



a man sits alone
and alone he sits
he could be a writer
and get used to it

get used to it
get used to it
but instead
with hand and head
instead he hold his guitar
and gets on with it
he plays and plays

and could play all day
he plays and plays this way
playing solo
this solo guitarist
solo but not alone
at the ice cream store
with his Christmas song playlist

solo with just this one
solo but not alone
he's now with us

it was Christmas
and it was Christmas music
and it was not and it was
my favorite thing

we listened to the Silent Night
we listened to Jingle Bells
and just then all was right
with Angels Heard on High

it was high
it was High Street
it was high
it was right
it was in spite
of the silent night

here was Rudolph
here was Jingle Bells
he didn't play
perhaps couldn't play
he didn't play
Joy to the World

he plays My Favorite Things
he sings My Favorite Things

rain drops on roses
girls in white dresses

roses in December
Jean what was
what was her name
roses in December
Jean Donovan

girls in white dresses
brown paper packages
girls in white dresses
tied up with string

my favorite things
silver white winters
he played and played
my favorite things

and then he stopped
and then we talked

the playing stopped
the music went on

he asked about Coltrane
did I know Coltrane
his Favorite Things
John Coltrane his version
John Coltrane his vision

no I did not
and yet I did too
I did and did not know
such is the loss

my favorite things
I had the album
the album did not
did not have me
or so I thought
most obviously

with Every Time

Every Time We Say Goodbye
and Summertime
we say goodbye

and summertime
And Not For Me
and he plays again
and does not sing

when the dog bites
when the bee stings
when the silent night
the silent night

not for me
not for me alone
for all in all

God Rest and
Please Come Home

those roses
she was the one
but not the only one

those roses
in December
in El Salvador
winter wonderland

murdered but not alone
for helping the tired
for the homeless
for the tempest-tossed

tossed in the grave
in the silent night
of roses
Roses in December

for Jimmy Felts

The **Solo Guitarist** is Jimmy Felts who plays at an ice cream, soup & sandwich store up the street from where I live. If you walk through the front door at noon on a Wednesday, he will be sitting in the corner to the right playing jazz tunes, sometimes singing. This time, after Thanksgiving, it was jazz versions of traditional Christmas songs. He has a tip jar on a little table next to his chair, but he plays for the joy and the need to play. Sometimes there will be a few people at the tables eating lunch and talking. Sometimes talking loudly. They may appreciate the music. Maybe. Maybe not. But he plays on. He appreciates the music. Jazz. The music, not just his own playing of it.

There's that saying about cleanliness leading to godliness, but for musicians (and sometimes for poets) it is as the renowned bass player Christian McBride says, what leads to such godliness is "Repetition" repetition, repetition

Repetition once was integral to Oral Literature, that oxymoron. Memory was then always in mind but also hand-y, always in-body. It was not elsewhere, for-gotten. Poets, and musicians, need not read to play. They played. From memory.

The Sunday I returned from a brief trip to Nicaragua, the US spaceship Challenger exploded killing the entire crew. Being a writer and not a musician, my memory is not very good. Being old doesn't help either. Tragedies spark the memory. I do easily recall the details of that explosion. The newspapers were full of what had happened, the pain, suffering of family. The nation wept along with them. United in grief.

Before I had gotten onto my plane in Cincinnati I had to check a large duffle bag. It was packed with baseballs, gloves, and bats. Baseball, as it once was in the US, is Nicaragua's national sport. The embargo imposed by the Reagan administration meant baseball equipment of all sorts was in short supply. I used to play when I was a kid. There had to be young kids in need.

When in Nicaragua, I sat at a table in a small cafe in Managua talking with a young Guatemalan man who was in hiding from the US and Israeli death squads. There is no better way to describe these "destroying angels" praised by El Salvador's Rios Montt, the most brutal of Central America's many dictators. Nicaragua didn't have many dictators because from 1936 to 1979 the country was ruled by only one family: Anastasio Somoza Garcia and then his sons Somoza Debayle and Anastasio Somoza Debayle.

In El Salvador there were others, the worst being Rios Montt, a fundamentalist Christian preacher, who thanked God and Israel "because many of our soldiers were trained by Israelis". Montt, responsible for the deaths of more than 10,000 people and the near extermination of native peoples was convicted of war crimes and genocide. But he was tried in absentia since he died, at age 91, before the trial.

President Ronald Reagan was a big fan of Rios Montt. He said of him, "I know that General Rios Montt is a man of great personal integrity and commitment." When I was at the literacy museum in Managua, I walked the circular walled display of the photos and obituaries of young people who had gone out into the countryside to teach illiterate farmers and their families

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how to read and write. And then were killed by the “Contras”.

US president Ronald Reagan who once proclaimed “I am a Contra” in support of the terrorists that he funded by supplying weapons to Iran. He also, like Montt, used religion to justify terror. It has always been difficult to know what were Reagan’s beliefs since he changed them to whatever was expedient, but many times he mimicked the beliefs of the Christian “end times” used to justify extreme state violence. As it is done now in Israel’s war on Palestine.

And though many are still alive who remember the Challenger explosion, few in the US remember, or even know of, the tragedy of December 2, 1980 :

Jean Donovan was a Catholic lay worker, Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, and Dorothy Kazel were nuns. All murdered in El Salvador by Montt’s military, all US trained, supplied, and supported.

When that young Guatemalan told me his personal story of exile, he began “500 years ago ...”. That is the kind of memory the oppressors try to not only destroy but also to make incomprehensible. So it was then. And is now.