Ode to Happiness Sunday April 26, 2020

This is what I have to put up with while the pandemic does whatever it feels like, so for starters I’d like to share a poem that the scene brings to mind:

**Fern Hill**

Dylan Thomas - 1914-1953

Now as I was young and easy under the apple boughs

About the lilting house and happy as the grass was green,

The night above the dingle starry,

Time let me hail and climb

Golden in the heydays of his eyes,

And honoured among wagons I was prince of the apple towns

And once below a time I lordly had the trees and leaves

Trail with daisies and barley

Down the rivers of the windfall light.

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns

About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,

In the sun that is young once only,

Time let me play and be

Golden in the mercy of his means,

And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves

Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,

And the sabbath rang slowly

In the pebbles of the holy streams.

All the sun long it was running, it was lovely, the hay

Fields high as the house, the tunes from the chimneys, it was air

And playing, lovely and watery

And fire green as grass.

And nightly under the simple stars

As I rode to sleep the owls were bearing the farm away,

All the moon long I heard, blessed among stables, the nightjars

Flying with the ricks, and the horses

Flashing into the dark.

And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white

With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder: it was all

Shining, it was Adam and maiden,

The sky gathered again

And the sun grew round that very day.

So it must have been after the birth of the simple light

In the first, spinning place, the spellbound horses walking warm

Out of the whinnying green stable

On to the fields of praise.

And honoured among foxes and pheasants by the gay house

Under the new made clouds and happy as the heart was long,

In the sun born over and over,

I ran my heedless ways,

My wishes raced through the house high hay

And nothing I cared, at my sky blue trades, that time allows

In all his tuneful turning so few and such morning songs

Before the children green and golden

Follow him out of grace,

Nothing I cared, in the lamb white days, that time would take me

Up to the swallow thronged loft by the shadow of my hand,

In the moon that is always rising,

Nor that riding to sleep

I should hear him fly with the high fields

And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.

Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means,

Time held me green and dying

Though I sang in my chains like the sea.

**MUSIC**

I’m a music mood today, brought about because my son Danny issued a challenge to his Facebook followers to come up with a list of their 10 favorite musical works and a friend asked me if I was going to respond. So when I started to lay out ten pieces, at around five I realized it was an impossible task; but at least I gave it a shot. Anyway here’s as far as I got. I’d like to know what your list might look like.

**Bach -- Partita #2** for unaccompanied violin (though it has been done on nearly every instrument on the planet. (hmm, didgeridoo?) A fun one is Joshua Bell performing in the Washington, DC, Subway Station where in less than an hour he pulled down $45.00.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJhZ0J3bIYc>

**Bach -- all of his organ works**, but I am drawn to his Fugue in D, "The Gigue" because of its happiness.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WuoxijdFKA0>

**Wagner -- Parsifal Prelude and Good Friday Spell** -- Forget that he is one of history's greatest rats and listen to his music.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQVJG94_Npk> (Toscanini}

**Ravel -- Mother Goose Suites, G major Piano Concerto** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3rir1bWTyI>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vi_7jaJQD78>

**Beethoven -- Symphonies 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, and particularly 9**. When I was in college I took a music appreciation course in which the professor claimed that Beethoven had gone senile before he wrote the ninth (and he had actually said that there was no good music since Beethoven's Fifth  
There are recordings all over the place, and what I've found in listening to them--symphonies, sonatas, etc., is that they bring out different views of what Ludwig's genius put before the maestros. My son Danny popped out of the womb in Beethoven's thrall. His prize possession was an album of the nine symphonies from which he would select the piece of the evening, leaving me no chance to make a choice of my own. Am, however, going to put one before you—the eighth--since you rarely hear any of the even number symphonies.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2Avpt9FKP>0

**Barber -- Adagio for Strings, Violin Concerto**. Barber was in my mind one of the few academics in the thirties that will be listened to for centuries to come.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3MHeNt6Yjs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CveX2LjVaw0>

When I got this far and hadn't touched Mozart, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Liszt, Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Poulenc, Faure, Bartok, Saint-Saens, Debussy, a whole host of Americans: Copeland, John Adams, Brubeck, Ellington, Lukas Foss, Roy Harris, Hovhaness, Alfred Newman, Joan Tower, to name a few; and I haven't even gotten started on the young talent, coming up through television and the streaming platforms.

We should never allow ourselves to utter the words, "If only I had..." but I'm going to do it just this once regarding my preference for football or baseball or racing around the neighborhood on my bike over the often painful task of running scales on the piano. It was a mistake even when I admit to myself that at best, in my finest hour at the keyboard I would not have been worth a cup of coffee at McDonalds.

One more piece, Bach’s Goldberg Variations played by Glenn Gould.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uX-5HOx2Wc>

Have a wonderful Sunday