

October 10, 1963

It was 2:30 AM, not quite the witching hour but in my life all bets had been called off and anything was possible at any hour of the day or night and in a multiplicity of possible worlds.

I had had a melody playing between my ears for hours, struggling for rulership of my head with the headache accompanying it as an underlying bass line. It was obvious I wouldn't be getting any sleep before dawn.

I heard a slight scratching sound from the hallway outside my bedroom. A rat sharpening its evil little claws? Who knew? Or cared? I had been battling recurring dizzy spells for the past few days and there had been no let up. It had been another long and difficult night overcharged with anger, rage, and physical discomfort that just wouldn't release me from its grip.

I was also experiencing pain in my legs, situated just beneath the skin of the lower limbs as an itch that couldn't be scratched. The pain was increasing in intensity and all my attempted remedies had yielded zero results. Having tried everything else, I placed my large green pillow beneath my knees, hoping the elevation would do whatever it is supposed to do for the blood circulation and bring a little relief. It did. Very little.

As the minutes ticked by I grew noticeably more comfortable and even my headache was receding. Then, the music in my head started up again. Composer that I was, I had no choice but to succumb to the wooing of the muses, get up from my bed, and plop myself down at the piano, picking out the tune on the black and whites and scribbling down notes and chords.

The room was cold so my old robe was a necessity, no replacement for a concert pianist's stylish tuxedo, but at least it was warm and fit the setting. My robe was ancient and in tatters, the kind of garment you don't throw away until it is condemned by the health department. And it added a sort of classical music feeling of antiquity as I sketched out the melody line on stained yellow music paper.

I had been devoting myself to the composition of a new mass, which had been posing problems ever since its original conception, difficulties that continued to plague my progress as I had worked on it earlier the previous evening.

Any composer will tell you that the nuts-and-bolts of composition are as far removed as possible from the lilting rhythms of the finished product. Indeed, it is a minefield thickly studded with pitfalls, hazards, and almost irreconcilable conflicts, all of which must be solved in order to produce the final product.

From the beginning I had been uncertain as to the proper tonal center of the piece but, oddly, this night of aches and pains and dizziness had made the decision for me: B minor juxtaposed with elements of free material lending an aura of transcendent freedom and spontaneity. Most

composers would have selected B minor after Bach's famous mass but me being me, the decision was made based upon physical infirmities, dizzy spells, and strange sounds in the night. I have been called many things by many people, but never have I been labeled "ordinary."

This particular composition had displayed a life of its own since the first notes of the opening melodic structure were written. The music's complex resonance seemed to fill my very being, from within out as its rich sonority made its way from my soul, through my mind, then through my hands and out into the world in the complicated midwifery of classical music composition.

Interestingly, the mass was quite eloquent of new life and optimistic faith, which are usually reserved only for the "resurrection" moments of a mass, focusing as they do on the great drama of the "passion" of Christ, the crucifixion, and other more somber themes. This gave my piece an elegant grace and immediacy usually completely lacking from masses and other forms of Western sacred music.

The music had taken possession of me and I continued working on the first movement until daybreak. It might have been a trifle manic, but for the first time in weeks the mass was beginning to assume a definite shape and I did not want to stop in mid surge of inspiration.

The light of the newly emerging day stealthily sneaked around the shades and penetrated the diffused illumination of my study, its rays coming to rest atop the piano in a stunning kaleidoscope of the colors no artist can create. Exhilarated with the uplifting vibration of creativity, I turned to greet the new day as a welcome friend, only to be blinded by the sun's rays. In all-too-familiar fashion, I dizzily fell from the piano bench onto the hardwood floor.

Had I been a painter at that time, this would have launched me into my "blue period" as everything was manifesting that color. I was adrift in a sea of blue. Eventually, I was able to see more than just the color.

Off in the distance, quite far removed from me, were dark blue mountains girdled by deep green meadows. At least there was now a differentiation in colors. A mild breeze blew over me while jet-black crows flew unerringly towards me. I sensed a deep connection between the crows and my inner consciousness, hardly surprising as by now you have seen certain themes appear in various episodes, crows and similar birds being one of them. Crows have shown themselves at certain times in my life and have been my guides through unknown realms since the beginning of my visions. Sometimes in my youth I would say "the crows are flying again," my way of telling people I was in an altered state of consciousness in which the birds and their wings were playing an important part.

The flapping of these crows' wings produced a strange music that was comforting and seemed to have a relationship with the mass. The sound wound itself about me, cloaking me in a cocoon of mystery. I felt impregnated with light and healing energy and on the wings of the melody I was transported into the heavens, the only suitable place for such sounds.

The light was all encompassing and bathed me in a divine radiance, its omnipresence crowding out all impressions of blue mountains and black crows.

The next thing I knew, I was waking up on the floor of my study, surrounded not by healing warmth but freezing cold morning air.

It was time once again to lift myself up off the floor and dust myself off after an episode, but this time my body refused to obey my will, an inconvenient disconnect when one is shivering mightily. I fell back down, the impact of the floor raising a bruise on my arm, and with my leg pinned beneath me.

I felt completely inert and probably looked like a broken doll sprawled as I was across the wooden planks. A few minutes ago I had been the brilliantly inspired composer, bending recalcitrant notes to my will as I ironed out one musical problem after another. Now I was as helpless as a newborn baby whose only command of sound was to issue forth precious little moans and gurgles. And who knows, I may have been.

In the way immortalized by countless blues songs, “minutes seemed like hours,” the seconds dragging under the weight of fear and uncertainty.

But still lingering around the fringes of my thoughts was that optimism I had brought back from the vision, a feeling all was as well as when I had been aloft on the wings of my crows soaring through the clear blue skies of my higher mind.