

# The Perplexed Follow Their Own Guidance, Merci

*by* strannikov

Not only would no expositions of braneworld cosmology or inflation cosmology (without singularity) be forthcoming, no web sites for self-proclaimed telepaths would be permitted, either, none.

The internet, most internet platforms, and what was left of the television industry had become severely reduced in scope and influence in less than a decade, so no one dared guess where tastes in popular culture were heading. Most notable pop culture journalists (along with most advertising, marketing, and publicist types) had killed themselves outright, their industries in steep decline, since their algorithms no longer possessed any ability to predict the present: tastes were changing with an abruptness that could only stupefy.

Commercial cults of celebrity perished by the dozen and by the score: pop music performers had killed themselves in droves, folks no longer attended pop music events (the planet's "Music Revulsion" outbreak in the mid-2020s was still felt, the massive global rejection of pop music perceived for its roles in malign social manipulation and marketing connivance). Film studio productions had little chance, theme parks all died the death. More commercial cults of celebrity perished.

Most performance art was finished: dance and theatre troupes folded, theatres shuttered, most comedy clubs fell silent. Sports stadiums and arenas continued to lose spectators, sports franchises croaked. Of all things book publishing, print magazines, literature, and libraries were staging comebacks, but it was as if fiction, verse, and drama less than ten years old were printed with invisible ink—no one was reading it. (Contemporary

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non-fiction was available but never with print runs that came close to threatening to break into any Top Ten categories—perversely, not even in the Top Ten category for non-fiction.)

The generalized mania and rage was for the rare and the bygone, anything that might have been overlooked, anything that might otherwise have been forgotten for good and forever. If any thumbnail description enjoyed merit, it was—the older, the better. “The Age of Neo-Classicism,” commentators had attempted to name it, but that didn’t stick for long. Disseminators could only watch hoping to catch up, with no hope of steering mass appetite: purveyors of culture could only attempt to meet demand with ready access to the most diverse works of world culture. The safest job category in the world of popular culture had become “translator”.

These patterns had held for about two years by the time August 2031 arrived: shifts in taste had little bearing on what followed hour to hour, day to day, week to week. In order of popularity, and in numbers never seen in tabulations of global culture, the most popular pieces of recorded music consulted in August 2031 were:

- 1) Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, “Who Are the Brain Police?”
- 2) the “Songs and Dances of Death” cycle of Mussorgsky, the Boris Christoff recordings
- 3) “Sonata con tre violini in eco” of Biagio Marini
- 4) Vivaldi, “Concerto ‘Per eco in lontano’” (RV552)
- 5) Shostakovich's “Piano Trio No. 2, Op. 67”
- 6) Mozart, K. 522
- 7) Blind Willie Johnson's “Soul of a Man”
- 8) recording of the live 1992 Sevilla performance of “Ziryab” by Paco de Lucia, José María Bandera Sánchez, and Juan Manuel Cañizares
- 9) the Rustavi Choir singing the Georgian folk song “Orovela”
- 10) Watazumi Doso Roshi, Katsuya's 2019 “one sound bamboo soul” collection

(This list mirrors what had to be construed as the continuing popular embrace of Baroque compositions and lingering appreciation for Russian contributions. Zappa and the Mothers had been riding crests and troughs for almost five years.)

Meanwhile, print disseminators could not keep Cyrano de Bergerac's Comical History of the States and Empires of the Moon queued up, no matter how many translations were available, ditto for all translations of Marthe Bibesco's Isvor: Country of Willows. The collected works of some all-but-forgotten imbecile named strannikov enjoyed third-place appeal for at least sixteen days that month. Frédéric Soulié's "Two Cadavers" and "Memoirs of the Devil" were back to the same level occupied in two of the preceding five months. The medieval Japanese anthologies Konjaku monogatari and Uji shūi monogatari vied for fifth place with Ibn Khaldūn's Muqaddimah, Vico's New Science, and Zhuangzi's Inner Chapters.

Film? The vogue for silent films persisted, with the entire catalogue being offered with optional colored filter backgrounds (electric mauve and electric lime dominant). "The Jazz Singer" became notorious only for people destroying their monitors the moment the singing commenced, which nudged monitor sales.

Visual art? Here—the older, the much better: photos and prints of Egyptian mummy portraiture, reproductions from Pompeii and Herculaneum, Mesoamerican mirrors, jade sculptures from China, photos of the Beauvais Cave charcoal drawings freshly dated to c. 30,000 BCE following their discovery in 2024 and subsequent conservation, et cetera.

Such was the state of popular culture worldwide through August 2031.

In September, of course, that nasty pandemic of the ZAO strain of pneumonic plague broke out, with fresh unanticipated consequences then following.

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