My Favorite World #37



Eagle-eyed readers of this here bloggy pontificatory nonsense are well aware of Your Narrator's affection for professional tennis. It's what makes the two weeks that wrap around Labor Day my favorite sporty time of the year. Yep, it's US Open time.

It's not just that your guide has attended the US Open – once at the venerable Forest Hills Club, where he had the great fortune to have the great Pancho Gonzales take a leak in the urinal next to his, and where the legendary Alan King deigned to sign his player program *and* flick a cigar ash in his, Your Narrator's, general direction.

"Have fun kid, don't get drunk."



Such a sweet man. Nah, I'm kidding. He was an

arrogant asshole. But
he did sign my program.

Later, at the grandly named US Open Tennis Center out in Flushing Meadows, Young Narrator watched Laver and Connors and Rosewall and Stan Smith and some perky little blond named Chrissie playing her first big match against Billie Jean, &c.

The last visit in 1985 found Your Narrator yelling for/against Wilander and Edberg, Connors, McEnroe, and that guy who sounded like a disease. Gerulitis. Yeah.

And it's not just because that stadium<fn>Specifically, Louis Armstrong Memorial Stadium, nee the Singer Bowl. By another turn of fate, someone who looked just like me and had my acne attended his first-ever bigtime rock and roll show in LAMS, nee Singer. The bill was Jo Jo Gunne, the James Gang, and the frankensteinian Edgar Winter Group. The world, it is small.</fn> in Flushing Meadows sits across the concrete plaza from Shea Stadium<fn>Where, as it happens, Narrator saw Game 4 of the 1969 World Series, but did not, repeat, did not see either The Beatles *or* Grand Funk Railroad.</fn>, and in the shadow of the 1964 World's Fair tower/needle/useless phallic appendage, the selfsame place where the pre-elementary Narrator discovered *It's a Small World* in the Disney Pavillion. To his parents' everlasting despair.

Nope, it's none of this. It is that Your Narrator is a kneeling, evangelical mendicant at the Shrine of the One True Sport. You can have your teams of people running around like noggin-deficient chickens, your behemoths beating each other senseless between the ropes, your vroom vroom, hyper-steroidal go carts spinning round in circles, your various stick and ball fiasci. As much as one may like these games (some more, some less), it's the well played tennis match that makes the Narrator's heart fly like a vicious down the line forehand screamer.

One could go on here about Andre Agassi, or Roger Federer, or Ashe or Steffi or any of the others whose games have made the world a better place for years. One could talk about the epc amalgam of grace, power, speed, and brute physical endurance that makes this *the* sport worth watching above all others. But not tonight.

Because tonight, since Venus and Serena are about to face off in the quarterfinals – with Serena on a path to the first true Grand Slam in almost 30 years – well, let's make do with one curious observation.

After years of debating the visual acuity of every linesman and umpire, of disputing and arguing furiously over close line calls ("You CANNOT be SERIOUS!"<fn>All linesmen insults are the intellectual property of one J McEnroe</fn>), we have all gone gently into that good night wherein an impossible technology automates line calls so effortlessly that the "integrity of the game" has been purified to its most error-free essence.

It's not that the added drama and strategy around line challenges are lost on us. It's that we've been robbed of the drama and spectacle of one of our favorites being literally robbed of a point, a set, a match, all because a human being blinked or had a bee fly by or simply lacks the visual acuity to make a decent call ("ARE YOU BLIND?"). And that we have simply acquiesced, in an act of faith as deep as any Road to Damascus moment, to the power of the machine to determine our destinies. Even the most Luddite of tennis fans turns to the Chase Official Review as the Diviner of Truth. It is, in its childlike way, almost touching.

It may be more fair, but is it better? Alas, the jury is not out, but rather has bellied up to the bar to watch the Sisters battle it out. And that's where we should all be.

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>

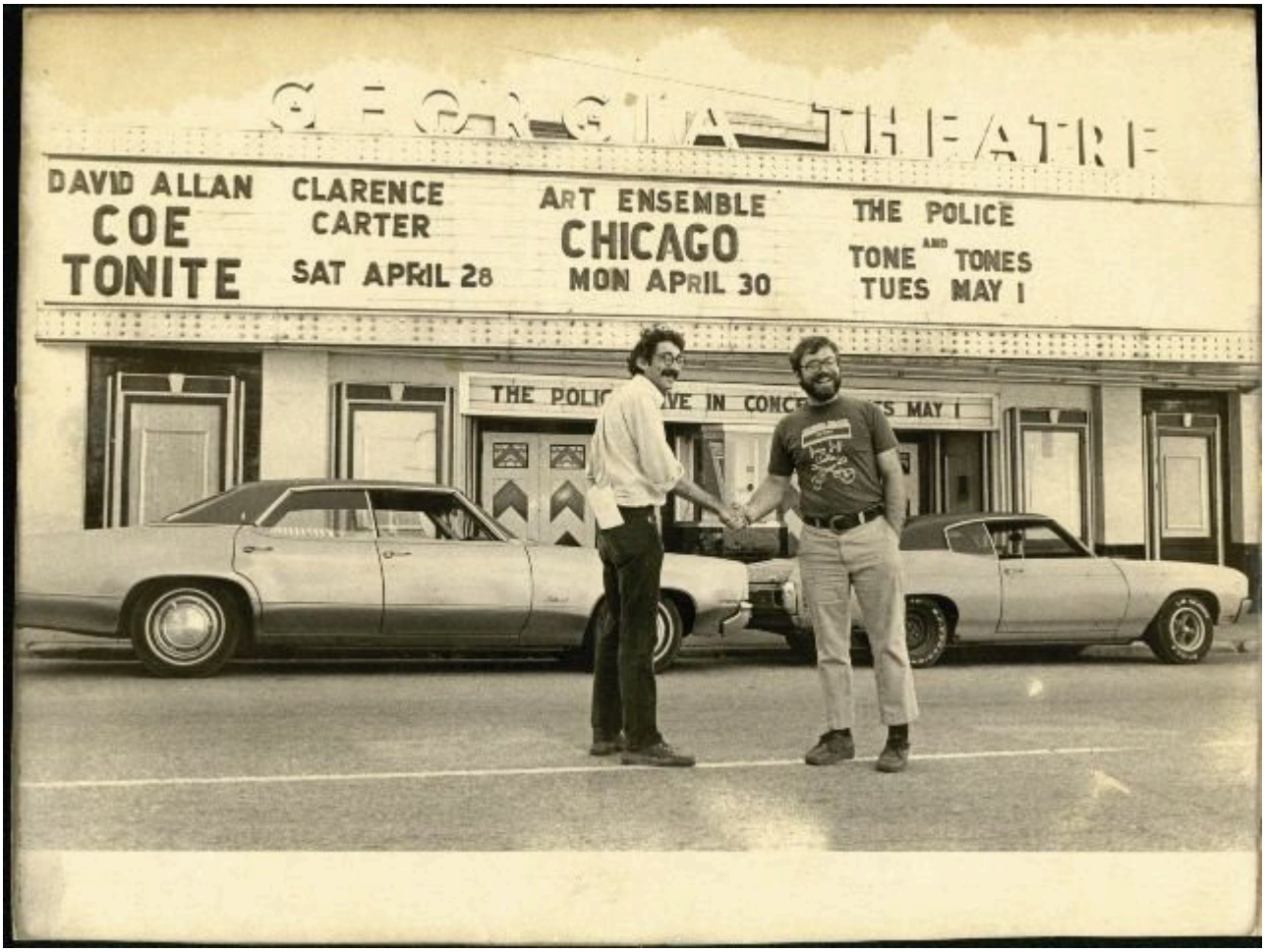
I had no frame of reference. Aside from the drum kit (which represented about 1/20th of the total percussion array on stage), none of the instruments were part of what had been my pretty standard suburban white boy musical diet. I had to learn about these instruments and the people who made them come 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 #33



Amy Shumer is funny as shit. She’s bawdy and profane and smart as a damned tack. And apparently, she’s pissed off the Disney/Lucasfilm monolith with her parody photo shoot of Star Wars icons. That alone is enough to earn her solid hero status.



Hung like a goddam robot.

I wouldn’t bother to post about her because she is literally everywhere in the media these days, but a friend the other day

declared, “I literally have no idea who this person is.” So on the off chance that one of my 7 readers is one of the 13 people in the world who aren’t hip to Amy, here goes.

Her “project”<fn>As the lit/art eggheads like to say.</fn> is primarily an exploration of what it means to be a young White woman in the media/world at large, the judgements/assessments of a Woman as an object first and foremost, and then perhaps having some sort of talent or other redeeming quality that might/might not deserve consideration based on whether she is hot/not hot. Also, too, whether a woman has a right to enjoy sex/food/drink to excess and without concern for what anyone else might have to say about it. At a recent awards ceremony, she declared herself well out of fucks to give, but happy to take them as she wishes.

> *“I’m probably like 160 pounds right now and I can catch a dick whenever I want, like, that’s the truth. It’s not a problem!”*

She had been introduced by AbFab’s Jennifer Saunders<fn>Another very funny woman who also ran out of spare fucks a long time ago.</fn>, who was a puddle of hysterics by the time it was all done. I’ve also watched Shumer reduce Ellen<fn>No last name necessary!</fn> to speechlessness. She takes no prisoners.

I could recommend any number of clips as exemplars of comedy-meets-art-meets-social-commentary that deserves placement in the imaginary hall of fame occupied by Lenny, Carlin, Pryor, Rock, &c.<fn>And why, oh why, mister pale patriarchal penis person is there not another woman on that list? The problem runs deep, and it damn sure ain’t the fault of funny women like Silverman, Diller, Rivers, Boozler, &c. Mea culpa.</fn> The extended piece on rape culture in a Texas high school football team is pitch perfect; jokes about rape are pretty difficult to pull off without being an asshole, and she nails

it. The pastoral luncheon with Tina Fey and Patricia Arquette celebrating Julia Louis Dreyfuss' "last fuckable day" before she is relegated to cronedom is superb. The trial of Bill Cosby is cruel and spot on. And even better, very funny.<fn>"I believe it was my mentor, the great Bill Cosby, who said, 'Here, take this.'"</fn>

But for my money, the best thing yet in her work is this episode-length "remake" of *12 Angry Men*. The cast alone is to marvel at; it's a sign of her clout and the respect she garners that this little show on basic cable could attract Jeff Goldblum, Dennis Quaid, Paul Giamatti,Vincent Kartheiser, Kumail Nanjiani, Chris Gethard, and John Hawkes for a single episode. But the genius is in the execution: a faux shot-by-shot remake, but instead of a murder trial, these men are to determine whether Amy is hot enough to be on television.



Well does she?

Watch it.

http://www.cc.com/full-episodes/d6vl24/inside-amy-schumer-12-angry-men-inside-amy-schumer-season-3-ep-303

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