

Love Your Mother



This piece was scheduled to run on Earth Day at the Salvation South website. Unfortunately, publication there is suspended for the time being due to an injury suffered by founder/editor Chuck Reese. We hope to resume publication there very soon.

In the meantime, this Earth Day piece was in danger of aging out, so I wanted to share in hopes that y'all will check out these worthy recordings.

Thanks for your support here and at Salvation South. – rr-k

Every year on April 22, millions of people around the world (some claim more than a billion) pay tribute to our Big Blue Marble by celebrating Earth Day. 2022 marks 52 years of this tradition in the United States and 32 years internationally. Earth Day is ostensibly about “saving the planet,” though it might be more accurate to say it is about ensuring that the planet remains a viable place for human existence; the planet has survived more than a few extinction level events and endured just fine. As for us? The jury is out.

To be brutally honest, Earth Day has long since been co-opted as a marketing gambit by many of the more egregious violators of the planet’s overall health.

EARTH DAY! BROUGHT TO YOU BY GE! WE BRING GOOD THINGS TO LIFE!

BUY A SUBARU AND WE WILL PLANT A TREE!

NEW FOR EARTH DAY! ECO-FRIENDLY BABY SEAL SKINS! 100% ORGANIC!

The Flattening never sleeps.

In the meantime, as we struggle to mitigate the cycle of consumption/pollution – and reconcile the brutal contradictions and deceptions inherent in the corporatization of this once ‘innocent’ observance – here are three new albums spurred by the artists’ concern for our fate.

I won’t pretend that recording, or listening to, a set of music driven by this noble impulse accomplishes much in pushing back against environmental disaster, any more than corporate appeals to “save the planet” by buying more crap with a spiffy eco-label does. On the other hand, all an artist can do is what an artist does: Induce us to pay attention to something that means enough to spur them to create. We share our divine spark as best we can. In this case, we are asked to consider our place in the ecosphere while we listen to truly wonderful music.

So give these recent releases a listen. Then get out there and pick up some litter or plant a tree. Doing something is more useful than just throwing up our hands, no matter how tempting that path might be.



***Hurricane Clarice* – Allison de Groot and Tatiana Hargreaves, Free Dirt Records**

For Allison de Groot (banjo) and Tatiana Hargreaves (fiddle), the follow-up to their eponymous debut album on Free Dirt Records confirms their reputation as two of the hottest talents in the stringband/bluegrass realm. Their archival exploration runs deep, their chops are kind of dizzying, and their charming harmonies bring to mind the best of the Carter

Family.

On *Hurricane Clarice*, De Groot and Hargreaves created what they call “an ode to family as a source of hope in a time of dying.” Recorded in Portland, Oregon, during the savage heat wave of summer 2021 – temps ran 40-50* above normal for nearly a month, with an estimated 1400 deaths – they dug into the dusty archives, penned a tune apiece, and interspersed recordings of their grandmothers to outline a vision of kin, community, and respect for our shared histories that might be all that stands between us and oblivion.

This album is getting a ton of repeat play here at i2bHQ. Don't sleep on this one.



***Only The Killer Would Know* – Valorie Miller, Blackbird Record Label / Indie AM Gold**

Asheville-based singer-songwriter Miller's latest is a nightmare tale of paradise gone bad. Years back, she moved onto a beautiful property near Swannanoa, North Carolina. Perfect, right?

“The very first night that I stayed alone in the trailer, on that little acre, I had a dream that the earth was a very thin layer of dirt on top of a giant trash pile and that the trash was sentient. It knew I was there, and it was evil. The next day, I woke up and I was like, ‘Something is weird about this place. Something is bad.’”

It was bad, alright. Turns out her little slice of heaven had been a dumping site for the weaponry and explosives company Chemtronics. Years earlier the corporation “restored the land” and moved on. It took years before Miller discovered that her

ongoing health issues were caused by living atop detritus from our military-industrial complex. On *Only the Killer Would Know*, Miller tells a tale of paradise lost squandered through tunes like “Apocalachia,” “Your Own Well,” and “Home of the Brave,” where she sings:

“Here in the mountains so green, it’s deceiving
You’d almost believe it’s a Garden of Eden
Somebody sold you thoughts that you’re thinking
And left a trace in the water you’re drinking.”

Yet for someone so clearly and deservedly pissed off, the album is raw and heartfelt and achingly lovely; this is no banshee rant. Imagine Lucinda if she’d come from the hollers instead of being born by the bayou and you get an idea of Miller’s sound. A damn fine listen and completely infuriating.



***FIVE MINUTES for Earth* – Yolanda Kondonassis, Azica Records**

Oklahoman* Yolanda Kondonassis is one of the world’s most celebrated harp players. (No, not the harmonica; that big stringed thingy that angels play.) With *FIVE MINUTES for Earth*, Kondonassis delivers perhaps the most beautiful set of music I’ve heard this year.

Kondonassis writes that she experiences “the harp [as] a strong metaphorical protagonist in the story of Earth: majestic but fragile, feminine yet fiercely powerful, and strikingly diverse.” She challenged fifteen contemporary composers to write new works of around five minutes each inspired by the planet’s atmospheric or environmental condition.

The resulting 75 minutes of music ranges from dreamy and gentle (“Kohola Sings,” Takuma Ito’s ode to the humpback whale); to mildly disconcerting (“inconvenient wounds,” Reena Esmail’s imagining of the moment a glacier cracks open); to the ominous and mind-bending (Stephen Hartke’s “Fault Line”). Even at its most tragic moments, the harp is inherently beautiful, and the mood from start to finish is *Shimmer*.

FIVE MINUTES is a project under the umbrella of Kondonassis’s non-profit Earth at Heart initiative. All proceeds from this album and any future performance of the compositions will go toward funding environmental action.

* According to the United States Census Bureau, Oklahoma is a Southern State. There are also some huge historical reasons for considering it part of the South. More on that another day.

Perfect Flat



I dropped a new article on Salvation South yesterday about guitarist Shane Parish, a talented and committed artist who is carving a unique musical path for himself. His determination to follow his own instincts and put in the considerable work required to realize his vision is inspiring, not least because the overwhelming directive of our late-capitalist society is to conform, follow, and obey.

I love to explore and write about artists who turn their backs on this directive for two big reasons: 1) They are inherently interesting and instructive, and 2) Their very existence is sand in the machinery of those who wish us to conform/follow/obey.

There is a saying in Japan: "The nail that sticks up must get hammered down."

It refers to the so-called perfect homogeneity of Japanese culture, but like so many pithy turns of phrase, it belies a more complex reality: under the shiny flat surface, Japanese culture is a roiling cauldron of cultural variety as reflected in its fashion and tastes in music, movies, and so on.

Still, that illusion of an unblemished ethnic and cultural gloss often elicits wistful sighs of envy from Americans who wish we could be more like that.

In my own imposition of oversimplification on a spaghetti-ball topic, I'll split that group into two categories: Those Who Want Everything to Stay the Way it Supposedly Used To Be and Those Who Strive For An Easier Target Market That Will Buy More Useless Shit.

Let's call them the UsedToBes™ and the UselessShitters™.

Note: These terms are of my own invention and original work and thus subject to all trademark and copyright protections. (As if anyone would steal them.)

The first group *demand*s the flatness and is more than willing to impose the leveling by coercion if need be. The second group is more subtle, striving for a high sheen of uniformity via seduction and temptation. This segment urges us to relax, enjoy, consume, all the while subtly ratcheting up the dread of perhaps losing the precarious toehold on 'prosperity' we imagine we enjoy.

There is a third group, too. Read to the end to discover the seven weird tricks this groups etc.....

Together, these three groups serve to impose what I call The Great Flattening.

The UsedToBes

Let's start with the old times are not forgotten revanchists who pine for an imaginary past where America was Great, men were men, women were housewives, perverts stayed in the closet, and knew their place, dammit. The people who say, "this is how we've always done it" and "if it was good enough for my Daddy and Granddaddy then it's good enough for me" or phone up the police when Those People™^s disturb the peace by acting all equal and human.

This is the motivating force behind the current crusade against the disturbers of a nice, quiet, *decent* society: the LBGTQ community who just refuse to act normal; those uppity people of color who demand to be treated as human; or those soft-on-crime coddlers who dare suggest that the billions spent on policing might be better invested in more humanitarian directions. You know. The dreaded 'woke' brigade.

These are the people who have their panties in a twist over teaching CRT, a legal theory that most people could not explain under threat of torture. CRT is a useful-if-incomplete explainer of how the world works and has rarely been mentioned outside a law school classroom until a culture war conman fabricated a social media firestorm suggesting that CRT was teaching tender little white kids to hate themselves. The grifter specifically tweeted ahead of time that he was going to do this, but the low-information rubes in the Fox bubble swallowed hook, line, and dog whistle.

And if you don't agree, refuse to comply, you will be ostracized. Hounded, subject to the limits of the law. Often,

refused the opportunity to earn a living.

Like Moe in the Three Stooges, the bullies of MAGAworld are threatened by non-conformity because deep down they know they are the ones who are deformed; any expression of freedom reminds them that they are the true cowards, afraid to engage the world and their fellow citizens with compassion and creativity. And like bullies everywhere, any serious pushback draws plaintive cries of victimization and efforts to demonize their perceived enemies, like those evil cabals of teachers. They hope to win by convincing everyone that if you do not fit their conception of what is acceptable you are to be cast out. And if they can't win by intimidation, the violence is never far behind.



MoeRon

(photo wixardry by barry stock)

Seriously, name a more perfect distillation of Moe Howard in today's public arena than Ron DeSantis, a none-too-bright bully suffused with barely concealed terror, anger, and ignorance, and all too anxious to unleash state violence to ensure compliance.

The pile-on has become especially acute this year as several state legislatures are rushing to criminalize discussing specific topics – or placing reading materials on the library shelves where tender minds might be sullied – as though such a move will wrench the clock back 50 60 70 years. Bundled under a banner of “parental rights,” the impulse here is to keep those dastardly teachers and librarians from indoctrinating their little angels with lies and filth. Things like accurate histories about slavery and the true origins of America the Great, or information that lets kids who are different understand that they are not alone, not defective, not disgusting just because they experience their sexuality in a way not in line with Mister and Missus Cleaver. I could go on. (Boy, could I.) But I'll leave it with this: several state legislatures, in their rush to criminalize abortion or sexual transition therapies, have added provisions that would make these services a crime not only in their own state, but would charge any person who leaves the state to obtain these services with a felony. Shades of the Fugitive Slave Act.

The silver lining in all this is that the greater the pressure to conform, the greater the likelihood of a backlash. The advance guard is already on the march. Their success depends upon the support and participation of anyone who is appalled by the bullying, but has never been one to act out and makes waves.

Make waves, people. Disrupt the smooth surface.

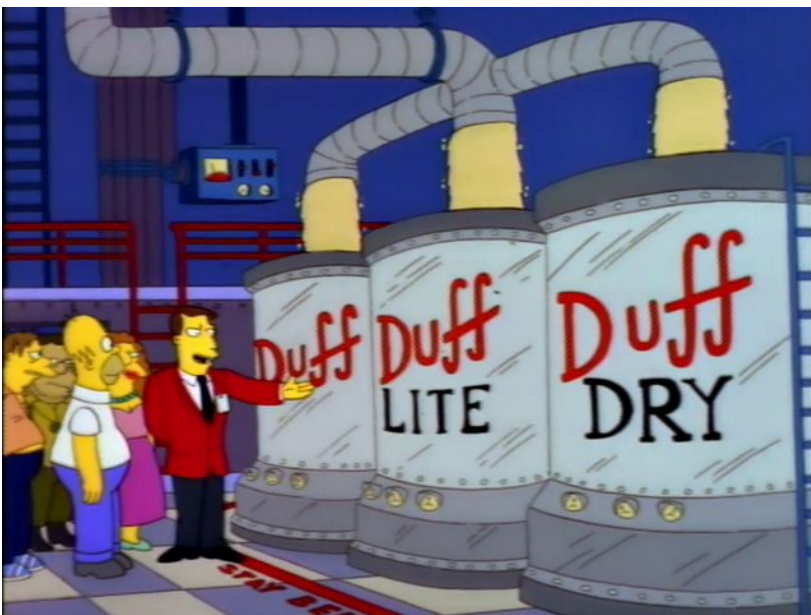
The UselessShitters

Not quite as overtly oppressive as the UsedToBe gang, the UselessShitters are every bit as opposed to individuality as the UTBs. And this is the crowd that wants the majority to remain quiescent in the face of Moe's bullying. Not because they agree with Moe, but rather because they are afraid Moe might turn on their happy little nook of the world.

We could call this gaggle of go-along to get along trimmers Larry to the UTB's Moe. But I find UselessShitters more apt.

Their aim: To constrain the range of choices we consider possible and desirable. The better to sell us products that are easy to manufacture cheaply and in bulk.

Despite claims that capitalism encourages a wide variety of choices in a vibrant marketplace, we are in fact offered pitifully narrow options for consumption. Consolidation in nearly every economic sector offers the illusion of choices – WOW! Look how many sodas/beers/toothpastes there are to choose from! – while in fact we have only a handful of large corporations offering us infinite and minimal variations (Lite! Dry! Crunchy! Extra Crunchy! Minty! Diet! Zero!) on a theme.



The UselessShitters feed our longing for equilibrium and plentiful variety. That satisfaction demands, however, that we do not examine the situation too closely. In this realm, The Great Flattening serves to create a critical mass of docile and reliable consumers, well-conditioned lab rats eager to press the lever for another pellet of useless shit.

Mass entertainments like the Marvel Cinematic Universe are a huge force in the flattening. Insipid and poorly written melodramas papered over with hyper-expensive CGI wizardry, these epics convey all the emotional depth and feeling of a 1930s Western serial reel, with a largely unchanged undercurrent of good/evil conflict that, in the end, reassures us in our flatness. The proceedings are turbo-charged to disguise the hole at the center.

The basic plots and paper-thin characters are almost always retreads of something you have seen before, a salutary attribute that massages our infantile yearning for equilibrium and familiarity. If it weren't for the visual whizbang and high-decibel audio effects, most viewers would fall asleep as quickly as if they were watching a Hallmark or Lifetime product. (To name yet another realm of "content" with all the heft of a potato chip.)

Everything in this realm is product, or its cousin in UselessShittery, content. You are meant to buy, consume, and forget all about it to empty a space for the next product. And the product comes in only a few colors, though they are described as though there is infinite variation at hand. But not too much variation! There is more profit to be made in reproduction of existing product than there is in something threateningly innovative.

This is true across all media. Corporate news wants you amped up so you will tune in or click through, but once you're there you are unlikely to learn anything useful about whatever crisis-du-jour is on offer. (And if there is no actual crisis,

don't worry; they will make one up. Invasive spiders, anyone?) Worse, what you find will more likely reinforce your conditioned sense of helplessness, a why bother defeatism that makes the next episode of Dancing With The Stars so tempting, accompanied by a bag of whatever-flavored Dorito you have at hand.

And by next week there will be another breaking story to fill your void, last week's spiders replaced by this week's ZOMG THE SKY IS FALLING product. COVID is a fine example of how we generally prefer our crises to come with a short shelf life. (Goddamit, I want my resolution served up by the top of the hour!) I expect Ukraine fatigue to settle in any time.

Here's where the third group comes in. And that group is us. All of us. The possibilities for our commonwealth lies in how each of us responds to the blandishments of Moe and Larry.

As to the transparent and cynical manipulations of Moe, it's pretty simple. Say no. Say fuck no. Vote and organize and march. Do everything and more to stop these marauding bastards from making America over into the image and likeness of their imaginary nostalgia.

As to the blandishments of the UselessShitters, things are less potentially violent, but no less difficult for that. We – all of us and mea culpa by damn – are susceptible to the little temptations. And those acceptances lead to larger ones, and so on. Once ensconced in the comfort zone, it becomes harder to object, to say no.

Sure, we all want a little dumb downtime here and there, and there is something to be said – though not much, and almost nothing, good – about the relative charms of The Bachelor or Big Bang Theory or Big Times sports or reruns of Cheers/Friends/Joanie Loves Chachi. I mean, I love ice cream, but if that were all I ever ate...well, fill in the rest.

The deeper problem with succumbing to the temptations of the

Flattening, with its limbic appeals to not think too hard, is that it leaves us utterly helpless against the campaigns of the UsedToBes. We grow comfortable in our constrained range of comforts and fearful that we might lose what meager buffer we have managed to erect between us and a world whose 'harsh reality' is intentionally exaggerated to keep us flat.

Sure, something truly different slips past the gatekeepers from time to time. The rock music of the 60s is a perfect example of a creative moment that confounded the gatekeepers at first, and the impact rippled far beyond the record bins. But the great superpower of the UselessShitters is their ability to absorb difference and transform it into sameness. Rock music has long since been among the most conservative of art forms. Led Zepplin sells Cadillacs and Metallica (in Abu Ghraib) and Van Halen (Panama) are weapons-grade instruments of torture to knuckle the imprisoned and defiant.

(I know, your favorite is the exception. Point granted. The exception that proves the rule.)

Language, too, is a victim – and a weapon – much as Orwell foretold. One pertinent example out of hundreds: The word creative has been denuded of any real weight in its service to the UselessShitters: Once simply an adjective describing innovation, it has become a noun and a verb that denotes bland and abject lack of itself, a referent to a person (a "creative") who regurgitates familiar formulae to the applause of their paymasters. And let's not even get started on the obscenity that underlies the term "the creative class," a cohort that sadly stands in stark opposition to true creativity. (Sorry, folks. It's just true.)

Words that by all rights should express genuine human feeling and yearning – words like freedom, family, community, even happiness – have died from their overuse in sales appeals, stripped of their actual meaning and now just code words of commerce. Freedom Banking. The Subaru Love Promise. Buy our

doodad and be part of a community. The Happiest Place on Earth.

Again, that's why I like to write articles about artists like Shane Parish, whose creative practice is itself an act of rebellion against the Flattening. So too for us as listeners: The simple act of seeking out his music, and other creative work like it, is a blow against the Flattening, an air bubble under the latex sheen. Working in tandem, audience and artist conspire to defy the messages that tell us to accept and be satisfied with the chosen flavor of the moment.

The amount of truly remarkable artistic endeavor going on right now is staggering. But unless you dig for it you are unlikely to know even a decimal point's worth of what your fellow humans are up to. We are remarkable, truly, and we should be celebrating each other every fucking day.

Go beyond that, too. Write a poem, dance, sing a song. It doesn't matter if it is great art, or even if it is "not really very good," as your inner critic might tell you. Just fucking do it. I guarantee the result will be more satisfying than another night slouched out in front of the telly.

That refusal to conform, to be a nail that sticks up, is where our hopes for a decent future lie. Because once the nails start sticking up en masse, the hammers become useless.

We Begin, Again, Constantly



Once again, Immune to Boredom begins.

A load of bosh, I hear you say. How dare this Unreliable Narrator come along and pretend he will provide regular content for his small-yet-largely-indifferent readership? Haven't we been fed this horse pucky once or thrice before?

Well, yeah. Hard to go head to head with that assessment.

Seven years and two months ago, I launched this blogswamp to give myself a reason to write. I figured if I committed myself to regular, on-time postings, I would break out of an illness-induced torpor and sharpen my writing skills. That was about as far ahead as I could think about things. I had no justification other than this: I needed it.

Things went pretty well. My traffic was never going to break the internet, but there was steady appreciation and growth. It was encouraging and confidence affirming. Within a year, I had my first real-life writing assignment from The Bitter Southerner. This kicked off my second career as a features writer. Lots of work for Bitter Southerner, some features for Flamingo Magazine (one of them scoring me a major award!) and occasional bits and pieces for a few other publications. And all through that, I kept the blog up and running, more-or-less regularly.

And then I started feeling shitty. Like really, incredibly shitty, unable to concentrate or sleep or write. I had zero interest in playing guitar; my best friend and longest musical collaborator had to browbeat me into what turned out to be my last gig. We played in October, 2018. Every note was a labor,

the evening interminable. I went home and put my gear in a closet. I barely played so much as a note for the better part of three years.

Turns out I was suffering the front end of an aggressive lymphoma. [Angioimmunoblastic T-cell Lymphoma](#) for the medically curious. By the time I was diagnosed, I could barely walk across the room without needing a nap.

And yet: With Stanwyck's help, I flayed myself through the 2019 Big Ears hoolie, conducted a few interviews, and posted several pre- and post-event articles. Two days after the music stopped, I gave myself over to the tender mercies of the medical-industrial complex at the University of Florida cancer center. I was given a 60% chance of surviving the treatment. If successful, I had a 40% chance of remaining cancer free for another year.

I managed to keep regular posting through seven months of deep chemo and, in the end, a stem cell transplant. I was awarded my major award for my George Clinton profile while in hospital. I interviewed filmmaker Ken Burns by phone from the hospital lobby the day before my transplant procedure began; I wrote and filed the consequent article with Bitter Southerner late that night.

The next day began three weeks of pure torment. And as with my 2014 medical mystery, I remember one specific moment where I was dead certain I would not make it to the next sunrise.

That was a little more than three years ago. And still, I persist.

But not without some hiccups.

Treatment left me depleted: zero energy, no muscle tone (I had been pretty much prone for 7-8 months), and scattered concentration. I managed a few posts and was planning my return to Big Ears 2020 where I hoped to recapture my zest for

writing, music, and, well, living.

And then COVID. Talk about your demotivating factor.

Pretty quickly I adopted a routine: sleeping late, reading all day, afternoon cocktails on the lawn with Stanwyck. What else was there, aside from waiting for the zombie hordes to come breathe on us? Homebound, my physical therapy foundered. Over time, I lost interest in just about everything except beer.

I squeezed off a handful of posts, but those felt like grim obligation, feeble gestures to prove I was other than a depressed, out of shape, drunken lump with a nagging wonder: Is this what I survived for?

But the time was not right. Nor was the writer right.

That was then. This is now.

Nine months ago, I swore off alcohol. Not a drop since. I took up yoga, four or five times a week. I resumed meditation. I began walking long distances again.

Three months ago, my erstwhile musical pal Jeff Crompton visited. I plugged in a guitar, and we gave it a go. It was shabby and glorious. Within an hour, I was so tired I could barely lift my guitar off my body. But I was alive. Again.

Since then, I have had guitar in hand every damned day by 6 a.m. for an hour or two of mostly callisthenic exercises. When I began again, I could not sustain an exercise for more than 15-30 seconds. Neither my hands or my concentration could bear it. Now, I am running complex patterns for five to ten minutes at a time. I've begun moving into re-learning material. And RoboCrompt may step out for a few gigs this Spring, COVID willing.

Along with sobriety, flexibility, and gigability, this regimen has re-sparked my writer's itch. And so, Immune to Boredom begins again. Again.

And again, there is little justification for this other than: I need it.

But atop that, I like to think I will bring something to the fetid swamp of the internets that others need, too.

For starters, I want to share the best bits of the mountains of music and books that I've been marinating in. There is a banquet on the table, but so much of it is buried by an algorithmic flood of junk food that it can be hard to sort out the worthy from the worthless. So expect plenty of recommendations about cool stuff I've found that you might otherwise never hear about.

Back in the day, many of my high-traffic/widely shared posts touched on politics and history. Expect some of that. I hold hope that you will find it more useful than the workaday rantings and received wisdom oatmeal so prevalent on the interwebs.

Another somewhat popular aspect of before times i2b was the occasional personal essay. Again, these would go weirdly viral from time to time. I'll be going back to that format, as well.

Mostly, i2b will be a sandbox for me to play in, to explore ideas that grab me, to tout the wondrousness of the arts that set my feet on fire.

And I will be opening up a comments section where I truly wish for your feedback, either praise or brickbats, corrections, and other such like. I hope we can keep it free of viagra and CBD peddlers. Still figuring that out.

Please drop by and give my ramblings a minute of your time here and there. Follow me on the various social media hellsites. If you are so moved, sharing and retweeting and all that social media jazz will be greatly appreciated.

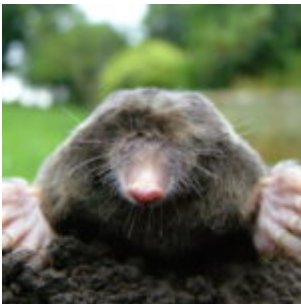
To be or i2b? That is the question. To which I say: Why not

both?

PS – This post hits on the evening of Jan 20, 2022. On Friday, Jan 21, I once again surrender myself to the fine people at UF Shands Cancer Center for my regularly scheduled poke and prod. I expect this to be routine and uninteresting. If not, it will give me something to write about. I can't lose.

PPS – Poke and prod says nothing to worry about. Thanks for all your good wishes.

Emerge. Slowly. Look Both Ways.



Is there anybody out there?

It has been a solid two years in near total isolation for us. A year of lymphoma treatment and quarantine ended just in time for the Trump virus to shut everything down for another year.

Finally, Stanwyck and I are fully vaxxed and ready to take those first tentative steps back into polite society. As luck would have it, our resurrection coincides with Tallahassee's annual Word of South Festival of music and literature. It's one of my favorite events on the local calendar, and it was

sorely missed last year under the COVID pall. As difficult as it is to contemplate crawling out of my hidey hole, Word of South offers a fine motivation to poke my head up and see if I remember how to be social and such.

As always, the lineup has prime talents, with music from Dom Flemons, Allison Moorer, Randall Bramblett, Royce Lovett, and the great New Orleans trumpeter Wendell Brunious. Writers talking to writers. Writers talking to musicians. People who love books and music hob nobbing in the beautiful Tallahassee springtime weather.



Yeah, the weather has gone to hell in a hockey bag. But the rain has plagued WoS before, and I figure they will come up with alternate venues and such, although a fair number of the alternate venues from festivals past have shuttered due to the pandemic. As of this afternoon, I have not seen any official announcements. Here's hoping they pull another miracle.

It is an amazement that the festival is still with us. Chalk it up to a committed team of mostly volunteers throwing their shoulders to the wheel. It was a towering act of faith to program and schedule this event without knowing what the COVID drama would bring. Even with limiting the daily attendance by issuing tickets in advance, if the vaccine rollout had been any less effective we would not even think of attending.

And with events moving indoors, perhaps, we may have to think twice anyway.

Word of South 2019 was my last public appearance, aside from the occasional trip for groceries. Two weeks after first chemo and it was clear that I was too compromised to be there. So the idea of WoS serving as my post-transplant debutante party was pretty slick, symmetry-wise. My original dream had been a triumphant return to Big Ears, but they have deferred for another year.

But here's the thing after two years of hibernation: The idea of crowds and small talk and conversation and trying so hard to hide that I have lost all recall of the name of whatever person I am talking to that I have known foreverName recall never having been my strong suit, the random access memory is even worse post-treatment. My apology in advance. – all that stuff has been giving me a real case of the yips.

I figure I'm not the only one. So, assuming we get to go at all, I've settled on some strategies to cope.

- Breathe (even in situations where it is optional).
- Smile.
- Be kind.
- Embrace awkward silences.
- Smile some more.
- Resist asking "So how's it been going?"
- Do not stare at my shoes for more than ten seconds at a time.

Speaking of shoes, I notice that several of the bands on tap at the young people's stage (young meaning anything under say 50) describe their genre as shoegaze, which seems to indicate an amalgam of jam band and emo, though there is probably some sort of "something-core" involved, too. I don't know. I am, as my kids remind me, an Old. But it sounds like something I would like.

So maybe you'll see me grooving at the shoegaze stage where my inordinate interest in my laces will not seem so out of place. Or maybe you'll run into me somewhere else. If I forget and stare at my fancy kicks for more than a count of ten, please tell me to look up and smile. I'm really out of practice and could use a little help.