jimmy Giuffre and that whole scene."

OK, superb playing *and* a shout out to the monumentally great Jimmy Giuffre.<fn>You can bet Giuffre will show up in a future

MFW post.</fn> I am a happy boy.

Recordings like *Room* make life worth living. Check out the *Premier Guitar* interview for more on these guys. Here's a video clip of the boys in action to brighten your day.

Tatsuya Nakatani

Live at Ruby Fruit Manor

Tallahassee, FL

11/24/14

Why is this my favorite world? Because you never know when a stray Facebook post from one of the world's great improvising musicians announces that he will perform in your little town in about an hour. So never mind the torrential rain or the fact that you only have an iffy address in Railroad Square, no contact number, no verification. Get up and go.

And sure enough, there was percussionist/acoustic sound artist Tatsuya Nakatani with a miniaturized version of his percussion array set up in the corner of a 12×12 foot bare room. Tatsuya has performed and recorded with a who's who catalog of free improv heavyweights, including Joe McPhee, Peter Brotzman, Billy Bang, Eyvind Kang, Ken Vandermark, Mary Halvorson, Shane Perlowin, Kaoru Watanabe, Eugene Chadbourne, and Barre Phillips. I suspect most people will not recognize any of those names, but trust me, this guy is the real deal.

When I arrived, a local artist was kicking off the evening with a solo keyboard performance heavily influenced by Terry Riley. Sustained harmonic spreads alternated with denser drone clusters. Nothing moved fast; this was music for people with patience. The reward – typical of the so-called minimalist movement ushered in by folks like Riley, Charlemagne Palestine, and La Monte Young – comes with the release offered

by subtle shifts in tonality at unexpected moments. I'd never heard of Chantelle Dorsey (the artist known as Black Sun Black Moon) before this evening. It was a welcome discovery.

Tatsuya began by chatting up the crowd of 20 or so, talking about touring, sleeping and cooking in the van, good gigs and bad gigs, how he sometimes wonders whether it's all worth it. (The tour began on September 4; he will finally return home to Pennsylvania in late December. He travels alone.) He's a very personable guy, with a warm smile and easy laugh. Too often, the improv scene suffers a grim demeanor and heavy mood. Tatsuya is serious about his work, but never somber, and his amiability invites listeners into a compatible collaboration that recognizes the audience as an equal partner to the music and musician. This is no small thing, especially when the music is "challenging".

Settled in behind a snare/kick/floor tom kit, a rototom, a medium-sized gong, and a pile of cymbals at his feet, Tatsuya began by gently vibrating the gong with one of his handmade bows. It's hard to believe the range of sounds available from this simple gesture; the buildup of overtones can trick the ear into believing there are violins, a church organ, people singing, a synthesizer. He brought his kick drum in a slow fade-in until a distinct pulse emerged. While his playing is not typically rhythmic in a traditional sense, it frequently features a prominent pulse that provides an anchor for listeners. Always free form and generally abstract, his improvisation displayed an internal formal logic that framed the entire piece.

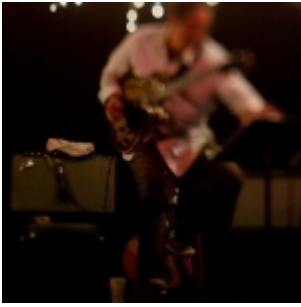
He moved through a range of sonic manipulations – handheld cymbals and kitchen whisks scraping drum heads; temple bells rubbed against one another or against a cymbal laid across a drum, multiple cymbals rubbed, tapped, and bent against one another. The effect ranged from a stiff wind through a bamboo forest to angelic choirs to a metalworks in full roar. This gave way to a Krupa-esque drum flurry, exactly what it might

sound like if someone shoved old Gene down a flight of stairs in mid-solo. And then the bit that really grabbed me – he held a small cymbal to his mouth and blew through the mount hole, treating the metal disc like a horn mouthpiece. This gesture culminated in his blowing through the cymbal as it lay flat on the snare drum to create a roomful of saxophones replicating a pack of whinnying puppies and hounds. The original kickdrum pulse returned, and then back to the bowed gong to bring the entire piece full circle. As the last vibrations faded away, the audience provided a sustained communal silence to bring the piece to a close.

Tatsuya Nakatani's music is available through his website. I particularly recommend his duo album with guitarist Shane Perlowin. You can also order his handmade bows and conduct your own sonic manipulations in the privacy of your own home. (Gongs and cymbals sold separately.) Wherever you are, keep an ear out and grab any opportunity to see him perform live.

Here's a pretty good video of Tatsuya solo in 2013.

My Favorite World Debuts on Wednesday



Tomorrow (well, late tonight) marks the first installment of My Favorite World, a weekly feature that highlights some things that make this my favorite world. It could be a book or paintings or teevee or whatever, but it will always be something that is immune to boredom. These are the things that make me do the happy dance, only that's just inside my head because my dancing, while not boring, is surely terrifying.

My aim is to bring you something you didn't know about before. Hey, it's the middle of the week, life is hard...how about something new and wonderful to think about? FTW? No! MFW!

For the debut tomorrow, posts about two cool things...a review of the first collaboration between two of my favorite guitarists, Nels Cline and Julian Lage, and how a stray Facebook post helped remind me that this is My Favorite World.