

55th Storyworth: What Are Your Favorite Musicians, Bands or Albums?

Unless something unexpected happens, I believe this will be my last Storyworth submission, although I may periodically write something as the spirit moves me, and add it to my collection on my website, where you can find my whole writing history back through the Porsche Club Newsletter articles and music recordings, all available for downloading, from <http://www.holzerent.com/pdfpages.htm> which are all virus free and safe ;-)

Anyone who has listened to my guitar and singing knows my favorite Artist is Gordon Lightfoot. I play a ton of his music. Generically, those fall under what I describe as the “Singer-Songwriter” genre, which would include other notables like Peter Paul & Mary, Bob Dylan, Chris DeBurgh, Harry Chapin, Carly Simon, Paul Simon, Arlo and Woodie Guthrie, John Denver etc, although this listing is by NO means exhaustive.

Basically, if I like to LISTEN to it and then decide to learn it, I am teaching myself totally by ear, since I cannot read nor write a note of music. I also am limited to few more than about seven chords total, plus some embellishment like progressions. So, for example, I have worked to learn to play the progressions of “Mr Bojangles”, by Jerry Jeff Walker, the ONLY specific music I know of that he developed. Another, Kris Kristofferson, wrote “Me and Bobby McGee”, which I first heard as performed by Janis Joplin. And of course, as noted in my earlier writeups, I write a LOT of spoof lyrics, which includes my “Ode to Ainsley Lynne” which I wrote on the second day after she was born, and which is sung to the Coke ad tune “I’d Like To Teach The World To Sing”, as well as my adjusted version of “The Marvelous Toy” and “A Baby Just Like You”.

However impaired my formal musical talent, I was graced with a decent baritone voice, and an ability to sing harmony, and have actively focused on picking the guitar strings instead of strumming for most of my music, which with my delicious acoustic 12 string guitar with concert box I play makes me sound a LOT better than my actual talent would suggest. And because, pre-Covid I was providing entertainment services for a variety of venues in Oswego County, I decided to record a bunch, some with video, at an actual recording studio in Syracuse, some solo and some with Lynne, so Ainsley would have an heirloom once she is old enough to recognize its value. Like these writeups, they are on the same page on my website for download by anyone. As an adjunct to that, I intend to record my reading these Storyworth articles so I can give a similar heirloom in the form of a memory stick to Ainsley, and may do similarly as a present for my sibs and close friends in 2022 ;-)

I tend to dislike, and therefore avoid, any “music” which is screaming or whose words cannot be clearly understood. There is far too much good stuff available to waste resources on that crap. But lots of people reading the above would find the fact of my liking some of the early Led Zeppelin and Rolling Stones music to seem paradoxical. I even quoted Mick Jagger’s “You Can’t Always Get What You Want” in a critical meeting with the GE Engineering group when I convinced them to expand their support for UPS batteries to include DIN standard cells which were available worldwide, to eliminate the liquidated damages their sole-source GE Lexan shell user was causing by delayed deliveries. But most of my favorite music tells a story which can easily be sung along with, which also means it can be reproduced by a solo performance with my guitar.

The story of my love of Gordon Lightfoot music started during my Freshman year at Clarkson. I had arrived at school and brought my full trap drum set, which was quite a feat finding room in my dorm for it. We were not allowed to have personal automobiles that year, although Dave Phillips, my roommate and subsequent Best Man for our wedding, had a special dispensation. So he helped me get the setup to the Ratskeller where they had weekly open mic sessions. Unfortunately, nobody wanted percussion accompaniment, which made me decide to take up guitar like my Dad (4 string) and older sister (6 string nylon). I had heard “Yarmouth Castle” and understood the sound was unique, but did not understand why. So I asked at the music store...

That store was much better than one might have expected for a semi-rural community in northern New York, because the Crane School of Music was at Potsdam State, the other side of town. They explained that the sound was a 12 String, but when they showed me the one I would eventually own, it had a price of \$3500. And that was 1969. Needless to say, that was impossible. So I paid \$25 for a cheap 6 string, and they suggested the silk and steel as on the 12. They made it only a little less poor a sound, but NOT “good”. So I learned to do comical music, so desperate was my need to “perform”.

I still at that time, and well into the next semester, had no idea who Gordon Lightfoot was, nor that “Yarmouth Castle” was his. Of course, when I returned from my Xmas break, the music store had burned, and that handmade 12 string, which had no ability to fix a warped neck, was a total writeoff for them. So they sold it to me for \$35, or a penny on each original dollar. My parents would eventually pay three times that for the case they gave me, which still houses it today. But back to the story...

Clarkson and Potsdam were well north of the lake effect snow which typically caused scheduled bands for Winter Carnival to cancel. I had met a girl who has accepted my invitation to Winter Carnival, which included a concert. Then at the last minute she decided to go with some frat guy instead, which thoroughly annoyed me, so I gave my tickets to my friend Bob Oppenheimer (not related to a-bombs ;-)) who often played the 16-key organ he made along with me. And he took a recorder to the concert (never mind that it was a no-no ;-)) and when he played it back later, the first song was my beloved “Yarmouth Castle”. Turned out Gordon Lightfoot lived in Toronto, and this was like a trip SOUTH for him. But I was SO angry I had missed the show, and never got to another concert. In fact, almost ALL concerts I EVER attended were local symphonic shows.

But I determined to learn as much of Lightfoot music as I could, and I have never been sorry I did. It also turned out that was something of the “golden age of music”, before the lawyers ruined it for copyright compensation, because everybody did somebody else’s music as well as their own. In fact, while I am a huge fan of Bob Dylan music, listening to HIM perform it is nowhere NEAR as enjoyable as having Joan Baez. Or PPM. Or almost ANYBODY. In fact, the first John Denver song I ever heard was done by PPM, and was “Leaving On A Jet Plane”, and one of HIS most popular recordings was actually written by someone else, who asked him to perform it for them; “Country Roads”. Like Lightfoot, he mixed 6 and 12 string performances.

Oppie and I performed “4 And 20” and “Teach Your Children”, which were authored by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young, a group which was comprised of individuals who had made names by performing with other bands before deciding to get together. But like Dylan, their vocals could not ever equate with their music ;-)) I did attend and enjoy a concert by The Byrds, who did a LOT of Dylan stuff, one of which is a favorite; “The Chimes of Freedom Flashing”, which I perform the Dylan full-length version unlike the Byrds. Now, if only I had the foggiest clue what the words meant it would be a miracle. Like much of Dylan’s music, but I love it ;-))

And I recently acquired a documentary on the life of Gordon Lightfoot, who is now almost 80 years old, but still performing. The news, especially with the Covid impact, has told of many performers being lost to age and the disease, which is really sad. I don’t recall even a single artist from the past 20 years whose music I want to emulate, sadly. And I just turned 71, and intend to perform myself as long as I possibly can. I like music ;-))

And thank YOU for reading my Storyworth articles. They have enabled me to tiptoe through my past ;-))

Joe Holzer 1/8/2022