



Begone Listlessness

Two out of three people who regularly read Whither Zither have discovered that I like lists. And the third person is my wife Kristi, who knew it already.

I remember being annoyed in school by so-called comprehensive lists. There was one list presented by my Sociology professor, Ramzan Dossa, of the nine (I think) qualities something must possess in order to be currency. I can't remember most of them but I do remember *difficult to counterfeit*; *sturdy*; and *easy to carry*. But the list seemed arbitrary to me, and I went home and wrote a paper called *The Nine Kinds of Robins*. I think I still have it somewhere. It was just all bunkum; things like the Harbinger Robin, the Listening Robin, etc. And sometime around then I divided the world into two kinds of people: People who were swimming, and people who weren't. Ever since those days I've been skeptical of lists claiming to be definitive, but fascinated by lists in general.

I've written at least two WZ's about lists: In October of 2002 I talked about songs that contain lists, like *Old MacDonald Had A Farm*, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, and *My Favorite Things*, though there are so many examples out there, I didn't even mention these three.

And in May of 2006 I rambled on about how songwriting is a form of taxonomy ("a system for organizing similar things into groups"), in that it identifies and arranges rhyming words, and similarly metered phrases, while grouping related ideas into verses and choruses.

I'm far from being the only human intrigued by lists. There's an interview in **Spiegel Online** (November 11, 2009, by Susanne Beyer and Lothar Gorris) with Umberto Eco, who had an exhibition at the Louvre on *...the essential nature of lists, poets who list things in their works and painters who accumulate things in their paintings*. Umberto Eco,

who died early this year, was, among other things, a semiotician. Semiotics is "The study of the way in which people communicate through signs and symbols." It's a catch-all field that covers everything from linguistics to ambulance sirens to emojis to, well, lists. Umberto says, *How does one attempt to grasp the incomprehensible? Through lists, through catalogs, through collections...* He also says *We like lists because we don't want to die*, which I don't exactly understand, and *I like lists for the same reason other people like football...* which I do.

My fondness for lists is a facet of my makeup that has revealed in the invention of the internet. The web is a bottomless bucket of lists.

One reason for this is the internet use of lists as "clickbait," defined by Wikipedia as *...web content that is aimed at generating online advertising revenue, especially at the expense of quality or accuracy, relying on sensationalist headlines or eye-catching thumbnail pictures to attract click-throughs...* According to Emerson Spartz, "The King of Clickbait," lists make excellent Clickbait. In an article about him in **The New Yorker** by Andrew Marantz called "The Virologist" (Jan 5, 2015), Spartz advises: *Use lists whenever possible. Lists just hijack the brain's neural circuitry.*

Clickbait lists are on AOL, they're on YouTube, they're everywhere. You see them every day: *Ten Starlets Who Never Brush Their Teeth*. *Twelve Deadly Gases In Your Lipstick*. *5 Sock Habits That Shorten Your Life*.

One interesting phrase to Google for is "Top Ten." There are thousands of such lists. There are even quite a few *Top Ten Top Ten* lists. Unsurprisingly, there are subscription opportunities for lists. **www.toptenz.net** will send you a new Top Ten list every day, like *Top 10 Horrific Cases Of Hell On Earth*; *Top 10 Hats*; and *Top 10 Underworld Gangster Nicknames*.

One reason there are so many lists available is that though they have an air of authority, they are easy and fun to

create. Lists lend a truthiness to groupings that previously weren't necessarily thought of as noteworthy. A good number of these lists are really just opinion collections, like *Top 10 Most Beautiful Sink Stoppers* and *Top 10 Must-See Roadside Soap Factories*. Any one of us ordinary muggles can make up a perfectly suitable Top Ten List. I mean, who says we can't? *Top 10 Most Adorable Street Corners in Kaukauna*. *Top 10 Shirt Mistakes*. *Top 10 Overused Leg Movements*. *Top 10 Doghouse Weathervanes*.

And of course, appropriate to this column, there are Top Ten lists relating to music. Thousands of them, I would guess, and the possibility for countless more. Here are a few I found in minutes:

Top 10 Ocarina Facts. (Includes the fact that over 500,000 Ocarina iPhone apps were sold in November 2008. This app turns your iPhone into a functional 4-hole ocarina. It's true; I bought the 99 cent app myself; I'm a Clickbait patsy).

Top 10 reasons your child should take music lessons, by the Dallas Academy of Music and Performing Arts (a strange list that includes "Leadership" and "Higher SAT Scores.").

Top 10 Music Instruction Sites in Pune, Maharashtra, India.

The 10 Most Often Butchered Lyrics.

Top 10 Banjo Interview Questions.

10 Stage Shows That Ended in Death.

10 Musicians Who Have Killed Someone.

Top 10 Rock 'n' Roll Bagpipe Songs.

10 Artists Who Hated Their Biggest Hit

Top Ten Most Handsome Nigeria Musicians

Ironically, there are ten reasons I have to end today's column at this point:

1. *I have run out of room.*

--ωΖ, Οcγ. 2016