



Bird Bird Bird Review Review Review

My music partner Lou and I wrote a song a number of years ago called Bird, Bird, Bird. It's a list song. I've always liked lists, and I'm not exactly sure why, except that it seems magical the way a list (often of nouns) can pretty much do all the work usually done by a combination of parts of speech. I think that's what thrilled me about Jack Kerouac's writing when I first read it; so many nouns. My favorite Kerouac story title is "October in the Railroad Earth." (Based on this title, there is now a New Jersey band called "Railroad Earth.") I know there's a preposition and an article thrown in there, but what a grouping of nouns!

Anyway, our list song represents a drive from the countryside into and through a small town and back into the country. It contains a subtext of social commentary. Here are excerpts:

Bird-bird, bird-bird, cow-cow
Bird-bird, bird-bird, cow-cow
Silo, tractor, Barn, plow
Bird-bird, bird-bird, cow-cow
Hay field, hay field, hay field...

...Speed zone, thirty, Wal-Mart
Wal-Mart, Wal-Mart Wal-Mart
Garden tractor, go-cart
Asphalt asphalt, K-Mart
K-Mart K-Mart, gas pump
Gas pump, gas pump, gas pump
Wendy's drive thru, speed bump...

...Empty storefront, plywood
Plywood plywood plywood
Out of business for good
Relocated plywood
Hotel courthouse dead shrub
Dead tree, dead grass, dead shrub...

...Strip mall, pig farm, sow-sow
Silo, tractor, barn, plow
End construction, cow cow
Bird-bird, bird-bird, cow-cow...

...etc. I know there are some non-nouns tossed in, but not many.

Recently Lou and I spent three days performing at the Erie (PA) Art Museum, thanks to the efforts of the Museum's Director of Education & Folk Art, Kelly Armor, a person of limitless energy and boundless knowledge of folk arts around the world. Kelly thought our stuff would fit in with the thrust of a current show which was called "dysFUNCTIONal" (hmmm...).

We rarely perform for children but made an exception in this situation. The younger kids were wonderful, attentive, exciting. But we also played for a group of 19 and 20 year olds. We are known for helping people of that age develop their eyeball rolling muscles, and this seemed like another such experience. But later they were given a "listening assignment" which focused on the "Bird Bird Bird" song.

Kelly sent us a few of the commentaries they wrote that week, and we were delightfully blown away by their level of comprehension (and there's some funny stuff here too). They pointed out a few things about the lyrics that even I, the lyricist, wasn't aware of. Many of these young adults were not native English speakers, and reading their perceptive writings, it dawned on me that list songs might be more easily translated than songs with sentence structures. Of course, they didn't cover any of our OTHER songs, so I can't make any comparisons. But when writing this song I had wondered about the understandability of list songs like this even to English speakers. It didn't occur to me that they may be EASIER to understand. Here are the reports, uncorrected, introduced by Kelly:

Kelly: "Here is a nice, honest, solid answer:"

The social commentary of Bird, Bird, Bird is how the economy is down and its hard to make a good living in rural areas these days. And all they use is nouns to describe what they see. They describe through their lyrics that there isn't much going on in the part of Wisconsin where they live. They talk about run down businesses and it pretty much being a farming culture.

Through their music they get the message across that Wisconsin isn't a big time city with skyscrapers and big huge shopping malls, it's a low key not much going on culture. But they also get the message across that people there are hard working because they talk about how a business gets run down and has to relocate this implies to me that people in this society have to work hard to make a living.

Kelly: "Here's a kid with lousy spelling but a lot of energy and opinion:"

This song is referencing societal situations, it brings the audiences attention to the fact that big oil and big business, and business dominates the country and you can see this domination everytime you drive. the roads are littered with wal marts, gas stations, kmart, wendy's. but at the begining of the song they are sure bring up what people like to think the country is all farms and feilds. then after ripping on big business they discuss what those business' have done to our country, it talks about the things that have suffered due to the business. then it progresses into the farm scene agian. the reason for the progression is because the song is ment to simulatue a drive.

Kelly: "But my favorite answer of them all is from an incredibly diligent and wide-eyed Chinese student:"

At first, I have to admit that my listening is bad, especially for songs. I cannot figure out most of the lyrics. In this song, what do I understand is that birds, cows or any other animals' habitant was neither destroyed or took up by humans. The natural environment was replaced by the duplex drive way, gas pumpt, house or something like this. "Hey field", is a kind of regret for the natural field. In the whole song, the singers didn't say a sentence, all the lyrics are words. However, these words like "died trees,died grass" express their love for natural field and also transmit the hatefulness for the human behaviors, such as destroy the environment. Also, many words like "dicount stripper club" indicate that human are very selfish and devil. We killed numerous animals only for entertaining. By the way, the women singer's voice is very cute.

Quotes used with permission. Check out the Erie Art Museum: erieartmuseum.org/

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