

Letters from our readers

17 December 2013

On “Beleaguered Minnesota Orchestra musicians nominated for Grammy award”

The Minnesota Orchestra musicians, as well as other orchestras facing similar conditions, might want to consider forming their own orchestra without any management other than themselves. They could hire the necessary agents or accountants to tend to the details of public performances.

The so-called “negotiations” have proven that there is no further reason for them to have to deal with the self-appointed, arrogant aristocracy any more than the sell-out union bureaucrats. They could set their own wages and standards. Most importantly, they could continue to provide the public with access to our unparalleled classical culture on their terms, not on the dictates of the MOA.

Gene

12 December 2013

On “The Coen brothers’ Inside Llewyn Davis: The story of a struggling musician ... but which one?”

I spent a considerable time listening to folk music / poetry in Greenwich Village clubs in this period and fully agree that the political context of the folk music scene should be emphasized in any depiction of this period. This is especially true for the poem “Green, Green Rocky Road,” turned to song and written by an ex-Trotskyist organizer and seafarer when the SWP had a base in the merchant marines. It is Bob Kaufman who got the word “beatnik” coined when in one of his street performances he recited “Sputnik, sputnik, sputnik” to a car where right-wing columnist Herbert Caen was passing. Soon the San Francisco police started targeting the new threat to social order, equal to the Communist threat.

Much good would come from retrieving this period to historical memory when Allen Ginsberg got together in 1956 with Bob Kaufman and gathered contributions from various pads and coffee houses in the Bay area for a flimsy hand-printed Beatitude magazine, “for people

who sneak around alleys near Grant avenue” referring to police harassment not made less by Kaufman reciting his poetry and propounding his “Abomonist Manifesto” on the streets regardless of endless cop beatings and court dates. Indeed, Kaufman was so often beaten and jailed for his street performances that a permanent collection for him was taken up at the coffee house where Ginsberg composed many poems for Reality Sandwiches (1961) of “actual visions & actual prisons / as seen then and now... / A naked lunch is natural to us, / we eat reality sandwiches.” This was before his Hindu/Buddhist enthusiasms of his later years.

Eventually, driven to New York, Kaufman met up with young Dave van Ronk who shared a place with Bob Dylan. “When the mode of music changes, the walls of the city shake,” Ginsberg liked to quote Plato. Not often enough can one hear the glorious nonsense verse of Kaufman, but Dave van Ronk tells on YouTube of a time when second to beatniks, folk musicians were seen as political threat in a 1960 police crackdown. It was then that the “the Greatest of the Beats” in Dave van Ronk’s estimate raised his tone-deaf voice to shake the pillars of the ruling class: “ooka, tooka, soda cracker, / Does your mama chew tobacker? / If your mama chew tobacker / hooka, tooka soda cracker. / Singin’ green, green rocky road / Promenade in’ green / Tell me who ya love, / Tell me who ya love.”

AL

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