

The Orb of Whammy

~Life, Music and the Pursuit of Happiness~

thursday, may 7, 2009

Grouchy Game Changer

After staying up far, far too late to finish a handful of reports (I just can't do the 2:30 am bedtime like I used to), I was a sight to behold this morning. Puffy-eyed and armed with two cups of coffee, I headed to the car to make the 45 minute journey to work. I flicked through my XM radio for a few minutes, but everything that came out of the speakers sounded like sandpaper to my ear drums. Leroy the iPod was promptly put on shuffle, and in him I trusted. Sure enough, 3 songs later, Leroy selected "Stop Doggin' Me Around", by the late, great Jackie Wilson. I listened, rinsed, and repeated. Four times. One coffee down and a few Jackie Wilson repeats later, I was in fine form.

Thank you, thank you, thank you, Mr. Wilson. Your voice is the stuff that dreams are made of.

now blasting:

Wheedle's Groove - (entire album! Delish!)

"Heartbeats" - Jose Gonzalez

"Young Adult Friction" - The Pains of Being Pure at Heart

"Good Arms Vs. Bad Arms" - Frightened Rabbit

"Come On Feet" - Pete and the Pirates

"History of Lovers" - Iron & Wine/Calexico

"South of France" - Harlem

"Lalita" - The Love Language

"Plasticities" - Andrew Bird

"Grounds for Divorce" - Elbow

"Saints" - Army Navy

"The Kids Don't Stand a Chance" - Vampire Weekend with Chromeo (remix)

"You Broke My Heart" - Lavender Diamond

"Energy" - Apples in Stereo

"Fools" - The Dodos

additions to the "fun to say" word list:

[Binomial Nomenclature](#)

[Lugubrious](#)

[Spelunker](#)

[Kerfuffle](#)

[Fractal](#)

[Grebelet](#)

[Boondoggle](#)

Listening to Jackie croon out those smooth notes, I came to a little realization about my music therapy needs. There can't be a blasting of "Yellow Submarine" when I'm feeling all cobwebby and irritable - oh no. That would just exacerbate the issue. For me, it has to ride the narrow line between just happy enough, and just sad/angry enough. Maybe that's why the Doggin' Me Around track really hit me in the magic spot.

Do you have a faithful funk lifter, a guaranteed grouch killer, or otherwise

[Esplanade](#)

[Plunk](#)

[Besmirch](#)

now clicking:

[New Funk/Soul Podcast and Playlist](#)

[Spinner](#)

[Mecca! "The Soul-Sides"](#)

[CD Baby - \(a great place to find new music from artists with a limited distribution situation\)](#)

[Daptone Records - Home of Sharon Jones, Budos Band & Sugarman 3](#)

[The Tofu Hut \(Music Hotness\)](#)

[iLike](#)

[Eat Sleep Drink Music](#)

[Pandora Music Geonome](#)

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reliable retch remover?

Posted by Amy at [7:54 PM](#) [0 comments](#)

tuesday, may 5, 2009

Pitchy Talk

Look at me go! I take months and months off from the blogosphere, and now I'm doubling up and going back to back. When it rains it pours in blogland.

My other (and some might say better) half directed me to a great podcasted discussion yesterday, which I, of course, feel the need to share with the world. This episode of WNYC's Radio Lab combines my two passions into one intriguing conversation. Language, meet Music; Music, may I introduce you to Language. Listening to this panel of experts go to task on the marriage of language and music made my skin all tingly. The first 10 minutes or so of the discussion hooked me right away, as expert [Diana Deutsch](#) (a musical psychologist – hello, dream job!) detailed the process that goes on in the production booth and how language can morph into music right between your very ears. Give it a listen. You'll have a spoken-word ear worm in about 4 minutes flat. Amazing stuff!

After hooking you with Deutsch's audio illusion, the team goes on to talk about perfect pitch, and tonal languages – the speakers of which are reportedly at a huge head start in the acquisition of musical skill as compared to us plain ol' intonation speakers. It's all very amazing stuff. I spent a good amount of time following links to other [audio illusions](#), too, and each one was mesmerizing to me. This whole topic, and the [bulk of Diana Deutsch's research](#) seems to strike a delicate balance between my pleasure principal (music) and my career (Speech and Language Pathology). I'm so grateful that I stumbled across all this.

Listening to this recording made me think of times when I've heard music in seemingly random noises in the environment, and thought I was a little off my heezy for doing so. I remember being in Disney World about 10 years ago, riding the tram across the park, and hearing the beeping of the doors as they opened and closed. I sat there, riveted, and pointed out to my husband that those tones were the opening notes to a CSNY song that I couldn't place. I hummed it, and hummed it... and finally came up with the song. Elevator tones, doorbells, microwave dings... to me, I can always link them back to some tune that has been etched in my brain subconsciously. (Does this happen to you, too? I'm hoping someone can relate.) I've not had a lick of formal music training to speak of, but as Dr. Deutsch explained "[perfect pitch](#)" – I felt so connected. *No*, I'm absolutely *not* saying I'm any form of musical genius. Far from it! (The most talent I ever displayed was being able to peck out harmonies by ear on my old Casio keyboard after my brother spun a favorite album.) I just think those of us who live and breathe music can hear it in anything, anywhere, at any time. This whole paragraph has me thinking of the movie "August Rush", by the way, which I have a like/hate relationship with... but I digress.

If the brain/music connection excites you as much as it does me, consider drifting your mouse over to WNYC and giving a listen to [this series of](#)

[music-related discussions](#) on Radio Lab. I started with "Musical Language", but have "Sound as Touch" and "Musical DNA" cued up for my ride home. I mean, really, any time you can listen to [Robert Krulwich](#) explain astoundingly complex information in such people-friendly terms, it's gotta make your day better, right? I'd love to hear your thoughts after you give it a listen.

Sing it with me, now, people:
... Sometimes behave so strange-ly...

Posted by Amy at [4:03 PM](#) [0 comments](#)

monday, may 4, 2009

Back... like Jack Black or Cooked Crack?

Neither one.

What brings me back to the blog, you might ask? Maybe asking what drove me away would be a better place to start.

Well, maybe I've been away because I've been busy. Maybe because I've had a few life changes. Maybe I've strayed due to work stress... or maybe, just maybe, I've wandered from the keyboard because I've been less than inspired by my recent musical discoveries.

That is, until today.

I've been waiting and waiting for a new anthem. A new ying to my musical yang. (I always thought there was an "I" in there somewhere... I had to look it up to be sure. Correct me if I'm wrong, though, please!) Anyway, I've found something to get geared up about again, musically speaking, that is. I give you, "Metric".

Sure, there's been lots and lots of great music coming out so far this year. Yes, I've enjoyed new releases by M. Ward, Neko Case, Animal Collective and The Decemberists. I've fortified my funky side by picking up a slew of crusty funk nuggets, several released by the glorious "Eccentric Soul" collections. But nothing, I say NOTHING, has resulted in the ear perking, soul wrenching, repeat-hitting jubilation that has come along with discovering Metric. I can't pinpoint the sound, exactly, I just remember being in high school and falling for The Darling Buds in the same way. But this is markedly better. I think it's singer Emily Haines. Her voice is dreamy, gutsy and ethereal, all at once. Perfect recipe for a rock/pop medley.

And yes, dagnabbit, I owe it all to my usual love muffins at [All Songs Considered](#) (Mr. Dreamy Voice himself, actually...), who seem to always hit my happy button in the tunes department.

I'll wax poetic about this some other time. For now, enjoy:

Ohhh that hook. It's so.... hooky.
One more, because really, why stop when it's this good?

Posted by Amy at [7:12 PM](#) [0 comments](#)

wednesday, march 11, 2009

Jingle-Jangle

This McDonald's commercial might just be inexplicably catchy enough to make me eat fast food again. (yikes. Can it possibly be?)
What is it with this jingle? What makes it morph into the world's biggest ear worm?

I think it's the harmony-laced "ooooo" at the end. Yep. That must be it. You know if I'm humming a silly singing fish ad, I'm in dire straits.

I can't think of another jingle that was this addictive. Can you?

Posted by Amy at [10:32 PM](#) [0 comments](#)

tuesday, march 3, 2009

Musical Warfare

Ok, little punk kids. We see you with your goth tee-shirts and your emo haircuts. We're on to your dark and dreary ways, and see you creeping around. We have to confess - we don't like your kind in our clean, sparkly shopping malls. We don't want you sipping from our Orange Julius cups. We don't want you querio-ing our Taco Bell. While we're at it, we don't want you tainting the glare of the bubble gum pink with your dingy army green and black. So what do we do to urge you to head back to the skate parks and Store 24 parking lots? We play Barry Manilow! Loudly. Over and over. Our in-depth research indicates that Mr. Manilow's smooth croon is the equivalent of a spray can of Raid for teenagers. An audio emo deterrent!

Really people, I am not making this up. Have you seen [this story](#)? I'll snip a bit for you from our dear ol' Associated Press, just in case you haven't seen it.

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — It'll be Barry Manilow versus the mall rats. The New Zealand city of Christchurch hopes that putting the American crooner's smooth and gentle tones into the mix of music to be broadcast through the central mall district can pacify unruly teens who congregate there_ or at least convince them to go elsewhere.

This whole situation reminds me of those sonic machines you plug in to

emit soundless waves of noise that somehow deter ants, fleas and ticks. Turn on the Barry, watch the little angry teens start fleeing for the doors. Within no time, your precious GAP stores and Body Shop retailers will be catering to the clientele they were originally intended for. During these "challenging economic times" - we need to be mindful of who is frequenting our fine shopping establishments.

Now turn up "Copacabana", quick, so that those pesky kids can get themselves out on the streets in the dark where they'll be nice and safe.

Posted by Amy at [8:50 PM](#) [0 comments](#)

sunday, february 8, 2009

Andrew Bird Bonus Love

If you were intrigued by my previous review of the Andrew Bird show in Boston, MA, you may be interested in the following link ([clicky](#)), which will take you directly to my pally-wallies over at All Songs Considered.

Being the good ladies and gents that they are, they taped Mr. Bird's show at Washington D.C.'s 930 Club last weekend. I was just about to head up to bed on that Sunday night when I felt the urge to tune in - for what I promised to be "just a second". The show was already well under way when I picked up the stream, but hearing the songs live again was like getting to eat dessert twice. I said as much in the live chat that corresponded with the streamed concert. What an odd thing that is, for a strict "non-talker" at concerts, by the way. It felt like I was breaking the most sacred of rules. It was fun to share comments with the other fans, though- and to do so without disrespecting the artist or fellow concert-goers was nifty. As the "chat"-ter drifted farther from the actual music that was being played, I eventually just zoned out and enjoyed the wonder of whirling violins, complex but endearing lyrics and, of course, the whistling.

So head on over to the NPR site if you're up for seconds... or firsts. Thanks to modern technology, you can experience that fresh, "just-like-being-there" feeling.

Now that I've done my long overdue good deed and shared that with you all, I'm going back to my tea and blanket, as I seem to have come down with some flu-ish nastiness likely communicated by the wee-little cherubs I work with each day. Hooray!

Posted by Amy at [6:29 PM](#) [0 comments](#)

saturday, january 31, 2009

Andrew Bird - In Concert

Last night I had the good fortune to see Mr. Andrew Bird perform at the historic (and slightly worse for wear) Orpheum Theater in Boston. I had no idea what to expect from this show, but after hearing a [recent interview on All Songs Considered](#), I knew it was a must-see. I'm relatively new to Andrew Bird's catalog; I tuned in thanks to a friend's recommendation to "[The Mysterious Production of Eggs](#)", released in 2005. I was quickly won over by songs like "Tables and Chairs", "Measuring Cups", and "Fake

Palindromes" - I had never heard such arrangements. Andrew Bird can make a song whirr with his smooth vocals, intelligent lyrics, witty word use, intense violin playing and, wondrous whistling. That last part wasn't alliteration for alliteration's sake, either. This man can w-h-i-s-t-l-e!

The show last night held me captivated for 2-ish hours. I found myself listening so intently my mouth hung agape, as Andrew and his band tore through song after song. I use the word tore, and I shouldn't. He *crafts* songs, makes them magical, and casts them out to his listeners like a fisherman casts a large, sweeping net. At one point, as multiple, intricate violin loops poured out of giant, orange speakers resembling those atop an old Victrola, I leaned over to my husband, and whispered, "This man is a magician of sound." He nodded emphatically.

In case my gushing isn't enough, I'll give you my official "Top 10 Reasons You Should See Andrew Bird Perform" list. These aren't really in order of importance - more like a stream of consciousness.

10. Your vocabulary will expand exponentially. You'll not only hear words like "proto-Sanskrit Minoans" and "nomenclature", you'll hear someone singing them, rhyming them, and making them art.
9. You can quietly keep track of how many references to the number four his songs make. (This is just my little hypothesis, and is in no way supported by any real literature. It just seems there are an awful lot of 4-syllable titles and other references to that number in his writing.)
8. Do you know what a Gramophone is? It's the closest thing I can compare to the three oversized, conical speakers that adorn the stage. Better yet, in the center of the set rests a two-headed version, which whirls at frightening speeds when Mr. Bird flips a foot pedal. The result is a dizzying tornado of sound - like Hammond Organ meets the violin.
7. "Sock Watch 2009". Andrew removed his shoes after one instrumental introduction song, revealing a pair of HOT pink socks. Maybe you'll see orange in your city, I can't be sure.
6. Violin. Guitar. Violin. Guitar. Violin. He's often slinging back and forth between the two like you and I may use a fork and knife on a piece of chicken. He makes it look effortless, yet he's conducting an electrified, elaborate orchestra of one.
5. His live version of "Fake Palindromes" is so much more intense than the one on the album- he makes it sound downright eerie, in a manic sort of way.
4. Expressive hand gestures. He punctuates his artful lyrics with arm and hand movements that resemble some sort of heroin-laced marionette. I simply could not turn my head away.
3. You're over 30 and you need to feel like a grown-up. Look around. Yes, you are the oldest person in the room. If you have a knitted cap, I suggest you wear it. If you can grow a beard, do that, too.
2. You're feeling the need to explore music that bends the rules of verse/chorus/solo/reprise. As I mentioned earlier, this man is part magician, part musician. He bends sounds and creates beautiful, ambient noise that is nothing short of hypnotic.
1. We've all had the urge to sing along at a concert, but this is the first time I've ever felt the need to whistle along. Luckily for those around me, I restrained myself.

Posted by Amy at [10:57 PM](#) [0 comments](#)

wednesday, january 28, 2009

The Pendulum of Funk

I've blogged about this before, but my musical tastes seem to ebb and flow with the seasons. It seemed like I always listened to more modern/alternative/indie music in the summer, and tended to lean more towards the blues, soul and funk in the winter months, when I needed to hunker down and let the turntable bring the heat. Either we had one heck of an Indian Summer, or there was just an extra good selection of current music out there this year, because I'm just starting to snap out of my lockdown with college radio and under-appreciated, [bearded sadmen](#).

Today, as I hungrily snatched up my remaining 12 [downloads for the month of January](#), I filled my cart at the proverbial warehouse of funk revival. It was there that I found [Speedometer](#), a feast for the senses, indeed. It was like coming home to your momma after a long, drawn out absence. I missed my funky side, and I do believe it missed me.

I'd like to think I'm a pretty good sharer, so here's a little taste to whet your appetite:

There is sadly very little out there for me to share with you about this band, but if you like this little compilation, consider it a Pu Pu For One, and go on out and get yourself a [full course meal](#) of tasty funk.

Posted by Amy at [7:51 PM](#) [0 comments](#)

monday, january 26, 2009

Music for Mania

My ride home from work today was filled with thoughts about a fourth-grade student I work with. His name won't be revealed here, but for the sake of calling him something, I shall dub him Fredrique.

Fredrique was diagnosed with bipolar disorder several months ago. This is not something that would be immediately obvious to someone who just made his acquaintance; he seems like a quiet, personable enough kid, honestly. Once you get to know him, though, you can see that he goes to his dark and quiet place often, and it is nearly impossible to get him out. He comes from a long line of manic-depressive family members, who report they can reach the pinnacles of bliss one moment, and plummet to the bowels of depression seconds later. I am not well-versed in disorders of the personality, so this sounds extremely horrific to me. My heart breaks for this student on a weekly basis - he's a sweet boy whose emotional roller coaster has a crazed conductor and an endless line of thrill-seeking patrons.

I wonder what Fredrique's adolescence will bring, seeing as mood swings are a pretty common occurrence for all kids of that age. His teen angst is likely to feel as though there is a magnifying glass being held up to it. His highs will likely be higher, and his lows lower than his teeny-bopping peers. And while his friends grapple with their status quo eighth-grade moodiness, Fredrique will be feeling the sting of that first unrequited crush to the tenth power. My thoughts then drifted to the inevitable: his iPod. He'll have one, for sure. It will probably serve as a metronome for his moods. The idea of

musical accompaniment to mood swings is not a new one, but something tells me that Fredrique's music will be his lifeblood - his emotional solar panel, so to speak. I started mentally planning mixed tapes to send him - anonymously, of course.

While cruising along today, I was feeling pretty upbeat. Spirited. Jubilant. There's snow in the forecast, I had a great, rewarding day at work, and I had enough left-overs in the fridge to translate to a night off from cooking supper. This song guided me home. I would put this on the top of my "UP" list. What about you?

That's Noah and the Whale, singing "Five Years Time"

I'll leave you with this quote, courtesy of Charles Rosenblum:
"On a bad day, I have mood swings - but on a good day, I have the whole mood playground."

Posted by Amy at [8:52 PM](#) [0 comments](#)

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