

Reasons to be happy

Elaine Bougie Gilligan

[Penguin Café Orchestra](#). The music of PCO and Simon Jeffes always raises my spirits, and I suppose it's a plus that I did not hear about the group till a few years ago, because it's rewarding to find new things and new ways to love after fifty. I think that Simon Jeffes is quite likely pulling our leg with his tale about eating some questionable fish and the cryptic dream declaration of Penguin Café proprietorship that ensued.

<http://www.penguincafe.com/home.htm>

The music of PCO, especially on the *Union Café* disc, I find full of curiosity and fun, as Jeffes and friends never lost sight of the playfulness that music ought to aspire to but often abandons in favour of other pursuits.



Werner Bischoff, Magnum Photos, EU

Actually, I haven't been able to completely shake an irrational grief I suffered upon learning that Simon Jeffes was already dead by the time I heard of him. After all, Rossini and Virginia Woolf were already dead by the time I knew of *them*. In my own defense, Jeffes was a contemporary musician and no one warned me he was no longer with us till I stumbled upon this at the PCO web site.

Unfortunately, PCO's online song samples are only 30 seconds long, so I have posted a mini song player with

three half-length tracks from the *Union Cafe* album. In the unlikely event you can't open the player, free flash player software is available at: <http://www.adobe.com/shockwave/download/download.cgi>.

Song player:

<http://www3.telus.net/bougieblog/player.html>

Come to think of it, why not glory in the access to music and performances that recordings and electronics have given us, for a century or more? In the film *Fitzcarraldo* Werner Herzog presents a fictionalized version of a real life Irishman in Victorian era South America, obsessed with bringing Caruso to the jungle. Now, we can bring the Carusos (and the passing fancies) of our own day virtually anywhere we wish. We can join our musical



sources of inspiration with the wilderness or with the asphalt and traffic, watch alone or in company a film about Cuban musicians who had languished in US-blockade obscurity enjoying a late-in-life career revival. As long as some recording of the film, “Buena Vista Social Club” exists, we can vicariously experience an immortalized Ibrahim Ferrer, moved by the cheering audience in Carnegie Hall.



[Organic, grown in BC Braeburn apples.](#) It's easy for me to conceive of risking the loss of paradise for an apple, if Eden's forbidden fruit was even half as good as this. My birds agree, and their judgement is unquestionable; see remarks elsewhere about sunrise, *et cetera*. (Where we tend to differ, is that my birds wonder why I think we're not *still* in paradise. Mind you, they don't have a job, and get to stay home all day looking down into the garden.)

That there are bicycles, and legs (or arms, as your bicycle and your abilities dictate) to propel them.

I used to feel a little deprived, when my running days first ended. Too many body parts were sore to continue loping around Vancouver places, building up a nice little runner's high.

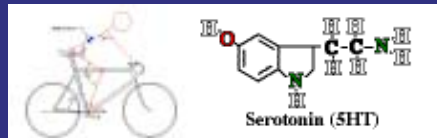
Now, however, I'm clued in that the brain serotonin boost that goes with repetitive muscle movements (anything from chewing gum to sex) is abundantly stirred up with the activity known as "spinning"—keeping your gears low and pedalling not hard, but quickly (as much as you can in this hilly town.)

I've often observed a seratonic effect after about half a block of spinning, especially now that I'm well used to my recumbent bike—that wonderful style of machine that takes the crook from your neck and the weight from your hands so you can look around and pedal around, freely and gladly.



Richard Bougie with Morgan in the carrier, Photo: Gordon E. McCaw

The healthy sweat and the satisfaction of getting somewhere you need to go without enduring a crowded bus or burning fossil fuel also add to the pleasure of the event.



That the cheesy or grimy things celebrate who we are, no less than the monuments to human glory.

May I mention three white guys:

Fred Herzog

Tom Waits

Guy Bennett?

Two of these *lo fan* are local:

Herzog's Vancouver photographs, on at the Vancouver Art Gallery through May 13, 2007, manage to make us see that kitsch and cultural clutter have a lot to say about Vancouverites or any other cultural montage of people, in a kind of fanfare to the common man/woman and our chihuahuas. Herzog's link at Equinox Gallery:

<http://www.equinoxgallery.com/>

[artists_index.asp?artist_type=1&artist_id=121&work_id=17150](http://www.equinoxgallery.com/artists_index.asp?artist_type=1&artist_id=121&work_id=17150)

Guy Bennett's "*Guy's Guide to the Flipside*" came to mind when we visited the Herzog show, with his story of a dessicated mandarin orange in a Chinese pastry shop and the exchanges with an elderly Chinese shop lady it



Fred Herzog, *Flaneur Granville*



Tom Waits

I count Tom Waits as a source of joy because no one can make a junk shop more iconic and luminously human than he can. Sometimes mislabelled as that diners and drunks guy, PBS in the US reports he is their most frequently requested repeat broadcast artist. It's true Waits has celebrated drunks and down-and-outers to an unusual degree, but he's also an artist of our times with depth and range. Almost anyone with some kind of artistic aspiration could study Waits on the subject of being true to yourself and your vision, while successfully gaining a cult following and a high degree of respect from your colleagues.

Things Tom has taught me: The in-your-face sales pitch is us. Howling dogs of self pity are us. Even Jesus wanted just a little more time, when he was walking Spanish down the hall.

[That the sun came up this morning.](#) This might seem to be celebrating the obvious, but I take my cue in this from my birds, Zacky and Danny, who evidently celebrate this in song every day. While their judgement might be questionable on some subjects (as to whether the hawk that sometimes visits outside the window could actually accomplish his malicious intentions towards them, for example) it seems sensible to give respect to the awareness of a species that has existed successfully for five million years. 🖋️

