

Mother's Day Dinner

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Hello dear readers!

Guitar Progress

I've been continuing to practice the guitar part for Peter Gabriel's song "Solsbury Hill." I can now play it all the way through, but not at full speed. The original is at 105 beats per minute (if you count quarter notes, but most the notes you actually play are eighth notes, so it has a double-time feel). I can play it through pretty well at 75 bpm, and much less cleanly at 90 bpm. 105 is definitely still out of reach.

I've been experimenting with recording it and playing it back to try to find the weak spots. Usually what happens is that I've played it through three times pretty well, but as soon as I try to do it again with the recorder running, it becomes a train wreck. I have to do things to distract the part of my brain that apparently panics when the recorder is running. For example, I have to speed it up by 10 bpm just before turning on the recorder. This seems to force my brain to concentrate on playing, leaving fewer brain cells to freak out and sabotage my performance. I don't know how this actually works.

Somehow this piece is particularly hard on my hands. I took a day off practicing yesterday, because my fingers were hurting, but today playing the chord shapes is still painful.

I think it has to do with having to hold chord shapes that require my index finger to bend backwards a bit, in order to leave the high E string open. I've been playing this chord shape for decades, but most songs don't require holding my finger in this partial-barre position for a long time while using the other fingers of my left hand to fret additional notes. There doesn't seem to be any other way to finger this chord in standard tuning.

In the past I've had trouble with hand muscles cramping when I had to hold difficult chord shapes for sustained periods of time, but that seemed like a normal and expected kind of pain. And of course sore fingers are par for the course, when my calluses have faded and my fingers aren't used to pushing

against steel strings. But I don't recall ever having this kind of aching pain in my fingertips before. I guess it is probably aging, possibly accelerated by long COVID circulation damage — the fingertips of my left hand, past the last joint, were looking a bit purplish, like I had tied a thread around them and it had cut off the circulation, except of course I had done nothing remotely like that. They looked kind of like the way my toes looked when I first had "COVID toes."

Maybe I should switch off and work on some pieces that require different fingerings for a while. It would be a bummer to work on this piece for several months only to determine that I can't play it any more because my fingers can't tolerate playing it, but it would be worse if did so much damage that I had to stop playing guitar altogether. I might try to switch to my nylon-stringed Godin for a while, and see if my fingers will tolerate playing that, although it sure doesn't sound like the original.

I remember a few years ago I was complaining to my father that between work and household tasks, I never had enough time to work on music, and he told me not to worry about that, because I'd have plenty of time to work on music in the future. I remember thinking "I'm not quite so sure about that." What he really meant was that *he* has managed to have plenty of time to work on music, but he doesn't play steel-stringed guitars.

***Anythyng* You Want To: Shakespeare's Lost Comedie by The Firesign Theatre**

I have had an eBay search running for a couple of years, looking for a CD containing their Shakespeare pastiche *Anythyng* You Want To. Their radio routines are often incredibly dense with puns and allusions, but in this case they're written in cod-Elizabethan language. I'm going to see if I can get a printed version, but to give you a taste of it, I've transcribed a bit of "Act II, Scene IV: A Graveyardde." Two gravediggers, MOLE and HOLE, are talking:

HOLE: Yar, down there, Mole, riddle me this one!

MOLE: Wait, wait all! I cannot dig and think together. I'll stop. I'm stopping. I've stoppe

HOLE: Why is your common gravedigger like unto your coarse comic actor?

MOLE: Oh. 'Cause we're in the same guild.

HOLE: You're right. We share the same guild, that's true. But that's not the funny answer, n
pate!

MOLE turns up a bone. He looks at it.

MOLE: Ah, humorous. I thought ye looked for Truth.

HOLE: Your whoreson grave maker is like unto your play actor

Because we both must undertake to please

The groundlings in the pit!

MOLE: That's not funny, Hole. What's Funny is,

That we're in the same union. I always throught so.

I brought it up at meeting last night...

HOLE: Don't lumber me with Labor talk! But heave
That box of bones up here, for the Plague goes on!
MOLE: Then we are like to ushers in God's Globe,
For we must turn o'er the crowd and clear
The boxes and make room for late arrivals.

Anyway. It's very funny, but not in a laugh-out-loud way. It was tailor-made for English majors like me. Unfortunately Act III, Scene III on the CD has some audible repeating distortion, of a kind I've never heard on any of the other Firesign Theatre CDs. I might try re-ripping it on a different CD drive, to see if the resulting audio sounds any better.

Weekend Update

Another weekend has blown past — this one containing Mother's Day. It seems like I only made progress on a small handful of the things I wanted to do. In the interest of maintaining a positive attitude, here's a list of successes:

- We ordered food early (Thursday night) and on Saturday, picked up groceries from 3 stores
- We also picked up eggs from the farm where we get our eggs
- We dropped off a gift for a friend
- We had another small bonfire to burn accumulated cardboard boxes
- We had a reasonably good movie night on Saturday (although once again stayed up too late)
- I made toasted bagels with cream cheese, red onion, and smoked salmon for Mother's Day breakfast
- I made rack of lamb, sautéed *haricot verts*, and roasted potatoes for Mother's Day dinner
- I sorted and shelved almost all the rest of the mass market paperback books that we brought from our storage unit the previous weekend

Of course, I mostly could only think about the stuff that we *didn't* get done: shipping a couple packages, packing up the office chair I'm returning to Steelcase, getting more boxes of books out of storage and shelved, and completing post-production of a podcast episode.

Movie Night

After the errands on Saturday, we again tried to make things easy for ourselves by making a movie night dinner of polish sausages on buns, and store-bought coleslaw and potato salad.

“Jose Chung’s *From Outer Space*” (*The X-Files* Season 3, Episode 20)
I've had DVD sets of the first two seasons of *The X-Files* for ages, but just got a used Season 3 set. The kids have watched some of them, although we put them away for a number of years because despite insisting they weren't frightening, at least one Potts kid, who shall remain anonymous, had nightmares.

We're trying to watch a few episodes again. I picked this one, which is one of my favorites, because it's more funny than scary. In this episode's framework story, the author Jose Chung, played by Charles Nelson Reilly — with more restraint than I have come to expect from him — is meeting with Mulder and Scully to discuss one of their investigations, and most of what we see is flashbacks of them re-telling what they experienced during this investigation.

The facts of the story are immediately in doubt, since under hypnosis the two teenage subjects who reported alien abduction give wildly contradictory accounts, but to the viewer, what appears to have happened is that two teens experienced a *hoax* alien abduction scenario, but during this hoax encounter, a real alien arrived and abducts the teens *and* two fake aliens. This alien is known as “Lord Kinbote,” which might be an offhand reference to the narrator of Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, a metafictional narrative in which the narrator is highly suspect, if not a complete fraud.

It isn't just the teenagers whose accounts are suspect. Scully tells Chung what she recalls, knowing full well that it is quite unbelievable. The flashbacks show us encounters with mysterious “men in black,” played by Jesse “The Body” Ventura and Alex Trebek (yes, the host of *Jeopardy*). The show is full of references to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. There's an alien autopsy that does not go quite as planned, but that doesn't stop footage of the event from becoming a cable news sensation, albeit in highly edited form. Was the entire thing a psy-op? Did Mulder really eat an entire sweet potato pie?

After the interviews with Chung, Mulder visits him to beg him not to publish a book based on their investigation, because it was all so inconclusive, and the accounts of the people involved so ridiculous, that it would only discredit the witnesses and the field of UFO investigations. Chung publishes the book anyway; the book is *From Outer Space*, and we see Scully reading it at the end of the episode. The book looks awfully similar to Whitley Streiber's *Communion*, and about as credible.

Aside from a number of fun performances, funny scenes, the real strength of this episode is that it doesn't take itself seriously, in a show that was often a bit too grim. But it is *also* thought-provoking in the vein of Kurosawa's *Rashomon*, in which accounts of the same event are completely contradictory, and we're left musing about how everyone is the hero of their own story, no matter how ridiculous the story, and how we all may be susceptible to psy-ops, especially when we want to believe.

***When Marnie Was There* (2014 Animated Film)** I've had this movie for a while, but it always seemed to wind up on the bottom of the “to-watch” stack. We finally watched in Saturday night, and I'm happy to report that it's quite a beautiful and touching ghost story. The artwork is gorgeous, and it's set in a salt marsh in Hokkaido, a part of Japan I'd really love to see one day. The location, in fact, seems to be modeled after the real Kushiro wetlands, and there

are even some buildings that look a bit like the iconic buildings that appear in the film. It isn't an exact match, but it appears that these inspired the film.

If I hadn't already seen *Your Name* (the 2016 animated film), I might think this was one of the best anime ghost story films I had ever seen. I still think *Your Name* beats this one, but *Marnie* is a little more conventional, and a lovely film.

***The Crow* (1994 Film)** This is another movie I've had for a number of years, but I haven't been willing to show it to the kids until they were old enough. We held this one until last and sent the younger kids off to bed. Grace gave up and went to bed as well. I stayed up and watched *The Crow* for the first time since 1994, when I saw it in the theater.

I'm pleased to report that *The Crow* holds up quite well. It's a very *stylish* film, sort of a combination of *noir* and gothic. Back in the day, I had the original comic, by James O'Barr. This remains, in my view, one of the most successful adaptations of a comic to film.

The plot follows the resurrection of Eric Draven, a young musician, who was murdered a year earlier, along with his fiancée, although she died in a hospital emergency room thirty hours later. Draven emerges from the grave, guided by a crow; he is able to see through the crow's eyes, and is invulnerable to injury. He embarks on a quest to avenge his fiancée's death. It's a remarkably violent film, but the violence is not gratuitous — it is poetic justice. The soundtrack is stuffed with banging nineties tunes, including the famed cover of "Dead Souls" by Nine Inch Nails.

The Crow is infamous for a sad and disturbing reason. Brandon Lee, Bruce Lee's son, who plays Eric Draven, was killed by a firearms accident late in the filming. He had already completed most of his scenes. So the studio decided to finish the film. I think that they made the right choice, and that Lee would have wanted to world to see his work, as well as the work of all the rest of the actors, artists, and crew who contributed to the creation of such a stylish film. But it certainly raised serious questions about the use of firearms in films, questions that haven't entirely been resolved yet, as demonstrated most recently in 2021 by the death of Halyna Hutchins on the set of *Rust*.

There's apparently a remake of *The Crow* nearing release, which is one of those facts I wish I had never learned.

Mother's Day Dinner

Looking at things with my more typical negative spin, getting those two meals made, simple though they were, was a challenge. My capacity for tolerating chaos in the kitchen is not what it once was. I had purchased four bags of bagels specifically for Sunday morning. The kids immediately got into the first bag without asking permission. I had to store the rest in our bedroom, behind a

locked door, but Malachi has learned how to unlock our bedroom door and kept coming in to scream that he wanted bagels.

I had purchased a big bag of *haricot verts*. The kids helpfully put it in the garage freezer. By the time I realized what they had done, it was partially frozen and so no longer usable for the dish I had in mind. So we had to order more beans. We can still use the frozen ones; we'll make a green bean casserole, which will be fine, but it wasn't part of the plan.

Making the two racks of lamb involved initially searing it in a cast iron pan that was as hot as I could get it, which activated the smoke alarm down the hall. With my screwed-up hearing (a weird combination of hyperacusis and tinnitus) I had to complete the process wearing my industrial ear earmuffs. With my long COVID fatigue and increased susceptibility to stress, just finishing the meal was a big challenge. The kids did not have the kitchen cleaned up, so the counters and sink were not very usable. The whole time I had a feeling of being severely out-of-practice, and a feeling of terror that I was going to ruin the ingredients, even though this really was a pretty simple meal. I wish it wasn't like that for me — I wish I felt more of the fun I used to feel when cooking. Part of that fun used to come from cooking alongside other people, but that wasn't really going to be possible; Grace was busy and I wanted to keep the kids, at least the little kids as far from the kitchen as possible, and making sure that happened required the attention of the bigger kids.

To get ready for the lamb, I used our little baby-food blender to make an herb paste: a few tablespoons of olive oil, a few tablespoons of butter, a handful of dried parsley leaves from last year's garden, a generous quantity of dried thyme, some store-bought dry rosemary leaves since we didn't have any from our garden (or, at least, I could not find them), and a tablespoon of water on the theory that some herb flavors are water-soluble rather than fat-soluble. I blended this up in the morning and then left it to sit in the refrigerator for a few hours so the flavors could emerge a bit more.

I seared the racks of lamb one at a time in olive oil after dusting them with a little salt and pepper - that was the extent of the prep, other than taking them out of the packages, rinsing them off briefly, and drying them with paper towels. Most of the recipes I looked up recommended cutting off all the fat, or at least the "silverskin" membranes, but the fat of grass-fed lamb is something we want *more* of in our diet, not less of, so I ignored this. Because the racks are concave, you can't really get a good sear on one side, but I browned everything I could, and left them to cool down.

For the potato side dish, I had Pippin wash and chop about twenty yellow potatoes. I then chopped them up a bit more, and put them in the Instant Pot for 8 minutes. (This turned out to be a little too long; I should have cooked them for only 3 minutes or so). When the timer went off I released the pressure immediately and put the hot potatoes on a baking tray, drizzled them with olive oil, thyme, salt, pepper, and set them aside.

When the racks of lamb had cooled down I smeared them all over with the herb paste and put them in the oven at 350 for 15 minutes. The number one thing I wanted to avoid was overcooking the lamb. I wanted the interior to only be at 125 or so when I took them out, since they would cook a bit more with residual heat. Going by temperature, I wound up putting them back in for about eight more minutes, then they seemed done, so I left them to rest before I sliced them up.

I put the tray of potatoes under the broiler to get the tops nice and brown, and pan-fried the beans in two batches in our biggest cast iron pan, in the lamb drippings, adding some extra herb paste. This made the dish look pretty messy with burnt bits, but I generally go for flavor over appearance!

While the beans were cooking I sliced up the lamb into individual ribs. They came out really well - well-browned on the outside, very rare in the middle. The family wolfed down all 16 ribs. We saved the bones and Grace made a lovely lamb broth and soup out of them on Monday. So we got as much of the nutrition out of them as we could.

The beans were a little unevenly cooked, some too raw and some too soft, since I kept having to turn to other tasks, but they were still very tasty. The potatoes came out last, since I wanted them to be as browned as I could, without actually letting anything else get cold. The meal was a success despite the stress.

I'm going to end this one early. Have a great week!

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