

Hey...

A rainy Sunday at a little cafe on Monroe Street, no TV in sight, pretty sweet jazz melange in the background. Double espresso and brioche yielded the field to decaf and a scone until it got to be reasonably past noon at which a bottle of Chateau Haute Selve Bordeaux sauntered over and asked if it could pull up a chair. The morning crowd had emptied on to afternoon engagements at that point and there were plenty of open tables, so I took it as a rather forward request. Still, I found no objections to sharing my spot with a bottle of Graves (which Wiki tells me is a shortened form of "gravel" denoting the soil type in the Graves region of Bordeaux, which gravelly-ness leaves quartz right on the surface for rock hounds to collect and made this among the earliest wine producing regions of The Bordeaux. Rainwater filtered through the same gravel that existed when Eleanor of Aquitaine ruled the region nourished the vines whose grapes were pressed to make this very sip. Rock of ages. Every Bordeaux moment, timeless.)

Took some notes while reading the CD jacket from a Django Reinhardt recording I checked out from the library on Friday. Said note will no doubt lead me still further into the depths of this most amazing gypsy jazz stuff I've come to love so deeply the past few years. It's so nice that I have two musics--on the one hand, this gypsy swing stuff that I love but cannot play and, on the other, my own stuff.

A trio of flies dance a complicated pattern to a slow tenor sax version of Ain't Misbehavin.'

This morning Marcia is doing a photo shoot at our place requiring the living room's deconstruction. Hence, I'm giving myself wide berth to stray from home and indulge one of my favorite pastimes--cafe idling. Yesterday's roofing work at our house (pretty strenuous, pretty hot) left me sore and in need of a day's recuperation. The slow, steady rain acted like a permission slip to skip further work. And tomorrow's beginning of the school year's a perfect invitation to live it the fuck up today.

Since we parted in Mom and Dad's driveway I've been mostly trying to catch up on work I missed in July that needed to be done before September which served as a great way to avoid really processing Dad's passing and the deep sense of loss that's, well, deepening daily. I know I'll cozy up to the emotional content of orphanhood and arrive at a deeper understanding of my loss and of Dad's life and of Mom's and of family. I know that when I start reviewing the sound files I have featuring Dad talking about his life I'll shed the tears welling up inside and I know I'll come to some understandings--understandings of their lives, understandings regarding how to live past their lives. I'm not fighting to avoid these reckonings nor am I worried that they will never come.

Last weekend Marcia and I took a short 'cation (not staycation--we traveled some...not vacation--we spent time at home just reading together) and took in, among other things, a wonderful Paris Poster Art art exhibit in the remarkable Calatrava-designed art museum in Milwaukee. Lovely. Since our trip (and as a means of arming myself against the advent of the

new school year) I've been doing a lot of writing, having begun several pieces that I can add to on and off for the next several months. One piece, How I Got Here, focuses on my own 53 years of passages, orphanhood apparently making me itch to understand where the hell I've been. Another, How Here Got Here, will, I hope, help me organize my thoughts about how the current state of world affairs came about. I need a coherent story to tell myself. I'm framing it this way--how did Dad's youthful impressions that, in the future, wars would be a thing of the past and all men really would be equal morph into the world he and Mom eventually passed from?

Another piece is simply called, "My Hope". I (rather urgently) need to figure out what's left to hope for now that catastrophic, civilizational-collapsing climate change seems all but assured. I'll let you know if I have any breakthroughs on that score. Another, entitled "Now That I'm Here Now" represents sort of a long-term to-do list. Insofar as we are victims of the habits with which we affix ourselves thumbtack-like to the bulletin boards of our days, we are free to choose those habit-tacks. I just want to be a little mindful about it. I have more past than future now--more days behind than ahead. That relative rarity makes them more precious than they's otherwise seem. When every day's more precious than the last, you want to make the most of each of them. If I occasionally remind myself of that fact and if I'm clearly conscious about the stuff I want to do, I'll be glad for it later is my guess.

The fifth piece I've recently started writing is called About Bistro Mirage. Here's the scoop...

I'm done, for now, at least, performing my music out in public. Done with musical monologues for now. Done with organizing themed performances. But I'm way not done with writing and playing. So, in need of a new venue, I've come up with the idea of a virtual cafe (which I call Bistro Mirage) that exists in my head (to which (head) I cannot easily offer access to my friends and loved ones) but for which I can create a sort of virtual replica: Hence, the website Bistro Mirage, which I'm building (for now, in my head) to eventually present so you can all visit (the virtual, internet-based version of my cafe) to share photos, video, music, writing, images visual and aural...

The evolution of Bistro Mirage goes something like this:

March of 2011, on Boulevard Henri IV, Marcia photographs a bit of Parisian street graffiti (attached).

May of 2011, just back from Paris, on Highway 26 backroad bound for Peoria, I wrote a song based on the metaphor of Mirage. Called the song Mirage.

June 2011, I began recording Mirage, which recording project included the interweaving of lots of audio files recorded in Paris. I came up with the idea of weaving my most recent songs into an "album" in which consecutive songs were connected by "audio-collage" transitions whose elements consisted of Paris audio recorded on our trip. These audio-collage elements themselves would be woven directly into the songs as well--footsteps in the Gallerie Viviane become the

rhythm track to one song, for example, and the cafe voices at Les Pupos lie behind the guitar tracks as if the song is recorded live in a cafe. That sort of thing.

July 23, 2011, (Dad's last birthday) I shared the first draft of Mirage with Marcia who encouraged me to keep after the project. She termed it "a spectacular weaving" of sounds. I liked that description, apparently--I still remember it.

July, 2011- February 2012, I worked on recording basic tracks for four more songs on "the album". The idea of making this a website containing more than just songs presented itself. I started writing some longer pieces (infused with Marcia's and Al's Paris photos) documenting my cumulative 14 days in Paris (Parasite Fortnight, Day One and Parasite Fortnight, Night One....long way to go on that little project). Gathered all my previous years' Paris Poems together

March 2012, I bought a resonator guitar and reveled in the new sounds and ideas that resulted. Boy was my banjo pissed! Continued recording work

April 2012, I traded my big red electric guitar for a 12-string. Another yummy addition to the sonic palette. My banjo stopped talking to me altogether.

May-July 2012, Life became way too busy to devote any time to the project which had by now garnered the name Bistro Mirage. The web site would consist of three options--Au Zinc (a page devoted to short music pieces and photos to glance at when you only have a minute), A' Salle (a page devoted to longer pieces of music and writing for when you have 10 minutes to spend) and A' Terrasse (filled with the longest stuff for when you have an hour to spend at the cafe.) Perhaps you're familiar from your trips abroad with the way cafes offer different prices depending on where in the establishment you choose to enjoy them. In Paris, Au Zinc means "standing at the bar"--lowest prices. A' Salle = at the table--slightly more expensive than standing at the bar. A'Terrace = outside at a cafe table on the street, the most expensive option (and, of course, the best).

Late July, 2012--I purchased a Bouzouki (long-necked Celtic/Greek mandolin-like instrument), completing my orchestra. At that point still more musical vistas opened to me. My Banjo moved into a co-op down town and refused to take my calls. (Summing the stings on my two guitars (6 each) my mandolin (8) my Bouzouki (8), my 12 string (think about it) my bass (4) and my banjo (5), I find myself grappling with (total please?--you got it) 49 strings. Began recording three more tunes (including The Judge's Robes as I mentioned in a recent email).

August 2012, I started writing About Bistro Mirage, whose first paragraphs go this way:

About Bistro Mirage

Re: Bistros

I've had a series of really evocative, powerful dreams over the last 20 years. May I tell you about them? They started out centered on a building--a house, I guess it was. Yes...a house. At times the house was uninhabited and at other times there were strangers living there. Sometimes my family and I were renting the house. Sometimes I was visiting it while on vacation from somewhere else as if the dream dwelling was a place I used to live. Sometimes the house was in Seattle, sometimes in Decatur, sometimes here in Madison.

In every instance, however, regardless of set and setting, I was engaged in some sort of *work* on the house. One dream would find me building on an addition to the house. In another I'd be repairing the basement foundations. Most often my dreams would find me framing out rooms in the dwelling's enormous attic, an attic accessed by narrow stairways but huge, itself, and airy and filled with light from many windows promising excellent views. Occasionally in my dream I would stumble unexpectedly upon the attic and feel such a thrill to have found a new room in the house I thought I knew. There were the scents of plaster dust and sawn wood, and old, dry air...never did it feel moldy or dank. It was always a pleasant, if unfinished, space, its spaciousness promising first enjoyable work then something great when the work was done.

In recent years as my dream-work progressed, I'd return to the attic to find find it becoming occupied by various objects intentionally placed--little shrines set up on the stairway consisting of tarot cards and candles, for example, or old second-hand furniture and mismatched lamps. At one point, people even started popping up in the attic. My middle son showed up there in two successive dreams last year--first as a young boy, then as an adult. But always, (until recently, that is) there was an *unfinished* quality to the attic...piles of lumber to be taken down to the garage, drywall to hang, painting to do and carpets to install. Whenever I was there in my dream, I was aware that I had work to do that I had been neglecting; work I had clearly begin in previous dreams and was excited about finding time to take up again

So, imagine my surprise when, last winter, I ascended the narrow, dreamscape stairway after falling asleep one night and found in my attic not more planks to cut and drywall to hang, but a finished room filled with--get this--cafe tables graced by place settings and unlit candles (it was late morning in the dream, as I recall). A menu was open at one table, along with someone's tobacco pouch and a wine glass and a cigarette still burning in the ash tray.

It turns out my subconscious has been building a cafe in my head all these years.

Is there anything more lovely than a perfect cafe? To me, the image of a perfect cafe lies very near the center of the known universe. Still, I know cafes are not everyone's ultimate setting. I know for some it's a summer mountain side, for others, it's a sailboat on the lake in brisk wind or front row seats at the theater, or in the kitchen with a cold wind outdoors and the kettle on to boil. Hardly matters what particular setting works best--as long as you are lucky enough to have one, your favorite setting lets you transcend the ordinary and consider the infinite.

It just goes on and on from there, of course.

One really appealing thing about the name Bistro Mirage, is that its initialized form BM) keeps me humble. All art is really nothing more than self-important BM, really, and all artists nothing more than self indulgent players-with-their-own-poop, of course, but I have such a good time playing with the material that goes into my BM. See what I mean about the initials really working?

This Autumn will find me grappling with my hope, processing my past, coming to grips with the world and my future, and playing with the various elements of my BM. A year or two from now I'll probably be ready to erect the website itself (and if there's anything an artist enjoys more than his/her BM its his/her artistic erections, lemme tell ya!) and you'll receive an invitation.

Beyond the Autumn, who can say.

Looking forward to hearing more about how your universe looks these days. Drop a line when you can.

Meantime, I hope you stay well. Thanks again for staying in touch so well over the years--sorry for having not reciprocated quite so well. But look for that to maybe change a little from here on out. As I said, I've been feeling more and more lately as if I gotta make every day count. And what counts more than keeping one's precious relationships alive? Except, of course, playing with your BM elements...and hanging out in cafes.

Jusqua' ce que nous rencontrons a' Paris,

M

