

Summer 1974

In the summer of 1974 I received an offer from a local theatre company to compose a score for their production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Although I appreciated the offer and their confidence in my compositional abilities, the downside was that their budget contained almost no funds for a conventional score. I told them I would have to approach the score from an unconventional aspect in order to make it work. They gave me the green light and I went to work immediately.

I decided to compose the score entirely for the piano. Reaching into my past, I turned the inside of my piano into a magic box, not with road kill and plastic monsters, but materials that would produce interesting sounds: sticks, cardboard, glass, soft tympani sticks of varied size, and just about anything else I could think of that would produce distinctive, unusual sounds.

One morning during the course of composing the score, I was placing glass rods in the piano. As I worked, I lost my grip on them, sending them tumbling to the soundboard beneath the strings. What I thought was ordinary clumsiness or the difficulty of working in so confined a space as the interior of a piano turned out instead to be paralysis of the left arm. Needless to say, I was more than a little concerned.

Deciding that this was a one-time-only event, I didn't think it worth mentioning to anyone. I replaced the rods and continued writing the musical score. One night while up late working on the structure of one of the movements intended to duplicate the sound of a storm, I fell, my arm and shoulder sharply striking the side of the piano. Once more I played diagnostician and wrote the spill off to fatigue and once more I continued working and told no one.

The next morning there appeared to be no lingering after effects of my impromptu collision with the piano. I arose at 6 AM, feeling great. I dressed, made coffee, and rode my bicycle down to the fog enshrouded beachfront without so much as a slight dizzy spell, much less anything of greater moment.

The earliness of the hour gave me free run of the streets. The only forms visible seemed to be growing right out of the fog and they were not easily identifiable. A bank of fog spawning creatures was rather unusual, even for me, but I was now firmly in the habit of shrugging these things off, so I pushed it aside and concentrated on my cycling. Within moments I was forced to deal with it, as the fog began to thicken, turn green, and give off a strange aroma.

The smell was a musty, natural, outdoorsy scent, reminiscent of old leaves, and I was unable to determine its source. I had more than enough experience with the ocean to know it can send forth all manner of odors and I was also aware that fog can play more than a few tricks on one's senses, so again I ignored what was happening right in front of my eyes and nose, and continued pedaling.

The fog quickly thickened to the point that riding became dangerous, so I stopped somewhere along the boardwalk to get my bearings. Pushing the bike beside me, I walked cautiously, squinting and feeling my way forward slowly. At one point I inadvertently stepped off the boardwalk and onto the sand. Perhaps it was the feeling of being slightly startled by the sudden change of footing that caused me to realize I could no longer hear the sound of the waves, which led to the realization I could no longer hear anything.

Not having the least idea where I was nor what direction I should take, I took what seemed the safest course of action: none. I merely sat down in the damp sand, put the bicycle beside me, and hunkered down to wait for the sun to dissipate the fog. A check of my watch showed the time to be 7 AM. This may have been a little on the early side for the workaday world just wrenching itself out of warm comfortable beds, but this was the beach. There should have been a pretty good amount of movement by now, surfers, swimmers, fishermen, lifeguards, joggers, restaurant patrons, other bicyclists, skateboarders. They could not have all been swallowed up by the fog. Even my adventures had never found me feeling so lost and alone and with a feeling of disconnect from the rest of the world.

The first vibration of civilization that penetrated the fog within me and without me was the faint sound of music. I was unsure whether it was external to me or being produced by my own mind. Either way, it was the only sound I could hear. I strained my hearing trying to localize the origin of the sound, but that proved impossible. I rose and just started walking randomly, hoping to find a portal out of this madness. I hadn't gone far when I heard a voice, my first contact with humanity that morning.

The disembodied voice was calling my name, but once again I was not successful in putting a location to the sound. Meanwhile, the fog continued to thicken and felt as though it were closing in on me. I decided that now would be a good time to let fear assert itself.

The moment had a strange timelessness about it, as though I were dwelling outside the confines of the three-dimensional world. I had even begun to forget what it was like to be in the actual world, though it had not been that long since I had been cycling along enjoying the morning.

A soft wind began to move through the fog, surrounding me, hovering above me, then insinuating itself into my being. The heavy green mist gave way to the authority of the wind, yet I still remained caught in its ethereal cloak. It was entrapped by it, being engulfed, pulled in, dragged down. I screamed into the fog.

Before the scream had been completely carried off on the wings of the wind, I found myself at home seated on the piano bench. My head was reeling with the familiar dizziness and nausea was dragging my stomach into the act.

On the edge of the piano sat my cup of cold coffee, the one I thought I had drunk before heading out on my bike.

Tears that would brook no restraint began to roll down my face. I gingerly rose from the bench and slowly tried to walk as far as the door of the study. My legs were putty; I was unable to maintain my balance.

I plopped myself down on a small chair near the sliding door, trying to get a grip on myself. I threw a glance down at my watch. 10:30 AM. Where had the morning gone? What on earth had happened to me? As I had so many times before, I tried to assemble a jigsaw puzzle without the benefit of a picture to guide me. Not only did I have the typical paucity of pieces, but even they did not seem able or willing to fit together into even the beginning of a coherent whole. I would much have preferred to have remembered nothing than have only a partial recollection, and then not certain what was real and what imaginary.

I headed towards the house and the kitchen to make a fresh cup of coffee, check on Susan, and try to plug myself back into the world. The motion triggered another dizzy spell, the room began to spin madly elongate into infinity and, once more, consciousness was eluding me.

I retreated back toward the study, slipping on the back steps, falling backwards. I was able to break the fall with my right arm, pulling a muscle in the process and sending the coffee cup careening off the stairs.

“Damn it!” I cried. “Damn it to hell!”

I was able to regain my balance and get myself back into the study. I sat back down on the piano bench and slammed my fist against the top of the lid covering the keyboard.

“Goddamn it!” I bellowed as my anger at the situation overtook my fear.

I knew that the trouble, whatever it was, was not minor, but I preferred to remain in a spirit of comforting ignorance when it came to causes; it seemed so much easier to deal with, or ignore, effects. The need to finish my musical score suddenly pressed itself to the fore, giving me a reasonable, businesslike excuse for not paying attention to my physical woes.

Weeks later, while editing the tapes of my score for *The Tempest*, my inner world made itself manifest. I was listening intently to the score when the music took an additional texture, becoming part of me in ways other than that a musician expects and welcomes. The sound whirled around me as I lost separate consciousness in the moment.

The room began the by-now familiar ritual of elongation, undermining my balance and adding to the dizziness and confusion. My study then seemed to enter into the swing of things, literally, beginning a dance that culminated in its flying off into the distance, like Chitty Chitty Bang Bang but without a trace of the innocent charm.

The next thing I knew I was reeling, falling to the floor.

The next day I called a friend of many years who had acted in the capacity of a spiritual mentor. I filled him in on the events of the last few days, hoping he would say something reassuring, or at least reasonably logical. I was to be vastly disappointed.

Not only did I find his advice as befuddled as my experiences, but his confusion only added bulk to my own. I listened attentively, thanked him, then hung up, no closer to a solution than before. He had been no help and I realized no one could really be of help. My seeking of counsel was nothing more than an excuse to avoid dealing with my own problem. I would have to dive into my own psyche and find out what was going on with me.

It was then my thoughts turned to the one I would later name Charon.

It had been years since I had encountered my childhood “chum” and I was frankly unsure as to whether or not I still believed in his existence, at least as an entity separate from my own deeper mind. Although I was continuously aware of a presence, an energy if you will, that accompanied me, or was part of me, I had long since ceased to affix to it a particular persona.

I switched on the tape recorder and went back to my work editing the *Tempest* score. The room had taken on a feeling that I can only describe as lovely in terms of the ambience that had made itself felt when I began to think of Charon.

The feeling was one of love emanating from every corner of the room. I had no doubt of the reality of the presence of the other personality that had joined me in the study. I was not alone; indeed, I had never really been alone throughout those long years.

There was no voice, no physical manifestation of any kind, undoubtedly because none were needed.

But for the first time in I could not estimate how long, I had the feeling I was part of something greater than myself.

And I was at peace.