My Favorite World #36



Life brings you moments, events that are pebbles tossed into our little ponds. Most of them pass by, one to the next, leaving little trace. Lots of our moments roll right by without us realizing that there was a moment at all; we may notice ripples later on<fn>Sometimes years later.</fn> and wonder where they came from. Some make more of a splash, are harder to ignore. Either way, the moments accumulate and define what we become, our tastes, our habits, our passions.

And some moments land like a boulder. You see it happening, you know it’s happening, and you know that nothing is ever going to be the same again.

So it was one April night in 1979 in Athens, Georgia, when I went to hear some jazz group that was supposed to be good. What did I know? I thought Return to Forever and Jeff Beck played jazz.<fn>Hold your fire! They were/are great. But not jazz. No.</fn>

I walk in and see a stage literally covered with every imaginable gong, drum, saxophone, flute, squeaky duck, penny whistle, plastic tube, bicycle horn, &c. Seriously, there must have been a few dozen gongs and bells, conch shells, and at least 20 saxophones, flutes, and trumpets. These guys had *all* the instruments. The low, pre-show lighting bounced spangles of dancing coins off these gleaming surfaces. I’d never seen anything like it.

The band walked on stage, several of the musicians dressed in

African tribal costumes with full face paint; one musician unadorned save his doctor’s lab coat; and the fifth musician dressed in street clothes. As per their custom, they stood silently facing the East for what seemed forever. The lights had come up full by then, and the dancing coins had transformed into a vibrant planetarium show of stars and suns. It was dazzling.

And then all of heaven and hell broke loose, with the thunder of a gong and a blasting cacophony of horns and drums and bells and godknowswhat that literally pushed me back in my chair. I held my breath almost the entire time, and when it was over I went home without talking to anyone because I couldn’t handle another piece of information of any kind. It was the strangest, most compelling and frightening and off-putting and enveloping experience of my first twenty years. It was music, it was noise, it was theater and dance and kabucki.<fn>Though I had no idea what *that* was at the time.</fn> It was multitudes.

I had run headlong into what the AEC called Great Black Music: Ancient to the Future, and I knew that nothing was ever going to be the same again. That was the beginning of my lifelong obsession with jazz in general, and especially with what critics have been calling *avant garde* jazz for going on 60 years now.<fn>How old does something need to be before it is *apres?*</fn>

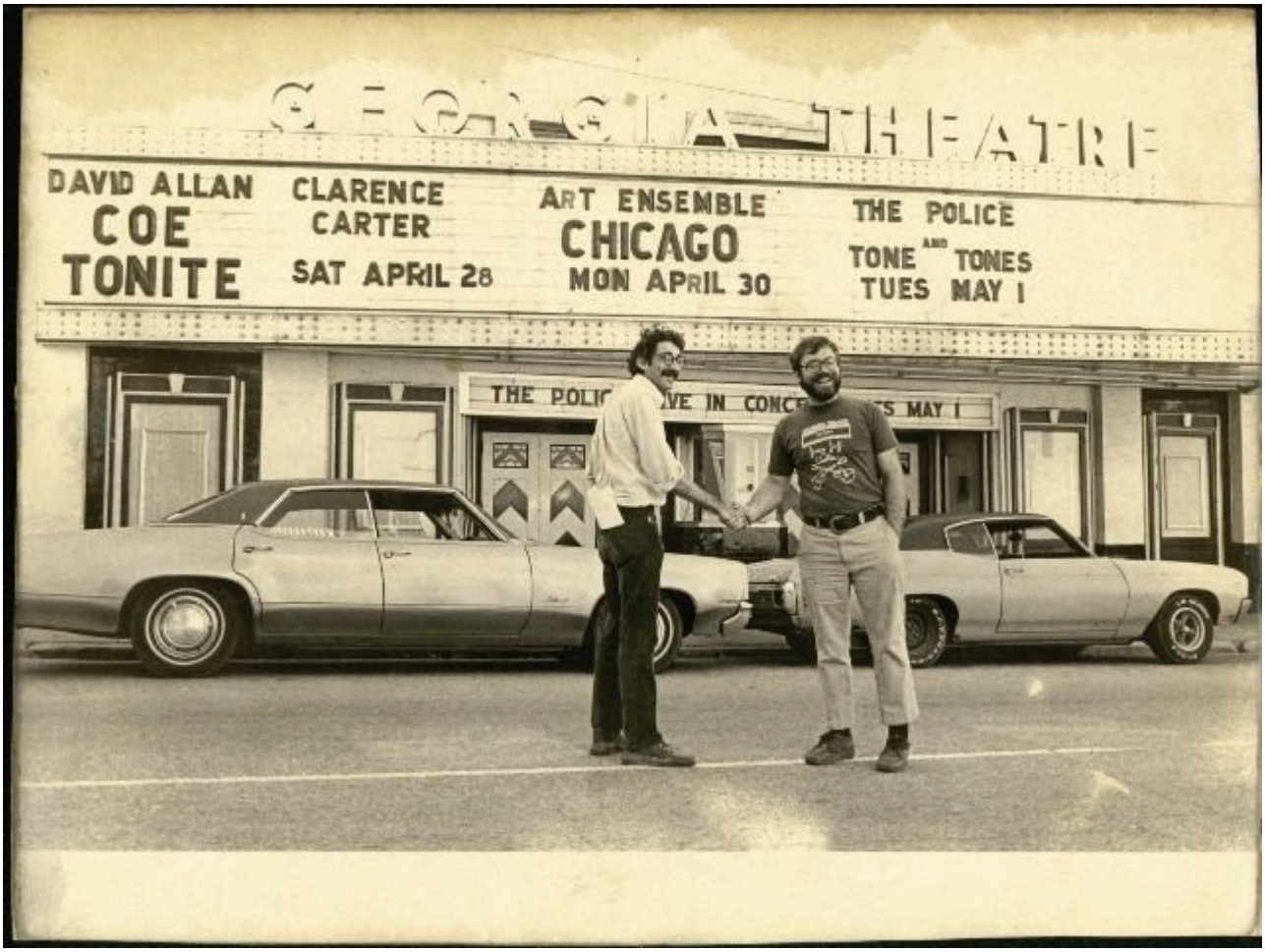
I had no frame of reference. Aside from the drum kit (which represented about 1/20th of the total percussion array on stage), none of the instruments were part of what had been my pretty standard suburban white boy musical diet. I had to learn about these instruments and the people who made them come alive. I would literally buy 10 albums a week, and I was borrowing and taping a dozen more. At this time, you could go to the used record store and buy LPs for 2 buck apiece, 3 bucks for a double album. It made it easy to take a flyer on something you weren’t sure about; maybe you recognized a name

of someone from another album, or maybe it was just the record label, or maybe the cover caught your eye, and if a record sucked, you could trade it back in the next week for a buck credit. I couldn't get enough.<fn>Fun fact. I bought most of these LPs from a fledgling guitar player named Pete Buck. I heard he made it kind of big later on in accounting or something.</fn>

That's almost 40 years ago, and I remember that show and its aftermath as clear as a bell. It remains one of the handful of transfiguring experiences of my life. And it opened, in turn, a willingness to seek out different forms of literature, art, theatre, films…you name it. Seeing AEC led me to Coltrane and Miles and Cecil and Ornette and Braxton and the list never ends because I knew there was music out there that could surprise and confound me and disturb me if I just looked hard enough.

Here's a piece from their album *Nice Guys*. It's a pretty good representation of the way they would blend incredible composition and delicate ensemble playing with the wildest free jazz around, and even better, how they manage to move from one realm to the other on a dime, smooth as silk. I still have a framed copy of the cover photo on an ECM promo poster.

So thank you Lester Bowie, Joseph Jarman, Roscoe Mitchell, Malachi Favors, and Famadou Don Moye, for cracking my bean wide open and filling it with such a magnificent array of riddles and sounds and possibilities. I can't begin to imagine what kind of human I would have become without this.



And thanks to Mitchell Feldman (left), the guy who made this show happen in a time and place where such a proposition – a Deep South presentation of Great Black Music – was decidedly unlikely. When Mitchell left Athens, I took over his Wednesday noontime jazz show at WUOG, *Out to Lunch;* this experience was probably the most valuable aspect of my undergraduate education. (Photo taken in front of the Georgia Theater the afternoon of the show.)

The video below is a 20 minute blast of AEC at their best. For a dozen years at least, whenever and wherever they took the stage, they were the greatest band on earth.

Bad. Ass. Mother. Fuckers.

Respect!

My. Favorite. World.

My Favorite World #30



I've written before about the almost incalculable amount of great music that exists *out there* that most of us never have a clue about. Lately, a pal has been funneling a supply of CDs from the Clean Feed label based in Lisbon. With all the production values and eclectic tastes of the ECM or the old Black Saint/Soul Note or HatHut gangs, this label has been putting out tons of great music for almost 15 years. Most of the musicians I've never heard of before. Most of the names are unpronounceable – improbable scrambles of consonants and vowels and umlauts and what not. And most of the music has been knockout.

Today's listening treasure is Carlos Bica and Azul. Carlos Bica is the bassist and primary composer. Frank Mobus is the guitarist, and his sound is more than a bit reminiscent of that Frisell character.<fn>Not that there's anything wrong with that!</fn> Here's a taste:

I'm not going to claim that this CD is any kind of world changer. What it is: fine playing, good group interplay, and compositions with enough quirk to keep you awake, but enough space and flow to let the improv ramble a bit. Exactly the kind of music I envision for The Jake Legg Trio, should it occur. Like this!

http://www.jakelegg.com/02%20My%20Buffalo%20Girl.mp3

My Buffalo Gal, by Bill Frisell, perf. by the Jake Legg Trio

Fine music, found just off the beaten track. My. Favorite. World

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My Favorite World #29



Life is busy with lots of good stuff. Big piece of this comes in multiple opportunities to make music noise.

Last week, RoboCromp (The Band That Refuses to Die, Even If You Beat it With a Stick) enjoyed a two night tour of the RR Square/Gaines district of Tallahassee. Jeff and I first played together 27 years ago in a band I put together called The Hundredth Monkey.



Hundredth Monkey, w Tom King and Mike Roe – Frijolero’s, Atlanta, 1988

A few months in, Jeff and the drummer (not pictured) scarpered off to form a different band. That’s how it goes…

But here we are today, the duo project in it’s 11th year. It’s a ton of fun, and gets better all the time.

But wait, there’s more!

Duet for Theremin and Lap Steel

Those dapper gents from Duet for Theremin and Lap Steel have

invited me to sit in at their show this weekend in Pine Lake. We've played together once before in their studio, and the result is a recording with me on it that I actually enjoy listening to. Here's a tickle:

[jwplayer mediaid="987″]

Lots of good work going on in My Favorite World.

The only drawback: scant time to put into the longer i2b posts. But hark! I detect a gap in the crazy schedule, maybe just enough to scrawl something coherent. Maybe.

My. Favorite. World.

Stay Cool. Everything is Jake.



With little time to spare, what with high school graduation and gobs of family visiting and the graduate having her tonsils removed this morning; and now a welcome flurry of people paying me to write werdz (unlike the Management around this little bloggy vineyard!); plus a couple of gigs later this week with new music to learn. Add in a dose of recalcitrance and innate indolence, and well, this is what you get this week.

Some time back, the Narrator created a little web site as a historical survey of his musical alter ego. There are some tall tales, some reasonably verifiable facts, and a smattering of music files round the place, along with embarrassing photographs, like this.



RoboCromp: We Were Actually Young Once

Hope this provides satisfactory diversion fodder until the Narrator can rub two words together again.