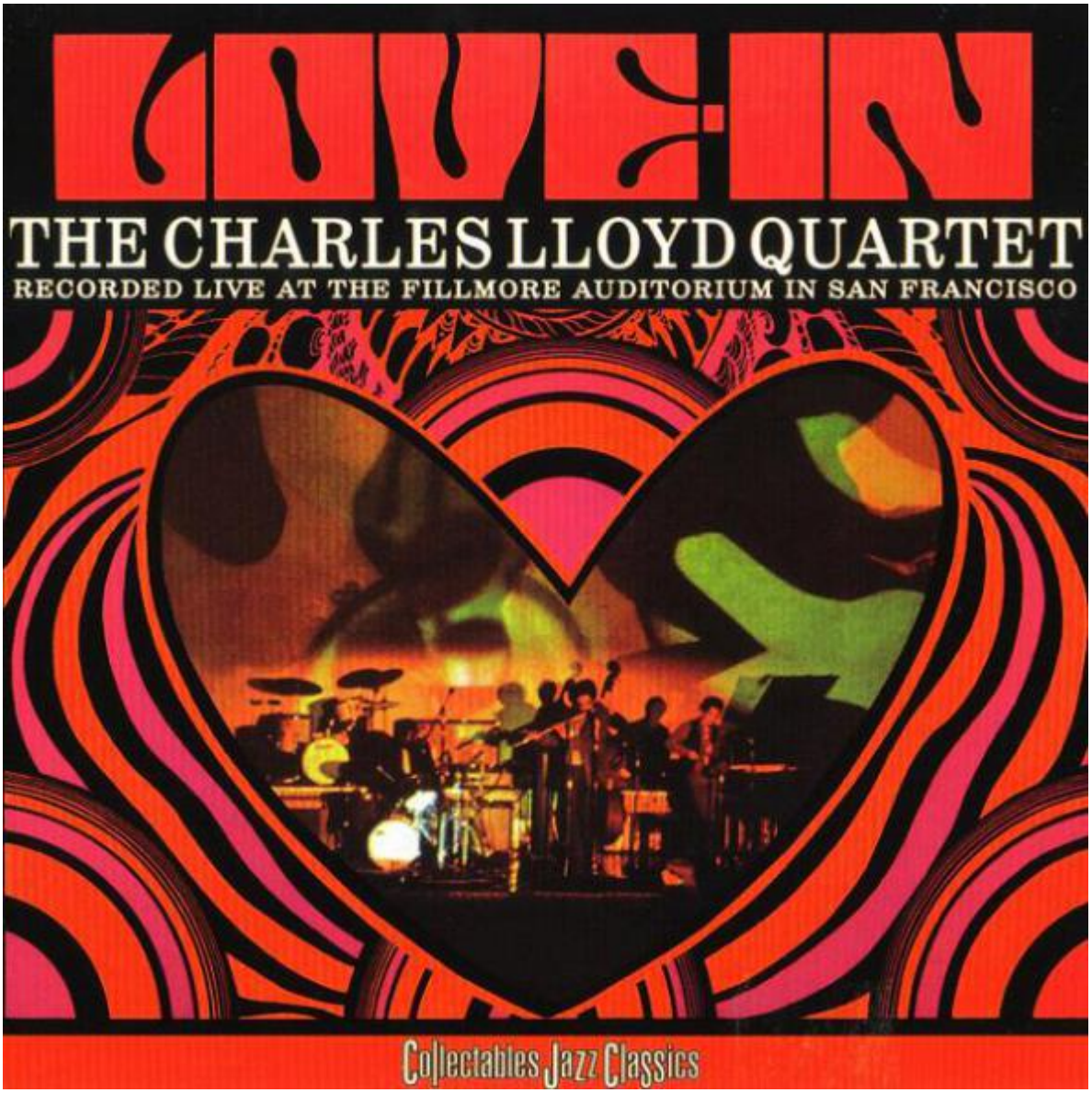
My Favorite World #38



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.

A Typically Hackneyed End of Year Sum It All Up Post



Hey kittens! It’s been far too long since I dropped some knowledge here in the bloggy vineyard. The wait for knowledge will, alas, continue, but there are a few things to talk about as we wrap up the 2016 calendar.

First off, and maybe biggest: we’ve (you and me) amassed a little more than $4000 towards my travel expenses for the Uganda/RUTF project. Massive gratitude to everyone who donated, and big props to pal Doug Blackburn who put together a terrific piece for the Tallahassee Democrat to give this project wider exposure.

As of last week, we are targeting mid-February for the journey. We had hoped to go in October, then November. We are at the mercy of the NGO we are traveling with and the conditions on the ground in Africa. I am about to crawl out of my skin with anticipation.

AND IF ANYBODY NEEDS TO RING UP A LAST MINUTE TAX DEDUCTION,
please click here
and drop a little coin in the kitty.
Fully tax-deductible, and all for a good cause.
You’ll feel so much better if you do.

It’s been quite a year in the vineyard, even though the blog frequency has been, uhm, infrequent. Mea culpa. Life has been full, and I’ve had the great luck to place two pieces in The Bitter Southerner in 2016, one of them included in their Best Stories of 2016 roundup. Attention ho that I am, I am extremely proud and honored, especially when you think of the consistently amazing writing they serve up all year long.

The ridiculously long piece on New Orleans and the Panorama Jazz/Brass Band and the merely-absurdly long piece on Hearty White were true labors of love. The opportunity to stretch out and tell stories about places and people that I love is one of the year's great blessings for me. Hard to thank the BS crew enough, especially Chuck Reece, for letting me ramble at length. And now there's another piece in the pipeline for the Bitter crowd, one that will be either longer or shorter than the Hearty piece, but definitely shorter than the NOLA ramble.<fn>btw, I've started looking at how I might expand the NOLA material into a book. Anybody knows a publisher or a deep-pocketed benefactor, please send her my way.</fn>

And bigly: Judy invited me to collaborate on her new Comma project. Look at me, Ma! I'm in the Academy!

I'm also deep into the research on the Uganda project and have begun sketching out some fiction projects that are either short stories or novels or perhaps a multi-volume epic that will make me richer than George JK Rowling Martin.

Hey, kidz! Let's get interactive. Take this poll to help me decide which fiction project to tackle first.

[Total_Soft_Poll id="2″]

Vote. It's important.

On top of all that, some fairly challenging and satisfying corporate 'ho type work that has been fun and rewarding. Hey, a guy has to eat.

And on top of that topper, a couple of really cool music projects in the first half of the year kept me hopping. Most notable of these was the Edgewood Big Band project led by my pal Jeff Crompton (pictured up top). Fortunately, this beast will rise again in 2017, with at least one ATL performance already on the books.

Here’s a taste of EBB in action. Really excited about this next go round.

There’s more over at Jeff’s SoundCloud page if you get the hankering.

So, yeah, I’ve been as busy as a one-armed wallpaper hanger with the hives. And the blog has suffered neglect. But I’m back, bitches. Plans for the next year include regular visits to the vineyard. I hear we have a new Preznit to look after.

Other plans for the year? They’re yoooooge, the best plans anyone has ever had, you really aren’t gonna believe them. Suffice to say it means lots of scribbling, lots of string tickling, and lots of walking.

We may be in a world of hurt with the Orange Haired Thin Skinned Pencil Dick in charge, but there is still Shit. To. Be. Done.

Who’s with me?

How Can We Miss You…



Frank Sinatra died 18 years ago today. It’s like he never left. Really. Books, and re-releases, documentaries and tribute albums. Even Bob is in on the act.<fn>YMMV</fn> Frank is everywhere, still. And that’s pretty great. I grew up

listening to Sinatra. My dad loves him, and every Saturday night at martini time, we would listen to *Sinatra at the Sands*, with the Count Basie Orchestra. Great, great stuff.

But this ramble isn't really about Frank.

Yesterday, for no reason other than idle intertubing that led me down a rabbit hole of 70s pop hits<fn>Spurred by a search for the Staples Singers' *I'll Take You There.*</fn>, I found myself listening to Jim Croce.

Croce had a couple of #1 hits and was on a rocket trajectory until his charter plane crashed on takeoff after a concert in Natchitoches, LA, in 1973. He was everywhere back then – *Midnight Special*, *The Tonight Show, Dick Cavett*, *The Helen Reddy Show*, Don Kirshner's *In Concert* – and on top of some tightly crafted pop songs, he was a pretty amiable storyteller. He was good and popular and likely would have gone on to bigger things. And then he was gone.

But this post isn't about Jim Croce, either.

Because alongside Croce in that video – and on every appearance you can find – is a very unassuming guy named Maury Muehleisen. This post is about him.

Back then, as a fledgling guitar player, I loved this guy. His touch and timing – even though I didn't really know about that kind of thing then – was just fantastic. Listening last night, I realized that the arrangements they were playing were pretty clever and tight. And that apparently came from Maury.

He was the guy who brought that sense of structure and sophistication to the music everyone knew as Croce's. His harmony singing is subtle and lovely. Here was a guy, very soft-spoken, who barely moved when he played and sang, just delivering the goods with no undue fuss. And it made what would have been a more-or-less novelty folkie into something a

little more.

I’m not going to oversell this. Croce’s was pop music, albeit at a time when pop music could actually deliver a surprise or two. He wrote entertaining lyrics and was by all accounts a genuinely good guy. And this song, though played to death over the years, is really wonderfully constructed. It’s a damned model of a pop song.

I spent hours trying to figure out Maury’s part on this tune. I never got there.

Maury Muehleisen. The guy was the real deal, a true musician who was happy to sit in back and make everything sound better, never hungry for a spotlight, a player who worked the road and died from it.

How can we miss you if we don’t remember?

All the Critics Love U in New York



If there’s any celebrity you can be sure you *did not know* in any significantly real way, it was Prince. Shape shifter, name shifter/eraser, master of every style you can name. Intensely private and essentially flamboyant. Exhibitionist. Hermit. You

don’t know him except in the ways you think you do, and that has as much to do with what you wanted him to be as it does with which little pieces of mythologizing he wanted you to see at any given time. Like the classic Trickster of legend, he could present multiple faces at the same time, and the face you got to glimpse, briefly, depended on which side of the road you were standing on. If Prince had been around then, Kurosawa could have made this pint-sized product of Minni-freaking-sota the centerpiece of *Rashomon*. That would have been cool.

What do I know of Prince? We’re roughly the same age. He’s probably the most under-appreciated guitar player in like ever. Over the years that I have been heralding him as easily the best thing since Hendrix and sliced bread I’ve received more than a few puzzled looks and dismissive chuckles about me just being a contrarian. This week, many people were surprised when Billy Gibbons described his playing as “sensational”.

But even that is only a piece of it. From his textbook knowledge and respect for those who came before him – JB, Sly, Jimi, Miles, George Clinton, &c. – to his savage dance chops and ultra-sharp fashion sense, to his early adoption and mastery of technologies like the Linn Drum; the guy put a package together that was both historically intelligent and, somehow, way out in front of the coming surge of hip-hop and Michael Jackson/Madonna style pop that followed him by a few years. The man had his gifts. Add in an almost incomprehensible work ethic, and you have Prince.

How Prince helped me know myself comes down to this simple question:

How could anyone possibly fail to recognize such evident talent?

Probably the way that I did.

Because instead of listening, I reacted to the packaging cues

that came with the Prince product. And because he hit the scene in the late 70s with a funky beat, puffy shirts, lots of synthesizers, and a (deceptively) silly reliance on lyrics about fucking, I saw him clearly for what he was: just another callow Disco Boy, a Travolta, a Bee Gee.

It's hard to remember (or, if you are a little younger, comprehend) the degree to which DiscoSux fever encompassed the world of funky music. Earth, Wind & Fire, James Brown, P-Funk: all these and more took their share of unfriendly fire from people who were essentially painting the entirety of black popular music as beneath-contempt shit.

DiscoSux fever was a symptom of reaction against gay and minority encroachment into the historically masculine world of rock and pop. This music was aimed at gender-fluid communities and urban black folk. For a generation of mostly white, hetero-norm critics and fans for whom rock'n'roll equaled priapic guitar stroking and golden-maned Dionysi sporting socks stuffed into spandex trousers, this was music that threatened the natural order. <fn>The pulse belonged on the 1 and 3, dammit, none of this 2 and 4 backbeat shit. Whaddya, Disco Duck?</fn> It was outsider art storming the academy. And I was a privileged, by-birth member of the patriarchal academy, though I didn't even know that such a thing existed; such is the blindness of by-birth membership.

Prince said fk all that noise, and it was pretty clear that he was throwing down on, well, people like me.

> *Look out all you hippies, you ain't as sharp as me*
> *It ain't about the trippin', but the sexuality*
> *— All the Critics Love U in New York*

Hey. I resemble(d) that remark.

So I could "listen" to *When Doves Cry* or *1999* and quickly sort this alleged genius off into the "just another over-hyped

fraud” bin.

In that same song, this upstart had the nerve to sing:

> *It’s time for a new direction*
> *It’s time for jazz to die*

As a burgeoning jazz-bo, I tooks what I tooks and it was more than I could takes. I didn’t need to hear the music behind this pixie poppinjay. These crude insults told me all I needed to know! Pistols at dawn!

Later, when Miles compared him to Duke Ellington and Chopin, it was easy to dismiss the comments as Miles trying to glom onto the popularity of the younger phenom. Because come on: he’s really just another Disco Boy, and everybody knows that DiscoSux, so pass the bong and cue up some Coltrane or some real rock’n’roll. Dude.

One night in 1993 I watched a terrific Neil Young *Unplugged* on MTV<fn>In those days, children, the M stood for “Music”. You can look it up!</fn>. The next show was Prince live in some mega-arena, and I watched it and thought, “Meh, pretty good” and then he walked offstage and into a limo that took him somewhere and he walked into a small club and took the stage and proceeded to melt my face with a yellow guitar and the most scorching Hendrix-style blues I’d heard since before Stevie Ray died. For the next hour I was slain. I’ve been listening to Prince ever since.

So what does the phenomenon of Prince teach me about myself? Every time I hear his music, even as I am digging it down to my toes, I am reminded that I am a fallible human being, prone to unpleasant bigotries and prejudices that cause me to stop paying attention to what is real and true. The impulses that put me on auto-piloting sort mode – this person is this, that music is that, I don’t like “those” kinds of

people/music/movies/food/&c. – are the things that make me miss the My Favorite Worldness of life. It’s good to have a ready reminder – one that the iPod throws up randomly and often – that for all my pretense to erudition and discernment and such like, I am just as likely to react like a dope as I am to apply any kind of intentional awareness to, well, anything.

Which means, naturally, that any opinion I hold is inherently suspect and worthy of re-examination. Consider yourself duly warned.

The most delicious part of the irony is that the song I quote above, had I bothered to listen to it in 1983, would have delivered exactly the kind of face-melting guitar heroics that won me over ten years later. Check it.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJxt_Ey6tbo

Who knows? I was full of myself in those days<fn>Unlike now, when I am extremely humble and enlightened.</fn>, so I might have dismissed it anyway.

Thanks, Artist Who Formerly Bestrode The World as Prince. Somehow, having you be the constant reminder of my proclivity to dopiness ain’t all that bad. You sexy motherfker.