

# 1. MOTOR CITY SERENADE

## Hellfire and Damnation

Someone was yelling at me. I was jolted out of my sound sleep and then it stopped. I must have been dreaming. I was hovering somewhere between the sleeping and the waking dream when suddenly, there it was again. In my mental haze I finally realized that it was someone outside on the street, and that they were really worked up about something. He was going on and on, and finally, through all the heavy slurring, I heard his message: “You motherfuckin’ honkies! I’m gonna kill every goddamn one of you...”

It was early September 1970. It was hot and humid, the windows were open, and the mosquitos were in the house. I had just driven the last leg of my cross-country trek from Southern California to Detroit, and had settled in for a much needed night’s sleep. I had an upstairs room in a big old house on Prentis Street, near downtown and not far from Wayne State University. It was a run-down mixed race neighborhood, and it was a long way, both literally and figuratively, from my hometown of Ventura, California. Detroit had been torn by riots only three years earlier, and there were entire blocks with charred buildings and vacant lots. Some neighborhoods seemed to be still smoldering. This was where I had chosen to officially come of age.

The harangue outside was continuing, and even though I was afraid it was all being directed at me, I slowly eased up off of my mattress on the floor and carefully peered over the windowsill. In the dimly lit street I could barely see that my preacher was standing on a large sawed-off tree stump for a pulpit, and was addressing himself to no one in particular. From his wobbling and slurring, I could tell that his sermon was indeed spiritually inspired.

Thus began my first day of residency in the state of Michigan. I didn’t get much sleep after that, as I began to imagine myself in various scenarios: lying in a pool of blood, having been shot in the head as I looked out the window. (“Poor guy, he just got here from California,” someone said); or, maybe being stabbed on the sidewalk as I left for work the next morning. What had I gotten myself into?

## What She Said!

I had willingly abandoned my relatively comfortable, fashionably hip lifestyle as a college music student when I left the Conservatory at University of the Pacific after only two years. I was going to hit the road—no more phony college life for me. I wanted the real thing. During the first semester of my second year, I had begun to think about postponing or perhaps even abandoning school. But at that time, I had not yet fully realized that going away to college for the four-year ritual of partying and studying—hopefully culminating in the acquisition of the entry-level life credential—would not be the primary vehicle in my rite of passage into adulthood. I had not yet hatched *The Master Plan*, which would eventually lead to *The Great Adventure*.

The final nail in the college coffin was to come in December of my sophomore year, 1969, courtesy of my philosophy teacher, Mrs. Benson. She was about twenty-five, hot, suitably irreverent, and talked a lot about wanting to become an air traffic controller. She certainly had the attention of all the future (male) philosophers in the class. We covered a lot of ground, from Descartes, to Berkeley, to Bertrand Russell. She was very excited about a new book called “The Master Game” by Robert S. DeRopp. This was, to her, (and would be, later, to me) a fascinating mix of philosophy, spirituality, and drugs. I somehow don’t picture her as having lasted too long in the university environment. I was talking with her one day after class and made the stupid offhand remark that, “I really don’t think I’m ready for college.” Her eyes widened and she looked over the top of her glasses and said, “No, Glenn, college isn’t ready for you.”

I was momentarily stunned. Had she really just said that? I knew it was a line right out of a B movie, but I could live with it. An adult in a position of responsibility had just given me a preliminary imprimatur on the embryonic *Master Plan*.

During those two years in Stockton, beginning in 1968, I dabbled in hippiedom—smoking dope, reading philosophy, marching in demonstrations, hanging out, and being cool. One weekend it would be coat and tie to the Opera House and the San Francisco Symphony. The next weekend it might be jeans and tie-dye to the Avalon or Fillmore ballrooms to hear Jefferson Airplane (several times,) Janis Joplin, Santana, Big Mama

Thornton, Tower of Power, The Grateful Dead, Crosby, Stills and Nash, and many others. I always regretted missing The Who and Jimi Hendrix.

I spent a lot of time sitting in those smoke-filled ballrooms trying to focus on the imagined intricacies of counterpoint, chord voicing, or anything else I could salvage from what was often in reality just a Wall of Sound. When I would get stoned, I could never just kick back, relax, and enjoy the music. No, I'd have to zone into it and experience the profundity of it all, even when there may have been none to experience. Sometimes, a loud band was just a loud band.

My bloodshot eyes were opened to a new concept of what the word *concert* could mean. In my childhood world of the Classical Piano Boy, it meant dressing up, sitting still, not talking, and, for God's sake, not clapping in between the movements of a symphony: a.k.a. concert manners. These hoards of scruffy kids in San Francisco certainly didn't have them.

Having missed the real Summer of Love and the flowering of the Haight-Ashbury in 1967, I was catching the rough-at-the-edges leftovers, not to say, the dregs, of the former feast. Of course, I realize that for many, it will strain credulity to even consider that throngs of unkempt, unwashed, drug using dropouts from society converging on a city and rutting in its parks could constitute a flowering of much of anything. Looking back, we may make assessments and moral judgments about what was going on, and we may even realize that the patina of time has not been particularly kind to this period with its excesses. But back then, for me, the *zeitgeist* was very compelling. I didn't know exactly what it was, but I knew I wanted to be a part of it.