

Artists Almanac- September 2020

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.

Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice

Once, when I was young, I rose from bed, anticipating eagerly what the day held and set about it eagerly. Even then, I needed something to clear my head and power the day's start. Coffee served well. Now I am a man, startup takes something more. Hot tea serves for a starter and because it releases its caffeine slower over time, serves me better than the short-term jolt of coffee, followed by an accompanying letdown. But now in later years, something more is needed, to keep the juices of creativity flowing - Music.

Good music; music of all types - classical, bluegrass, opera, cool jazz, country, folk, bagpipes, elevator music, patriotic marches, waltzes, 40s dance music, chorale music, hymns, love songs, ballads telling history or a story, the list goes on and on - but does not include rap, which is but syncopated raging hatred.

Music is the lubricant of creation. I like to have it on as I paint. But it does not serve me as well while writing, which is jealous of my entire attention. Different parts of the brain, I suppose.

There are four elements of music – rhythm, pitch, timbre and melody. They are not equally awarded to all. A good drummer or dancer may be strong in rhythm and timbre, but tone deaf. Some that are lacking in pitch discrimination may be good at reading scores and playing the organ or piano. For time out of mind, the auditory experience of music required a live performer and an audience. Now, thanks to the miracle of electronics, we can listen to the music of our choice, in every room, home or office, or while traveling, at any hour of the day. So sing out, CD player, Alexa, You Tube, FM, computer, or radio! An entire industry is built around music. Even those who cannot carry a tune may participate in music through the medium of dance. At the annual Fiddlers Jamboree, I enjoy the buck dancer, carried



away in the rhythm of a mountain jig. The expression on his face is one of pure rapture. We think of Native Americans who would dance all night, entranced, in prayer for rain, war, corn, until they fall exhausted.

From the earliest lays of wandering minstrels, music was used to dramatize stories. Andrew Jackson saved America from British conquest at New Orleans in 1815. There Militiamen from Tennessee, Kentucky, and Louisiana, U.S. Regulars, freed blacks, French Creoles and Royalists, New Orleans businessmen. and Jean Lafitte's pirates stood off a British army and navy that had defeated Napoleon. The Ursuline nuns back in the cathedral prayed constantly during the raging battle. When a breathless courier arrived with the shout - VICTORY! - the Cathedral bells rang out and Jackson thanked them for their prayers. They sing a Mass each year to commemorate their delivery.

Folk singer Jimmy Driftwood wrote and played a song which made the top of the charts, in honor of the day that was once a national holiday Here is his *Eighth of January*. (Turn on the sound and skip the ads.)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiNWx_IzUj8

Music has intensity; painting has richness. When the Frist Museum hosted the Constable exhibit, I sat for a long time before the six-foot painting of Willie Lott's cottage, featuring the vast sky filled with fluffy clouds, the stream, the farmer and his dog, the hay wain, and Lott's cabin, yet my eyes were dry; nobody weeps before

a great painting; they absorb it and return in remembrance. They enter the painting and participate in its creation,



Willie Lott's Cottage – John Constable

While Bach's *B Minor Mass* or Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus* may moisten my eyes, the emotion passes in an instant. Music is moving, intense, then gone in seconds, and we can only recover its momentary intensity by starting the cd over, and listening over and over. Music is in time; a great painting is timeless.

Music, they say, is a form of prayer. Why, during this lockdown, shouldn't we solace our isolation with good music, rather than television?

In conclusion, I leave you this, with my favorite solace, Samuel Barber's *Adagio*. Turn on the sound, skip the mindless ads, and be enraptured.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRL447oDId4>