

LIGHTENing Bolts

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FEATURE ARTICLE: Marching to a Different Accordion

(Adapted from “Marching Orders” in Ron’s book: *Is Your Glass Laugh Full? Some Thoughts on Seeing the Humor in Life*)

The University of Virginia is steeped in tradition. The campus is called “The Grounds”; the diplomas are the size of my driveway; and instead of a marching band, they had the “UVA Pep Band.”

The Pep Band was very different from a typical marching band. It was a scramble style band, modeled after Ivy League bands, in which the members run chaotically around the football field forming pictures, telling jokes and playing cool songs. In essence, the band had integrated three art forms, humor, music and visual images, and developed a creative new halftime experience for fans. In 1979 during my first year at UVA, I auditioned for and was accepted in the band. That was cool in a non-typical-band kind of way.

The Pep Band’s mission was simple: Take the focus off our losing football team by entertaining the crowd with satire and reasonably well-played music. The format was as follows: Make a formation; tell a joke; play a song. Repeat. After 8-10 jokes we’d run off the field to the cheers and adoration of the 35,000 plus in the stands.

In 1978, Marvin Mandel, the governor of Maryland, had been indicted on corruption charges. When UVA played *at* the University of Maryland that year, the band introduced its special guest conductor as “the Honorary Marvin Mandel.” Out came a band member dressed in a striped outfit with ball and chain attached to his ankle. The band received a standing ovation from the Maryland fans, but was banned (so to speak) from performing at the University of Maryland ever again. The acting Governor of Maryland called the Governor of Virginia and asked for a formal apology. From the Pep Band’s perspective, it didn’t get any better than that.

While controversial, the band used the power of satire and music not only for its high entertainment value but to make the audience think differently about current events, pop culture and controversial school issues. The impact was so effective, the band made headlines everywhere it went.

One year during the halftime show against our arch rival Virginia Tech, the announcer said, “We interrupt this performance to bring you a special announcement. Last night, Virginia Tech’s library burned down. Both books were lost.....and one wasn’t even

colored in yet.” The band then scrambled into the shape of a library and played *Disco Inferno*. Now that’s artistry in motion!

Interestingly, the blending of humor and other art forms has been around for hundreds of years. Throughout history, the theater used humor to subtly mock the reigning government. Andy Warhol used humor in his paintings and Anne Geddes uses touching yet humorous images of babies in her photography. The Smothers Brothers and Victor Borge both combined humor and music. And Dave Barry is a genius at blending humor and writing. It’s no surprise that the UVA Pep Band was popular for merging two art forms into one unique performance. It was entertaining, thought provoking and hopefully an agent for social change.

When Virginia played the University of Tennessee in the 1991 Sugar Bowl, a band member dressed like Elvis, came out onto the field and the entire band jumped on top of him. The announcer said, “Now, can we all agree that Elvis is dead?” The Tennessee fans revolted and once again Virginia’s governor was apologizing for the band’s antics. It’s a shame that the band couldn’t run for public office and just eliminate the middle man.

As you consider your life, your work and your “art,” how might you add humor to something you already do well to enhance both? Whether it’s music, drama or even the art of parenting, adding humor could make your experience even better.

HUMOR IN REAL LIFE: Funny Music in the News

A Fairfax County police animal control officer responded to the 2300 block of Centreville Road in the Herndon area on Thursday Dec. 7, for the report of a squirrel running about a woman's home. When the officer confronted the squirrel, it leapt off a window ledge and then jumped into an open baby grand piano. Without harming the squirrel, the officer played the piano until the squirrel jumped out of the piano and onto some curtains. The squirrel then jumped onto the officer's head. It stayed there for only a moment before it pounced onto the couch. The squirrel stayed there long enough for the officer to catch him at which time the squirrel was released outside. There was some damage to the curtains; however, neither the squirrel nor the officer sustained any injuries. The officer played "All I Want," by Toad the Wet Sprocket, from their "Fear" album. – *Herndon Connection* newspaper.

JUST HUMOR: It Ain’t Country if It Ain’t Funny

Some of my favorite humorous music is found in the lyrics of country music. The following are a few of the best:

Did I Shave My Legs for This?

Four on the Floor and a Fifth Under the Seat

She Feels Like a New Man Tonight

I Gave Her the Ring and She Gave Me the Finger

I Changed Her Oil, She Changed My Life

I Only Miss You on the Days that End in “Y”

If My Nose Was Runnin Money, Honey, I’d Blow it All on You

My John Deere was Breaking Your Field While Your Dear John was Breaking My Heart

HUMOR RESOURCES: Funny and in Tune

To purchase the CD, “Mike Rayburn at Carnegie Hall” and other great products from Mike, go to www.MikeRayburn.com.

Actor Jeff Daniels also has several CD’s of humorous folk songs. You can find them at www.JeffDaniels.com.

Find out more about Victor Borge at www.VictorBorge.com.

Learn everything you ever want to know about the Smothers Brothers at www.SmothersBrothers.com

HUMOR AT WORK: Humor is Music to His Ears

Mike Rayburn’s message is “What If and Why Not?” and it couldn’t be more relevant to his artistic blending of humor and music. Known as the “World’s Funniest Guitar Virtuoso,” Mike intertwines the creative intricacies of hilarious comedy and classical guitar in a way that earned him appearances at Carnegie Hall and on XM Radio.

Early in life, Mike spent time listening to and studying famous comedians. As he watched their skillful craft, he thought, “I want to do that.” The country song parodies of Homer and Jethro and the sharp comedy of Richard Pryor and Steve Martin became his inspiration. At the same time, Mike realized he had been blessed with musical talents and became a student of great guitarists like Stevie Ray Vaughan, Django Reinhardt and

Stanly Jordan. At that point, music and humor were in his blood and he knew he must somehow pursue his dream of performing.

In high school, Mike made his first attempt at song parodies and the audience loved them. In college, he saw Mike Cross, a humorous guitarist/fiddler, and it changed his life. Mike decided then and there to pursue a career as an entertainer.

He performed in bars and on college campuses. Initially, his show consisted only of music but when drunks heckled him, he began to develop funny responses that got as much attention from the audience as his music. So, he started mixing the comedy with his music, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Mike's unique style involves two very creative techniques. The first relates directly to his "What If?" concept by combining different music genres in ways we would never imagine. Mike will ask, "What if Dan Fogelberg sang AC/DC?" Without ever strumming a note, the audience erupts in anticipation of this oxymoronic idea. Then Mike launches into a smooth jazz version of a heavy metal classic which seems as if it could only have been conceived by ingesting some sort of illicit pharmaceutical. Mike assures us that he was only under the influence of his highly creative mind when he wrote each song.

But it gets even better. As if these mixed up songs are not enough, Mike then literally "taps" into his guitar fingering prowess to perform a guitar version of "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" and a chilling acoustic version of his college music exam which blends classical music with rock and roll standards. It's during these renditions that you realize Mike's unbelievable talent and see how he has taken musicality to a new level of instrumental comedy.

In 2003, Mike's talents earned him the stage at Carnegie Hall. Right before going on, he said to a stagehand, "I'm waiting for someone to say, 'We didn't mean you!'" After a standing ovation, it was clear they did mean him.

While most of us don't have the same skills as Mike, we can certainly apply his message of What If and Why Not? We all have skills and talents that can be combined for a greater purpose but unfortunately, we are limited by our ability to see those possibilities. Letting go of the constraints of conformity and allowing our minds to see new ways of doing old things will take us to a new level of success. Who knows, one day, you could be the next World's Funniest (insert your talent here) Virtuoso!

COLLECTABLE QUOTES

It's hard to live in a funny place and not have an effect on others. – Mike Rayburn.

Laughter is the closest distance between two people. – Victor Borge

Ronald P. (Ron) Culberson, Director of Everything! at FUNsulting, etc., is a speaker, humorist, author of *Is Your Glass **Laugh** Full?* and former hospice social worker whose mission is to work with organizations that want their people to lighten up by using humor to minimize stress and maximize effectiveness.

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