

MAY 8

I have spoken and written about my younger life experiences working on a farm for room and board, being a fruit picker with hispanic migrant workers, and doing construction as a laborer with an “off the boat” Irish crew. What I haven’t said much about is my years working “inside”, in an office, as a researcher and writer, mostly in the field of Anthropology, but with some side gigs in library acquisitions and education research. The major piece of my work in Anthropology was as the administrator and chief research assistant on a project funded by the National Institute of Mental Health focusing on a cross-cultural analysis of adolescent socialization in pre-industrial societies (a fancy way of asking how do societies around the world that have not yet become industrialized manage the transition of their young members from childhood, through adolescence, and into adulthood). Fascinating subject. I had three part-time assistants; their work combined with mine was evaluated by the two principal researchers who wrote articles and books using the data we assembled.

Virtually every pre-industrial society had/has some formal designation of adolescence (sometimes very brief) as that period between childhood and full adulthood, quite often beginning with the onset of reproductive capacity and ending with some establishment of a new formal status toward same sex and opposite sex individuals.

How I got the job is a long story for another time, but my reason for mentioning it comes directly from my note yesterday in which I said music is one of our human responses to being aware that we are both part of the natural world and observers of it at the same time. That is, we know ourselves to be inescapably bound to the natural order, and we possess the dual capacity to influence that reality directly through our technical capabilities and to respond to being “in nature” through music, art, and literature.

All societies, human groups, and individuals make music, and we always have, so far as the historical record shows, and because we can vocalize and make noise with our bodies in an intentional fashion, we may fairly say humans have made music for as long as we've been here. By way of comparison, the Lascaux cave art is dated to about 15,000 BCE, less than half the age of the oldest instruments we have found.

Professor Brian Ferrell of Harvard University studies music and nature. He is an entomologist and a jazz drummer. He teaches a course titled, “Why We Animals Sing”. He wrote compellingly about the nexus of music and nature in an article from 2016 published in “Revista Magazine”, (revista.drclas.harvard.edu).

“Nature and music are intimately connected...As a scientist, I am now more fully aware of the links. I notice the similarities between jazz—a famously improvisational form featuring trades of motifs between players, as if in conversation—and that of birds and other species that trade vocalizations to convey their motivations to each other...

Music appeared early in human history, documented by the discovery of 40,000 year old flutes...and remnants of ancient drums...music may have preceded language...social

cohesion was likely a force for the adaptive basis of music in early humans...music may have fostered the greater reproductive success of those who played and responded...

While language abilities may be lost...music production and response are almost impossible to knock out. In fact, individuals who have lost their language abilities sometimes can learn to sing their thoughts.”

Music is a human art, but music making is not exclusive to our species, (pace Mozart, Bach, Handel, Jimi Hendrix, Scott Joplin, and Sweet Miss Emma, et al). Scientific research has shown that song birds learn how to sing, they aren't born doing it; Humpback whales compose their “whale songs” as minutes' long performances. Human beings, like other animals, learn and use music and develop their music making capacities.

What seems to be reserved for humans only is rhythm. No other species has been found able to follow or create rhythm. Thus, drumming and patterned and shaped sound making and vocalizations are actually the exclusive human musical art.

Why do we make music and how is it that a musician can pierce the heart and soul of one who hears that music? I suppose the simplest, broadest answer is we do it because we can and we do it because we must. That is, we yearn to connect with one another.

The British novelist E.M. Forster wrote in “Howard's End”, “Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height! Live in fragments no longer.”

Connecting, becoming whole in community and thus complete within is our deepest capacity and desire. This is why our partial isolation now is so painfully hard and exhausting. We are made to see and to hear, to smell, touch, and taste the presence of others. Not to have that sensory immersion is a form of slow starvation unless we find ways to compensate.

If you are on Facebook and Youtube, the incredible desire to create human connection is precious in itself. Offering it to others—and to get to observe what others are doing--is inspiring, encouraging, inviting, and joyous.

Three of my favorite on-going enterprises are the elaborate costuming efforts of one family who color code the absurd outfits they don in shades of a particular color, such as yellow, green, red or blue, and then pose for an imaginary daguerreotype; then there are the ridiculous and terrifically clever songs and dances people create for audiences they will never meet; the wildest one of all is the illusion series of punches, ball tossing, prat falls and so on that are created by a chain of people who link themselves to one another by passing something along through the illusion of trick photography. A slap to the mid left side of a screen cuts to a sore face on the mid-right side of a subsequent screen which leads to the next bit of literal slapstick getting passed on. In theory, you

could make this progression go around the world in the few seconds it takes to play the video sequence by linking people at any distance the electronics we have will traverse, and make it look like it happened in your neighbor's yard or house—or make it seem you went around the world without leaving your own back yard.

Making the effort to connect is so important for each of us. Appreciating our own need for connection. Go bless us all, every one, by reaching out.