

*“The First Movement  
in a Symphony of Ideas!”*

# **A Week in the Life of an Irredeemable Day-Dreamer**

**Music  
Psychology  
Technology  
Philosophy**

**By Humanity’s Child Composer / Playwright  
John “Jack” McDonnell Tierney, PhD**

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*“The difference between the right word and the  
wrong word is like the difference between  
lightning and a lightning bug.”*

Mark Twain

## FOREWORD

When I was a young musician in the Sixties, I worked for an old musician in *his* 60's. Don Tepper taught me a lot about how to work a gig, how to handle an audience, program a set...necessary skills. He did not start out to teach me anything nor had any interest in doing so. What he did do was model professional practice and I watched and learned.

Don's philosophy (underlying belief) was that if you wanted folks to pay attention to what you were doing, which is what all performers desire, you should first tell them exactly what you're going to do, do it, then tell them what you've done.

Don:

***“And now, Ladies and Gents,  
Louie Armstrong's latest hit, Hello Dolly.”***

The Band Sings:

***“Hello Dolly, well Hello Dolly!  
It's so nice to have you back where you belong!”***

Hello Dolly from Hello Dolly

Don:

***“That was Hello Dolly, by Satchmo!”***

If I am nothing else, I'm a good learner. I will do as Don would advise. I will begin by telling you what I'm going to do. Then I will do it. And, at the end, I will remind you of what I've done.

Here then, is what I'm going to do.

**On Day One**, I will comment on the nature of performers and performing, articulating the difference between *dreaming* - an unconscious experience while asleep- and *imagining*, a conscious experience while awake. I will describe my early work where I imagined a “Dreamsinger” who eventually became Humanity’s Child in a musical of the same name, and how an infatuation with a form (musical theater) evolved into a mission. I will compare that mission- “...to nurture a peaceful, just, sustainable future for all humanity’s children,” to the ubiquitous and simple experience of planting a seed. **On Day Two**, I will focus on emotions (feelings) and the profoundly powerful effect they have on our cognition (thinking) and subsequent action (behavior), and **Day Three** will be about connections and relevance to real life in which I will reveal the “seed” from which the entire play has sprung. **On Day Four**, I will venture into the field of Psychology with references to some of the major advances in understanding of what is to be human. And, on **DAY 5**, I will posit a strategy for talking to ducks and JPFs, bestow kudos on all who have come before, and describe a virtual apprenticeship. **DAY 6** will honor my teachers...Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and a rogues gallery of innovators who have pushed the boundaries of their art. I will bring the week to a close on **DAY 7** by getting back to the fundamentals with Philosophies and Philosophers.

*And now, Ladies and Gents,  
the First Movement in this Symphony of Ideas.*

## **A Week in the Life of an Irredeemable Day-Dreamer**

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Afterword

Also by John McDonnell Tierney

## AN OLD MAN'S LEGACY

Established theories of human development predict that folks, in their later years, will reflect on their legacy, what they may leave behind for future generations.

My name is John McDonnell Tierney, my friends call me “Jack.” On Thanksgiving Day, 2020, this “Turkey” (that’d be me!) turned 75 years old! And, as theory predicts, I did and have been reflecting on my legacy. In fact, that’s what this writing is all about. Perhaps someday my grandson, as adults, will read these words and come to know their Grampa Jack on a whole new level. Perhaps even folks who do not call me Grampa Jack will read these words and find therein some wisdom, some insight, something valuable to take away. It is, in fact, my hope and fervent wish that both of these events may come to pass, and the latter sooner than the former.

What will follow emerges out of my experiences as a teacher and performer; for they are, in many ways, one in the same: teaching is performing, performing is teaching. Perhaps I have learned something from all these years of performing that is worth the teaching.

Perhaps.

**DAY 1 - January 1, 2021**

**LOOK AT ME! LOOK AT ME!  
DREAMS and IMAGININGS  
A “DREAMER” OF SONGS  
MISSION  
IF YOU PLANT A SEED**

**LOOK AT ME! LOOK AT ME!**

I can tell you, with some authority (PhD in Ed. Psych.) that virtually all children around age four, upon discovering that they can do something, will declare, “*Look at me! Look at me!*” We’ve all said it. Most folks will grow out of this, but some of us never do. And there is name for those us who, at some level, remain forever four years old, and that name is *performer*.

I have been a performer for most of my life. My first public performance was “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” on a beat up old slide trombone at the Cub Scout Banquet when I was ten. Twelve years later I completed a Master of Music Degree on a somewhat better slide-trombone and subsequently performed as a professional trombone player for more than fifty years. Now that I am no longer an active performer, I count on other folks to do that for me: the many actors, singers, dancers, and theater folks who have populated my musicals in the past and those who may yet do so in the future.

## **DREAMS and IMAGININGS**

Dreams are subconscious mental events; they are not what we imagine while awake. Even so, the word dreaming has been used as a synonym for imagining. I have always been “a dreamer.” In fact, in fourth-grade, my teachers pejoratively labeled me a "day-dreamer." That was a bad thing. I did not know that it meant I had a good imagination, one that has allowed me to create new things for some fifty years: music that had never been heard before and stories that had never been told. It was my imagination, not my dreams, that allowed me to create Humanity’s Child; to make real what had only been imagined.

## **A DREAMER OF SONGS**

Christmas Day 1969, two months after the birth of my son Michael, I began work on my first musical, “*A Dreamer of Songs; A Singer of Dreams*,” later shortened to “*Dreamsinger*.” That “dream” was not well-defined back in 1969. I guess I just wanted to write a show, having been attracted to the genre since playing Ben Rumson, the lead role in my High School’s 1963 production of *Paint Your Wagon*.

*“Where am I goin’? I don’t know.  
When will I get there? I ain’t certain.  
All that I know is I am on my way.  
Got a dream, got a song?  
Paint your wagon and come along.”*  
Paint Your Wagon, Lerner & Lowe

Now, however, that “dream” has been well-defined. So well, in fact, that I no longer describe it as a dream, an imaging, the mental gymnastics of an irredeemable day-dreamer, but I describe it now *as a mission*.

## MISSION

For the last ten months or so, we have all lived through a global pandemic and, at this writing, all predictions are that we have not seen the worst of it. I have been self-isolating all this time, only venturing out once a week “hunting and gathering.” I leave the house with a mission: find food-bring home. I am focused on the mission, mundane as it is. So, missions can be mundane and simple, but missions can also be profound and expansive. Twelve years ago, on retiring from a long career in higher education, I established a non-profit foundation, The Peaceful Educator, with this mission statement:

*To nurture [through the arts]  
a peaceful, just, sustainable future for all humanity’s children.*

I’m not sure how “profound” this mission is, but I can assure you it is expansive, having struggled with it now for many years as it continues to expand. Sometimes, late at night, when I’m all alone, it just seems...well, hopeless.

*“This is my quest, to follow that star,  
no matter how hopeless, no matter how far.”*

The Impossible Dream, Dale Wasserman

The Man of LaMancha was a huge influence on my development as a writer of musicals long before I began writing musicals. And, of course, the big tune from that show was “The Impossible Dream.” Inspiring as that song was, I now ask, “So what?” So what if I can imagine the impossible? It is hopeless, a fool’s errand. For one thing, that which is *impossible* is, by definition, *not possible*. Such things are the realm of real sleeping dreams.

In crafting the afore-mentioned mission statement, I was especially careful not to dream the impossible dream, but to imagine the achievable mission. And, that potential for achievability, rest in one word...*nurture*.

**NURTURE (verb)**

***“To take care of, feed, and protect someone, especially young children, and help him, her, or it to develop.”***

Cambridge English Dictionary

If I had said my mission was to *create* or *ensure* a peaceful, just, sustainable future for all humanity’s children, it would have been...well, impossible. But to say “nurture” *all things become possible*.

**IF YOU PLANT A SEED**

***“If you plant a seed inside, water it daily and give it lots of light; you nurture it until it is ready to be transplanted outside.***

***When you nurture a person or thing, you care for it and help it grow.”***

source

Every year, in late winter, my wife Patricia sets up small greenhouses in our home. She plants seeds. She waters them daily. She gives them light until they are ready to be transplanted outside. And then we watch in wonder as the tiniest seeds grow into enormous plants... sunflowers 12 feet tall, sunchokes 16 feet tall. Even seeds that produce small things – peas, beans, and cherry tomatoes – harvested in quantity can provide nourishment throughout the cold winter months that will inevitably come. This is “my quest,” to provide some psycho-social-spiritual nourishment to humanity’s children throughout the cold winter months that will inevitably come.

In my seventh decade, the “winter” of my life, I discovered a seed deep in my imagination; the idea that I could genuinely contribute to a better world with my music, with my lyrics, with my stories. I set up a small home studio, my garden in which I would plant that seed. And then, I became enthralled as the music in my head became music on the Internet. And now, like Patricia’s sunflower and sunchoke seeds, mine have sprouted and are ready to be transplanted outside in the garden we call real life.

Tomorrow, Day 2, I shall fearlessly delve deep into the human psyche to reveal how universal emotions play out in our lives and in Humanity's Child as it may mirror our lives.

**DAY 2 - January 2, 2021**

**FEELINGS  
IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMANITY'S CHILD  
FEAR, JOY & EMOTIONAL SALADS**

Today, Day 2 in the life of an irredeemable day-dreamer, I want to go deep into the human psyche, the source of all human behavior. Now, do not get nervous, I'm not going to lecture. I just want to share some basic understandings about how we humans work.

**FEELINGS**

Back in the day, when I was a gigging musician playing in Top-40 Bands, a very popular song on the charts was, "Feelings," sung by Morris Albert (a one-hit wonder). The theme of that song diminished the role of emotions (aka, feelings) in the human experience.

***"Feelings, nothing more than feelings."***

Feelings by Morris Albert

For a very long time, most folks have assumed that what we do (our behavior) is the result of what we think (our cognition). And, that is pretty much true; but what is our *thinking* the result of? And, the answer: *feelings* (our emotions). Emotion has long had a bad wrap in our culture. In my youth, emotion was considered a feminine phenomenon, based in some irrational mysterious fog imperceptible to the male of the species. Even today, emotion is dismissed as a reason for doing things; we want logical reasons.

So, here's the bottom line: psychological research argues that almost everything *we think* is the direct result of what we *feel*. If we encounter a rabid dog, we feel fear, an emotion, and from that emotion spontaneous action may emerge (run like hell!) or some thinking may be engaged (what do I know about rabid dogs?), but in either situation, *what we do* follows *what we feel*.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMANITY'S CHILD**

So, given that we know what folks do is based on what they feel, it follows that if we want them *to do something*, we need to start by appealing to their emotions. For example, if we want to motivate folks to donate to our charity, we can appeal to their logical thought: "*Your donation is 100% deductible.*" ...or, we can appeal to their emotions; "*Your donation will feed a starving child for a week.*" Granted, different folks might "naturally" lean toward logical thought, still, if they do not at least feel something for the starving child, they will find some other charity for which they may feel something. (For example: "Joe the Plumber's Secure Our Dream Charity"...yeah, that's real...look it up!)

Similarly, if I want folks to donate to or support The Humanity's Child Project in other ways, I need to appeal first to their emotions. And that, in fact, is exactly what Humanity's Child, the musical, is designed to do.

## **FEAR**

Consider only that the first two words of the first song in the show are, “I’m afraid.” Of all the wonderful and terrifying emotions human beings experience, fear is probably the most motivating factor in behavior and, in fact, fear is the emotion that has allowed our species to survive for some 300,000+ years (so far). Fear is the most researched, written about, and generally discussed of all the emotions.

## **JOY**

If fear were the only emotion available to humans, we would be a fully paranoid society, if we had not already killed each other off for fear of being killed off ourselves. The good news is that we also have joy, and joy, like fear, does not emerge from logical thought, but from natural, spontaneous experience. When I watch my grandsons grow and develop, I am filled with joy- spontaneous, immediate good and happy feelings. I do not think, “They are behaving as Piaget’s Theory of Development would predict.” (I would know that; I just would not think it.)

## **EMOTIONAL SALADS**

We humans experience not only fear and joy; we generate an emotional salad on a continuing basis in response to environmental stimuli, i.e. what happens to us. We belly-up to the salad bar as we pile on servings of anger, fear, disgust, happiness, sadness, surprise, and/ or contempt; the ingredients behavioral science has identified as the “seven universal human emotions.” (Note the absence of “Love” on the list.)

The good news is that we do not generally experience all emotions all the time, and, to a certain degree, we have some control over how we process and think about our emotions as reflected in the Native American Story of the Two Wolves.

### **The Story of the Two Wolves**

*A Cherokee elder told his grandson about  
“a battle” that goes on “inside people.”*

*He said the battle is between two wolves that live inside us all.*

*One is named Evil.*

*He is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.*

*The other is named Good.*

*He is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith.*

*The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: “Which wolf wins the battle?”*

*The old man simply replied,  
“The one that you feed.”*

And so, as you consume your daily salad of emotions, please choose only the freshest lettuces, the ripest tomatoes, and the tenderest shoots of dragon kale...the things that the “good wolf” likes to eat!

Tomorrow, Day 3, I will begin the upward path once again from deep within the human psyche where we have ventured today.

**DAY 3 - January 3, 2021**

**A SHOW STOPPER  
RELEVANCE  
UNIVERSALITY  
AUTHENTICITY  
ART MIRRORS LIFE**

Yesterday, Day 2, I talked about the roots of human behavior buried deep within the human psyche. Today I will begin the upward path once again.

If we accept the premise that people do what they do based on emotions, then, in my view, we need to begin with the emotions that underlie people's behaviors if we want to create authentic narratives and stories, and, in my case, plays and musicals. And, in fact, that is exactly what I did. Allow me to explain using Humanity's Child as an exemplar.

**A SHOW STOPPER**

Fast rewind to May 8, 2016. The first real production of Humanity's Child (aka Dreamsinger and/or Peacemaker) with eight principle actors, a 16 voice SATB chorus, a children's choir, and an 8 piece orchestra had closed the night before. If audience response is to be considered, the show was a great success; standing ovations every night with a few "show-stopper" moments sprinkled in; very exciting! However, in the cold light of day, as I imagined next steps, I faced the hard truth that my show was unmarketable.

Why? Well, for one thing it called for eight principle actors, a 16 voice SATB chorus, a children's choir, and an 8 piece orchestra. That alone was literally "a show stopper."

Jump ahead now to September '16. Knowing the HC was just way too big, I set out to re-write it for a much smaller cast. I returned, once again, to the original music. After multiple futile attempts to make something written for upwards of thirty voices and many instruments work for 5 or 6 voices and a trio, I decided to just write a whole new score.

## **RELEVANCE**

There was something even deeper that began to emerge as a problem... the story. It's hard to define just what it was that bothered me, but I think it came down to relevance. I asked myself, "Self, how relevant is this current story to the lives of real people, specifically young people...teens and emerging adults?" And the answer was, "Not much."

I made the decision to write a whole new story in which I would sustain the principle character, "Humanity's Child," but everything else would be new: new supporting characters, new story, and especially new music. I conceived it as a sequel of sorts. At the end of HC2016 the community sends the Child, a 15 year old, off into the world to find out who she is and who she might become. So, for HC2019, I aged the principle character about five years. In the Off-Broadway script, Humanity's Child was 20, with one foot planted in childhood and the other in adulthood. And, currently in HC2020/2021, Humanity's Child has aged another five years and is facing the world as an adult.

I wanted to write a story about young people as they develop in the contemporary context. When I was actively professoring, teaching classes in Adolescent Development, I spent a lot of time researching adolescence, so I felt I had a legitimate foundation, for an old person, to write authoritatively about young people.

## **UNIVERSALITY**

There are universal traits shared by virtually all developing humans; babies act like babies; children act childish; old people act...well, old, no matter where you find them. And connecting all these stages are universal experiences that define what it is to be human; things like the desire for safety and security, while at the same time wanting freedom and liberty; or, the quest for individuality and independence while, at the same time, seeking comfort in conformity and community. So, I began with a pretty good foundation, but I wanted to enhance that by more specifically looking at the experience of real teens in the real world as it was playing out in real time. So, as we professor-types are wont to do, I consulted the research.

Most of the research I found, found exactly what was to be expected; that teens were concerned about their social life, how they were perceived by others, self-esteem and identity...you know, the usual stuff. I did not trust “the usual stuff.” I had little faith that researchers had asked the hard questions, and even less faith that the average teen would want to answer the hard questions. Things like, “*Do you anticipate being alive in five years?*” Yikes!

## AUTHENTICITY

So, instead of relying on research and scholarly journals, I started to look at authentic writing by teens in social-media, personal blogs, and youth movements such as March for Our Lives. Therein, I began to see a different story, a story about a generation terrified.

I came across one particular quote by “Monique,” a teen blogger that seemed to sum up all I was reading. Monique, apparently responding to the criticism that teens are all self-centered and that they don’t really care about the world around them had this to say about that:

***“I honestly do not want to care,  
but there are moments where the anxiety  
that the world gives off creeps up and swallows me whole.  
I just remember going to bed that night and thinking,  
'What are we supposed to do?  
What if this gets really bad? It can't be that bad!'***  
***Teens do care about what is going on in the world around us  
and are just as frightened as any American should be.”***

Monique, Teen-Blogger, RadicalParenting.com

Now, keep in mind, this was five years ago!

## ART MIRRORS LIFE

For those of you familiar with “I’m Afraid,” the opening song in Humanity’s Child, you may have noticed some connection to the above quote by Monique, the teen-blogger.

Compare:

Monique Wrote...

Song Lyrics...

*“...the anxiety ...creeps up and swallows me whole.”*

*“Anxiety creeps, swallows me whole.”*

*“What are we supposed to do... if this gets really bad?”*

*“What are we supposed to do now that we’ve seen it?”*

*“Teens...are just as frightened as any American should be.”*

*“I’m afraid I any not be alive to be afraid!”*

So, if art can, in fact, mirror life, then that is exactly what I have tried to do, more and more authentically as Humanity’s Child, like a living, breathing human being, continues to develop and define its humanity.

Tomorrow, Day 4, I will take you yet another level higher, or perhaps deeper into the human mind as we focus on beliefs, the engines that drive human behavior.

**DAY 4 - January 4, 2021**

**JUST PLAIN FOLKS  
COGNITIVE DISSONANCE  
A TERRIFYING DANCE  
DON'T EAT THE MUSHROOMS!**

Yesterday, Day 3, I talked about the power of emotions to influence our thinking and behavior. Today, I will talk about another hugely powerful influence on our behavior that sometimes circumvents our thinking completely; the beliefs that guide our daily lives.

**JUST PLAIN FOLKS**

I am constantly amazed at some of the things that some folks believe. I know I'm sounding like the old man that I am, but, really now? I'm not talking about the weird fringe stuff - a cabal of Satan-worshipping, blood-drinking, pedophiles, Hollywood actors and Democrats running a global sex-trafficking ring out of the basement of a pizza joint in New Jersey - I'm talking about what psychology calls JPF's; "Just Plain Folks." (Not a pejorative term.) Millions of JPFs believe that current pandemic is "fake news," a "hoax" perpetrated globally to make the current President of the United States "look bad." They will tell you that deaths (300,000+ and counting) are exaggerated and really reflect co-morbidities or just old age; old people die. Or, they will tell you that they are divinely protected and therefore do not need to wear a mask, isolate, or socially distance. That is of course, until they find themselves hooked up to a ventilator looking at their kids through Plexiglas.

## COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Even for the most gullible, sometimes the contradictions are just too much to endure. That is when most folks experience another interesting mental phenomenon: *cognitive dissonance*.

“Cognitive,” of course, refers to “thinking.” In Music, dissonance” is a term used to describe the aural effect when two or more simultaneous tones (aka “notes”) are perceived as psychological tension needing resolution. And that, in fact, is how most of western harmony works: musical dissonance resolves to musical consonance. If you analyze the harmonies in my song, “*I Will Never Ever Leave You*,” you find mostly consonance with just enough dissonance to keep the music moving. On the other hand, “*The Dance of the Boogieman*” is about as dissonant as I get. In music, dissonance and consonance are barely noticed. It took Stravinsky’s norm-shattering ballet, *The Rites of Spring*, for most people to notice dissonance at all! (It was not well-received.)

Kids grow up believing in all sorts of things; Santa Claus, The Easter Bunny, and The Boogieman. I remember believing, as a very young child, that there was a highly malevolent being hiding “under my bed,” and just as fervently, I believed there were Guardian Angels “overhead.”

*Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.  
If I should die before I wake,  
I pray the Lord my soul to take.*

Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep, Traditional Children’s Prayer

“If I should die before I wake?” *Say, what?!!!*

## A TERRIFYING DANCE

***“The Boogieman will spin you in a terrifying dance!  
Be alert, or you haven’t got a chance.”***

Dance of the Boogieman from Humanity’s Child

We are at a time and place in our nation where dissonance abounds. The Boogieman has spun us all in a terrifying dance; there are huge gaps between what some folks believe and what some other folks believe. Consider only that, at this writing, some 74 million people, to some degree or another, believe that the incumbent won the recent presidential election and the challenger lost “by a lot,” or so claims the incumbent. While, at the same time, upwards of 86 million believe the opposite to be true: the challenger won the election and the incumbent lost by 7 Million votes, or so claim 50 Secretaries of State. As coincidence would have it, on this very day, the Congress of The United States certified the election of the challenger. The incumbent, nevertheless, and his supporters, remain steadfast believers who will be swayed by neither evidence nor facts. Somewhere and somehow, political thinking has morphed with religious thinking, where beliefs are no longer questioned, and non-believers are demonized.

***It’s like there are two realities,  
depending on who you believe!”***

Vox in Humanity’s Child

So, whom do you believe?

## **DON'T EAT THE MUSHROOMS!**

*“Who can I trust; can I know and believe in?”*

Who? From Humanity's Child

If you come across a field where succulent mushrooms grow, you may be inclined to harvest them for your next soup. But wait, you spot a sign: *“Caution. Don't Eat The Mushrooms!”* What do you do? Are the mushrooms poisonous or was the sign put there by someone who wants to keep the delicious fungi for himself? Whom do you believe?

For those of you thinking, “mushrooms,” oh really now? Consider this: more than 10,600 people were poisoned by mushrooms and 22 deaths were reported from 2010 to 2017 in France ([source.](#)) either because victims did not know the mushrooms were deadly or they did not believe so; evidence that what you believe can literally mean the difference between life and death. There are many, many people dead today who, last March, believed that COVID-19 was “fake news.”

We are now at a crossroads where what people believe will ultimately lead to either the destruction or the flourishing of our species, if not our culture. And so, I invite you to embrace a belief system that leads to a peaceful, just, sustainable future in which all humanity's children may indeed flourish.

Tomorrow, Day 5, I will talk about the creative process that led to and the technology employed in Humanity's Child, the musical.

**DAY 5- January 5, 2021**

**QUACK LIKE A DUCK  
THE ILLUSION OF ORIGINALITY  
A VIRTUAL APPRENTICESHIP  
TECH TALK  
CO-COMPOSERS**

Yesterday, Day 4, I discussed how belief systems impact our thinking and behavior, a discussion based on Psychology. Today I am going to move away from the science behind my work and talk about the creative process and the technology involved.

Human beings are, by nature, builders...the evidence is, well...self-evident. All that we have built is a result of creative thinking and the product of the creative mind. And, as previously professed, pretty much all thinking, creative or not, emerges from some fundamental emotion. I have already talked about the emotions that underlie my creative thinking – fear and happiness, aka, “sorrow and joy.” So, let’s jump ahead to the actual process from which Humanity’s Child has emerged.

## QUACK LIKE A DUCK

***“If you want to talk to a duck;  
learn how to quack!”***

An Old Saying

If we want folks to make sense of what we are saying, ideas must be expressed in a way that makes sense to them. This implies that we need to know what folks– the other ducks - know before we begin quacking at them. In the field of Instructional Design, this is termed “entry-level knowledge.” If you want to learn Physics; you’ve got to know Math first.

For the purposes of this discussion, I am going to assume that most of you ducks are neither musicians nor technicians, but with respect, “just plain folks.” So, I will try to explain some pretty complicated musical and technical procedures and challenges in a way that is...well, comprehensible.

***Quack, quack!***

### THE ILLUSION OF ORIGINALITY

In the early days of computers and the development of music applications, a new term entered the lexicon: *Technology Assisted Music Composition*. The “assistant” they were talking about was, of course, the computer, and the idea was met with a lot of resistance. The complaint was that the computer supplanted originality. The fear was that computers would become the composers...they did not and they are not!

The fact is that virtually all musical composition, from the earliest beginnings, has been, in some way, “technology-assisted.” We composers have arrogantly claimed originality, when, in truth, only a small part of what we create is “original.”

Case in point: I have – arrogantly - claimed that Humanity’s Child is an “original work” for musical theater. Truth is, I used all the same notes, all the same scales, all the same chords, structures, instruments, orchestrations, and choral voicings as pretty much everybody else! Granted, the notes and chords might be in different order, or the structures might be a tad unusual, but for the most part, my originality is limited.

That said, I have – not so arrogantly - also claimed to be a composer. I do feel a right to the title on the basis of some six decades of musical output. Actually, I was never trained as a composer. My training was aimed at producing School Music Directors. And, it was in that capacity that I began composing. My bands and choruses, over my career in secondary and higher education, became my labs for trying out musical ideas, albeit limited by student musicianship. It was a learn-by-doing process. I did not, however, seek entry into the then celestial elite without some “education” in composition, not formally, but authentically; learning how to arrange and compose by “virtually” apprenticing to practice arrangers and composers.

## A VIRTUAL APPRENTICE

When I was a Junior Music Major at UMASS in 1966, I got a work-study job as a copyist for the marching band. The Director, John Jenkins, prided himself on only doing “original compositions and arrangements” with the band. Jenkins brought in a composer/arranger named Jerry Bilik out of the University of Michigan. Every Monday morning, during football season, I would receive, special-delivery, the full score from Jerry for that week’s half-time show. I would then have 24 hours to copy individual parts that would be on music stands by 4:40pm the next day. Through observation and analysis of Jerry’s work, I became kind of a “virtual apprentice.” By copying his work, I learned how to arrange for Marching Band, and by extension, instruments in general; something I had wanted and needed to learn how to do. And, in fact, all I have learned *how* to do has come from *wanting* and *needing* to do it. For reasons unbeknownst to me, I wanted, and somehow needed to become “a composer.”

***“Now, as I stand before you free and true;  
Now I shall sing my song for you!”***

I Will Never Ever Leave You from Humanity’s Child

## TECH TALK

When I began arranging and composing, I used the same technologies as composers have for centuries, the same tools as used by my personal musical deity, J.S. Bach. Granted, Johann tried out his ideas on a harpsichord and wrote them down on parchment with a quill pen and I, some 400 years later, tried out my ideas on a piano and wrote them down on paper and pencil, but the technologies were essentially the same.

My career as a composer/arranger was always tied to my gigs as a college music educator and parallel career as a commercial music producer. When I “switched” to Ed. Psych in 1996, I no longer had opportunities or even reasons to compose.

Establishing a career in a new field, Educational Psychology, in my fifties, left little time for composing. So, I took off my composer’s cap and put on my professorial mortarboard, that funny hat you wore and flung in the air at the end of your High School graduation ceremony. I did not write another note for two decades.

Fast forward to 2012; I’ve retired, put away my mortarboard and once again put on my composer’s cap only to discover that almost everything I knew about composing had changed! In the same way that computers profoundly changed the way we write poetry and prose; so have they changed the way we write songs and symphonies.

## **CO-COMPOSERS**

Let me illustrate from my own experience. Back in the day, I partnered with a really great piano player and all-around musician named Kenny LeClair. When I would write a song, it would mostly consist of a melody with lyrics. (Harmony back then was quite mysterious to me.) I’d jot down a tune and bring it to Kenny. He’d ask me questions about what I had in mind: tempo, style, feel? And then, with little else to go on, Kenny would harmonize the song and frequently offer improvements to the melody. Kenny was my co-composer, and, to this day I think of him with admiration and appreciation.

By the time I began earnestly writing version one of Humanity's Child in 2014, I had learned a thing or two about harmony, and I had a pretty good grasp on styles, having played in many top-forty bands as well as ethnic groups. I needed to apply that knowledge using the new tools of contemporary composition: "new" hardware – digital keyboards, mixers, computers; "new" software – notation, plug-ins, Digital Audio Workstations; and, "new" protocols – MIDI, USB, MP3.

And now, after some eight years of self-directed learning and authentic practice, I have learned to use all these "new" tools. Just how well I've used them is a judgment left to you. But, in the spirit of full disclosure, know that my creative process was significantly assisted and, in fact, influenced by the tools. And with that statement, I must give full credit and honors to the technicians, musicians, and programmers who built the tools in the first place. They are, in so many ways, like my old collaborator Kenny LeClair, my co-composers.

As for me?

Credit me with putting pieces together.

Tomorrow, Day 6, I will reflect a bit on the philosophical foundations underlying Humanity' Child.

**DAY NO.6 - January 6, 2021**

**PHILOSOPHY & PHILOSOPHERS  
UNDERLYING THINGS  
CARE, COMPASSION & KINDNESS  
SO, HOW SHOULD THINGS BE?**

Previously, I have focused on ideas and traditions in the fields of Music and Psychology. I have done so with the “authority” conveyed upon me by the State of Massachusetts in 1969 (Master of Music) and the State of Connecticut in 1996 (PhD). Today, as I venture in to the field of Philosophy, I do so, not as a credentialed practitioner, but as a seeker and collector of knowledge in and of the field. And so, with your understanding that my knowledge of philosophy is very much a work-in-progress, I offer these reflections.

Question: What do Aristotle, Confucius, Descartes, Emerson, Foucault, Hume, and Kant all have in common?

Answer: They, and many other folks, are Philosophers.

It is with embarrassing immodesty that I might apprentice myself to that esteemed group. But then, having already associated myself with some of the giants of Music (J.S. Bach) and Psychology (Jean Piaget), modesty has not been too constraining thus far.

## **PHILOSOPHERS & PHILOSOPHY**

Philosophy has been defined as “the study of underlying things,” and those folks who carry such study are, of course, called Philosophers. Philosophers try to understand why things are as they are, and to posit how things should be. That describes me, too! I do try to understand and make sense of things and I am constantly promoting a vision of how I think things “should be,” – “peaceful, just (as in Justice), and sustainable.” Philosophers have also been described as “a kind of thinker or researcher” and I do think I am “a thinker.” And, having researched a 400 page Doctoral Dissertation (*Conceptual Development in Novice-Users of Educational Technology, UCONN, 1969*), I can claim researcher credentials as well. And finally, the roots of philosophy lie in the ancient Greek word "Philosophia, the "love of wisdom," and, there is something pure in that idea that really attracts.

With that said, and full-disclosure accomplished, let’s philosophize a bit.

## **UNDERLYING THINGS**

For some reason, I find this idea amusing; like the “things” I find under my couch - rolled under, dragged by the cat, or slipped through the cushions. Still, there is a power to the idea. It focuses us on things fundamental from which other things may grow, like the way nutrient-rich soil is fundamental to the growth of Patricia’s sunflowers.

## CARE, COMPASSION & KINDNESS

In the final decade of my career as a teacher and professor, I articulated a set of ethical principles upon which I would base all my future teaching; principles that had intuitively guided me from the beginning, but I was able to describe only after having gained some experience in describing such things. My 2009, Psychology 201 Syllabus stated that the ultimate goal of my teaching was that my students might, “...*live happy, healthful, meaningful lives, carrying into the world an ethic of care, compassion, and kindness.*” **Care**, I told my students, was a heightened concern *for self and others*. **Compassion**, on the other hand, I described as an emotion expressed in sympathy for the distress *of self and others*. And, **kindness** as the behavior motivated by the emotions and expressed in humane, considerate and sympathetic action *toward self and others*.

If such ideas (aka philosophies) really “underlie” my practice, you may (and should) ask what have I done to live out this philosophy, to actually *be caring, compassionate and kind*? And here I would point to The Peaceful Educator Foundation, whose mission it is “*To nurture a peaceful, just, sustainable future for all humanity’s children.*” And, my musical Humanity’s Child, which is the nurturing agent, “...*carrying into the world an ethic of care, compassion, and kindness,*” as evidence that I have, indeed, tried to live out that philosophy.

Philosophies are, at their heart, belief systems. I embrace a philosophy of “care, compassion, and kindness” because *I believe* these are *good things*...these are the things the “Wolf named Good” brings to the “battle” inside us all. That said, I also believe that philosophical principles are of little value if they do not play out in action. Recall that I described Philosophers as folks who try to understand why things are as they are, and to posit how things should be. The first line of the script of Humanity’s Child (the musical), I would argue, describes pretty well “why things are as they are” for Humanity’s Child (Sara).

***“At the beginning of the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,  
on a small blue-green planet third from the Sun,  
the world was in terrible shape!  
Disease, danger, dissonance, and distrust ruled the land!  
It was a time of fear and trepidation for all humanity’s children.”***

From The Prelude

Yikes! No wonder Sara (aka Humanity’s Child) is afraid!

So there we have the “why” of things.

Now let’s “posit how things should be.”

## HOW SHOULD THINGS BE?

My Dad, also John Tierney, passed away at the ripe old age of 101 a few years ago. He would often be heard to say, “*That’s the way it should be*” about everything and everybody. Was he right? Sometimes. Was he wrong? Frequently, in my view. But, who decides “the way it should be” anyway?

How “should things be” with regard to the environment?

Some folks say we are stewards of the Earth, others say we own the Earth, created by God specifically for our use and misuse, and that’s “the way it should be!”

How “should things be” with regard to the guns?

Some folks say there should be “sensible gun control,” others say such controls are an infringement on their freedom and “the way it should be!”

How “should things be” with regard to one’s body?

Some folks say, “My body; my choice,” others say God has already been quite specific about “the way it should be!”

How “should things be” with regard to immigration?

Some folks say come in, others say stay out, both saying that’s “the way it should be!”

There are, in fact, many, more categories of some folks say this and other folks say that, which reminds us of the song “Who?” in my show. Who *can* be believed? Is “this” the way it should be, or is “that” the way it should be?

This is where the question becomes very personal. I cannot answer for any other person. I can only describe what I hope, imagine and work toward: *a peaceful, just, sustainable future in which all humanity’s children may live happy, healthful, and meaningful lives.*

I will not say, “That’s the way it should be,” as though pre-ordained, God-given. So, I will just say, as I imagine the future, maybe, just maybe, “That’s the way it *could* be!”

**DAY 7 - January 7, 2021**

**A BAND OF ROGUES  
WHAT I LEARNED IN SCHOOL TODAY  
A SYMPHONY OF IDEAS  
CLOSING CHORDS**

**A BAND OF ROGUES**

Yesterday, Day 6 in “the life of an irredeemable day-dreamer,” this day-dreamer invoked the name of one who arguably possessed the finest musical mind ever. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had a brain that allowed him to imagine entire symphonies, whole operas, sonatas, and cantatas, complete and perfect as if waiting to be freed.

Mozart was a composer; I am a composer...and there the similarity ends. I will not for a moment pretend to even stand in the shadow of such as he (or is it “him.”)

I have long regarded Mozart, Bach, Beethoven and a band of other musical rogues as my teachers. In the same way that Michigan’s Jerry Bilik taught me how to write for marching band, so it was that through dedicated listening, score analysis, and actually teaching their music in college classrooms, that I learned some essential techniques of composition.

## WHAT I LEARNED IN SCHOOL TODAY

Johann Sebastian Bach taught me counterpoint and I applied that lesson in “The Spirit Within” where Vox and Sara sing different melodies at the same time (the definition of counterpoint.) From Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, I learned structure, from the macro to the micro, lessons that played out in the big design, a play in five inter-related parts; and, in the small design, the individual notes in individual chords and how they relate to one another. From Ludwig Von Beethoven, I learned passion and I applied that lesson in “Like The Phoenix.” I learned by studying the music of so many great composers: Samuel Barber (Adagio for Strings); Gustave Holst (The Planets); George Fredrick Handle (The Messiah); Franz Schubert (Die Schone Müllerin), Claude Debussy (Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun); Maurice Ravel (Bolero); Igor Stravinsky (The Rite of Spring) ; John Philip Sousa (Stars and Stripes Forever); and even a guy whose views I deeply disliked, Richard Wagner (Die Walküre). And there is another list of “my teachers” who are writers, artists, architects, and a plethora of other irredeemable day-dreamers.

One thing I regret - there a no women mentioned on my list. Why? Well, for the most part, women composers were not mentioned in my education, and, I’m guessing not much in your education either. Quick! Name five of “The Great Composers!” How many women on your list?

The fact is that, throughout the history of music, women composers have matched and frequently exceeded the artistry of the better-known male counterparts. Women composers like: Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179), Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677); Louise Farrenc (1804-1875); Fanny Mendelssohn (1805-1847); Clara Schumann (1819-1896); Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944); Amy Beach (1867-1944); Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979); Lili Boulanger (1893-1918); Ethel Smyth (1858-1944); Judith Weir (b.1954); Anne Dudley (b.1956); Rachel Portman (b.1960); Debbie Wiseman (b.1963) ; Roxanna Panufnik (b.1968); and, Phamie Gow (b.1980), to mention a few. (Look ‘em up!)

I feel (there’s that emotion again) an obligation to honor my teachers by artistically and diligently applying their lessons, never forgetting that a crucial characteristic shared by all the above is that they encountered the art as it was and pushed the boundaries to what it became. I leave it to you, dear reader, to decide if I have done that with Humanity’s Child.

## A SYMPHONY OF IDEAS

In the time-honored tradition of Classical Sonata Form, I'll bring closure to this the first movement of this Symphony of Ideas, these Variations on a Theme, this Suite of Dances and, this Fugue of Emotions with a brief recapitulation.

**Day One** featured commentary of the nature of performers and performing, articulating the difference between dreaming, an unconscious experience while asleep, and imagining, a conscious experience while awake. I recounted my early work where I imagined a "Dreamsinger" who eventually became Humanity's Child in a musical of the same name. I described how an infatuation with a form (musical theater) evolved into a mission and I compared that mission, "...to nurture a peaceful, just, sustainable future for all humanity's children," to the ubiquitous and simple experience of planting a seed.

**Day Two** focused on emotions (feelings) and the profoundly powerful effect they have on our cognition (thinking) and subsequent action (behavior).

**Day Three** was all about connections and relevance to real life in which I revealed the "seed" from which the entire play has sprung, a starkly honest quote from a teenager named Monique.

**Day Four** was a venture into the field of Psychology with references to some of the major advances in understanding what is to be human and just plain folks. It came with a warning: *don't eat the mushrooms!*

**DAY 5** posited a strategy for talking to ducks and JPFs, bestowed kudos on all who have come before, and described a virtual apprenticeship.

**DAY 6** was in honor of my teachers...Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and a rogues gallery of innovators who have pushed the boundaries of artistic practice.

**DAY 7** brought the week to close by getting back to the fundamentals; those things that underlie the other things previously mentioned by highlighting Philosophies and Philosophers. Specifically, an amateur philosopher named John McDonnell Tierney.

### **CLOSING CHORDS**

There is a great story, often told by Leonard Bernstein, about Beethoven. It seems that when Ludwig was composing the first movement of his famous Fifth symphony (Da-Da-Da-Daaaaaa), he was dissatisfied with the ending; it was “too short;” not grand enough to end this momentous music. So, he wrote a longer and grander ending only to realize that, in Bernstein’s words, “...the problem with the first ending was not that it was too short, but that it was not short enough.” And the result is the powerful, albeit brief, coda that ends The Fifth.

Like Beethoven, I found myself thinking that this ending of mine is too short, there is so much more to say, so many notes yet to be played. But, as previously claimed, I am a learner. And, having learned my lesson, I will bring this movement to a close with this coda...sing it with me...you know the tune:

*Here now shall I rise  
High above the clouds and the storms battering me.  
Here now I proclaim my liberty and not just one child singing,  
I am strong. I am a child of light; I am all that tomorrow may be.  
Now, as I stand before you, free and true,  
now I shall sing my song for you.*

I Will Never Ever Leave You from Humanity's Child

## **AFTERWORD**

Perhaps you may have noticed that I referred to this little book, these reflections by an irredeemable day-dreamer, as the First Movement of my Symphony of Ideas.

Stay tuned for the Second Movement...

**Another Week in the  
Life of an Irredeemable Day-Dreamer**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John McDonnell Tierney, aka “Jack,” holds advanced degrees in Music (UMASS) and Educational Psychology (UCONN) and has held fulltime college faculty position in both fields.

From 1996 until his retirement as a Professor of Psychology in 2012, Dr. Tierney focused his teaching practice and scholarly research on Adolescent Development.

Prior to 1996, Jack was a fulltime Professor of Music specializing in Musical Theater.

Over the course of his career, Jack produced and/or directed more than fifty musical productions with high school, college, community and professional companies as well as commercial clients.

He also composed several major musicals including “Dreamsinger” (2000), Peacemaker (2016), Humanity’s Child Off-Broadway (2019), and the 2021 version of Humanity’s Child, subtitled “More than a Musical,” currently in production.

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