

## Passing It On

Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist means nothing to me. If asked to declare a religion I must say none. Emphatically none! To me religions are dangerous superstitions; ideology is odious at best and evil in practice.

“But you have to believe in something.”

“Well, then, put down musician.”

“Musician. So, what sort of music do you play?”

“Almost everything within reason, except opera and madrigals, disco and techno. They’re all forms of elevator noise to me. Bad perfume.”

“And do you have a favorite instrument?”

“I play a mean stereo.”

“Do you read music?”

“No, I read books. I listen to music and sometimes sing along but music as a language I can’t comprehend; like advanced Calculus. I know that certain principles control the order of the universe but I don’t know what they are. I’m in awe of my kids and anyone who can play music but it’s a mystery to me. I do have the occasional dream where I’m sitting in for Bill Evans with the 1959 Miles Davis Quintet and that is great fun. I can really stretch out in that context.”

“So prayer means nothing to you?”

“Almost literally nothing, except sadness. Some people, I know, pray a few times a day and in times of need and always go to church on the Sabbath. I listen to music 12 hours every day and take an occasional break for silence. Silence is rather like my Sabbath.”

## Aaron & Gretchen

I like to think that quality will find its own way into the Universal

Mind and I'm sometimes confirmed in this belief. An example: In 1981 my 11 year old rock'n roller son Aaron and his twin sister Gretchen were spending a few weeks with me in Wellfleet on the Cape of Cod. We went out one night to the clam shack and then stopped off at the ice cream stand. Inside, from the speakers, Ella Fitzgerald was purring something or other. Ella could sing from the Yellow Pages and I will listen. And Aaron (wearing his "I'm So Happy Here I Could Just Shit" t-shirt) got a very cute but stunned look on his face.

"Who is *that*?" He wanted to know.

"That would be Ella Fitzgerald," I said.

"Is she still... alive?"

"Yeah. Last I heard." I said. "I'll make you a mix."

"Cool."

Aaron may also have here invented the cliché 'awesome' at that time but I'm not claiming it.

I'm not sure if I ever did make him an Ella mix (I'll do it now.) but it marks a time when a certain knowledge was passed on to another generation.

I have no idea who or what my parents listened to or liked as music but I'm assuming it included Bob Wills and Woody Guthrie. My Mama, rest her soul, loved Lawrence Welk and Liberace. Mercy! I love you Mama but where did I get this music gene? (See J.S. Bach note below.)

Now, Aaron and Gretchen are 30ish and we pass our favorites on to one another. I turned Aaron on to Springsteen and he sent me Beth Orton's *Daybreaker*. He gave me Nirvana's *Nevermind* and I sent him *Coltrane @ Birdland*. He and Gretchen are easy to deal with come birthdays and Christmas: Send money and music and they are happy. Which, come to think of it, pretty much sums up me too. Send cash.

Now that I'm entering the digital stage of listening (iTunes Rules\*) I digitized 300 or so of my favorite albums and passed them on last Xmas.

Gretchen had a little trouble distinguishing the two Ettas so I explained: Etta Jones is more Jazz and Etta James is more Rock'n Roll and Blues. But both Ettas are equally great.

\* Pirating: As an artist I respect Copyright © and would not steal another artists work. However, when I buy something, a painting, sculpture, DVD or a CD it is for me and my family to enjoy. When I have shuffled off this mortal coil, I expect my family to still have access to my art and other possession such as: my (packed away) LPs, my (deteriorated) tapes, my CDs and now my MP3s. So back off you corporate fucks. Gimme some truth.

## **Kate**

Kate was born listening to a tape of Glenn Gould playing the *Goldberg Variations*.

(Note: I like to claim J.S Bach as a distant patriarch because the German side of my family tree fizzles out with a woman named Anna Magdalena Bach who comes from the same area and in the decades close to the genetically and musically prolific JSB. And Anna Magdalena is a common name listed amongst his progeny. However, I've never expended the energy to track down the truth. Speculation is enough to soothe my musical soul.)

Kate wandered in and out of my studio as an infant hearing the above plus Thelonious Monk and Miles and Coltrane. And she has picked it up wonderfully. Her early favorites are Ella, (especially with Satch) Sarah, Diana Krall, Etta James and I've got her listening to Billie and Prez.

Though she has not yet acquired the love of Billie I'm confident it will come. As I mentioned Billie is an acquired taste.

She's studying piano with Connie Crothers (who studied with Lennie Tristano along side Lee Konitz, and Warne Marsh) and is beginning to thrill me with her improvisations. And what is even more amazing, one day as I walked in the door, George Jones' *Cold Hard Truth* was playing full blast. Out of all my records, Kate had selected The Possum. I knew she had heard it because I play it often, but I never imagined that she actually liked it.

"George Jones?" I said.

"Yeah, it's a great album."

And one Sunday morning as Kate silently slumbered in her room next to my studio, I put on *Kind Of Blue*.

After a few minutes she wandered in sleep in her eyes. "That is such a good album," she said.

"Number One on my list," I said.

I had to give Kate a hug. I'd be willing to bet there is not another 15 year old in NYC who listens to Miles Davis, Ella Fitzgerald & George Jones.

## **Ann**

Kate's mother can't stand George Jones and recently confessed that she doesn't really like Richard Thompson either; they are both acquired tastes and Ann hasn't had the inclination or found the time. Ann is more of a reader than me and listens to music differently; she finds a new record that she likes and plays it over and over until she's sick of it. Twenty years later she may listen to *Blood On The Tracks* or *Running On Empty* again and enjoy it. But she will not listen once a week to *Blonde On Blonde* as I do. Or Glenn Gould's *Goldberg Variations*. Or *Explorations* by Bill Evans. And she

would never dedicate an occasional whole day to, say, Sonny Rollins or Eric Clapton.

When Miles died, WBGO in Newark played his music continually for days and I kept the radio on all through it. There was also an exhibition of his paintings in SoHo around the same time but sadly Miles was no Matisse. Many musicians dabble in art; Miles, Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Tony Bennett. John Lennon came out of art school as did David Byrne. And usually their visual products are about as interesting and when I bang on the piano when no one is around.

Ann buys me the occasional CD as a gift, and they are always good choices, but I can't recall if she's ever bought one for herself. I wonder sometimes what would happen if I stopped buying new music; would she eventually go out and buy something totally off the wall? Like, say, *Cher's Greatest Hits*. Given my music collection, it would be like living in a candy shop and going to the Deli for a *Snickers*.

## **Emma**

Emma plays piano and clarinet but it remains to be seen if she becomes obsessed like her sister Kate who is seldom seen without a headset, singing along. When Emma began clarinet lessons, I made her a mix of Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw and Sidney Bechet to give her a kick start.

Emma follows more closely in her mother's footsteps so far. She has a couple favorite albums that she listens to over and over but she's more into games. She listens Avril Lavigne's debut album while constructing alternate worlds and societies in SimsLand. Her other favorites are equally choice: *Jesse Winchester*, *Hourglass* by James Taylor, *The Rising* by Bruce Springsteen and *Without The Fanfare* by Mary Black. She also requested *The*

*Best of Sheryl Crow* for Christmas but I don't hear her listening to it very often.

Last summer I discovered and became besotted by Mary Black. Never having heard of her before, I downloaded an MP3 called *Going, Gone* from Amazon. It was so stunning that I switched over to my eMusic\* subscription and found about 10 of her albums. I downloaded all of them and there is not bad track in the bunch. For a month or two the rotation in the car stereo was *Without The Fanfare* or *Hourglass*. I now call it The Summer of Mary Black.

\*eMusic is a great deal for jazz and blues lovers; less so for rock and country. They offer all the Prestige, Fantasy, Riverside catalogs at very reasonable prices.