

The Revenge of the Dead Music

by John Olson

Someone has robbed the music store. Two harpsichords, a Wurlitzer organ, a pair of helicons and a sousaphone, a Spanish viola da gamba with a varnished gut, a 4-valve piccolo trumpet, and five hundred harmonicas are missing. The wind is a major suspect. The wind is discovered blowing around with five hundred harmonicas and a Highland bagpipe. The wind is arrested.

The wind is represented by Miss Abigail Weatherspoon, attorney at law. She wears a pink feather boa and is the spitting image of Janis Joplin as she appeared at the Monterey Pop Festival of 1967.

The courtroom is silent. Abigail produces exhibit A, a sample of music. Music rolls out of a sack in a debacle of bars and scales. Her strategy is exquisite: music, all music, eludes definition. That which eludes definition cannot, therefore, be stolen. No one can steal the ineffable. This would, of course, include the instruments. If music is ineffable, which is to say transcendent and abstract, then the instruments that produce this phenomenon have no application to the real world, and are as empty of reality as the words in a story about something that never actually happened.

The prosecuting attorney, who sports a lusty goatee and bears a remarkable resemblance to Colonel Sanders, argues that music has identifiable features and is therefore subject to the dictates of the law. Music is a product of mathematical proportions. Music reflects the proportions of the Heavens and is said to be an expression of God's greatness.

"Why," he argues robustly, holding a drumstick, "even the clucking of chickens in the barnyard is a form of music."

"I object, your honor," Abigail gives forth in a voice of stunning electrical power. "My esteemed colleague's argument is inspiring but it lacks demonstrable evidence. He is leading this courtroom

astray. If we are going to premise this case on metaphysical concepts, we will all be found guilty of trespassing on the neighborhood of the sublime.”

The door to the courtroom bangs open and a band appears with a drum kit and electric guitars. They sing “Ball and Chain,” “Piece of My Heart,” and “Summertime.”

The jury retreats, and reappears a few minutes later with a verdict. The wind is found innocent.

The violins are delirious. They simmer with the weightlessness of their strings. The atmosphere grows giddy with acciaccatura. Improvisation. Evocation. Escape.

Everyone is happy, particularly the local elephants. The elephants are so overjoyed that they go on a rampage.

The elephants crush the violins. The shadows of their music continue to play a concerto by Mozart. The elephants crush the shadows. The ghosts of the shadows continue to play. The elephants crush the ghosts of the shadows. The ghosts of the ghosts of the shadows continue to play. The elephants crush the ghosts of the ghosts of the shadows. The ghosts of the ghosts of the ghosts of the shadows continue to play. The elephants listen. They raise their trunks and trumpet their outrageousness to the ghosts of the ghosts of the ghosts of the phantom sky.

