

Chapter Two

DRUGGIE-WUGS & BOOZER BLOOZE

~

THE DELIGHTS OF MADNESS

You are not drunk if you can lie on the floor without holding on.

Dean Martin

How does one walk the razor's edge and manage to survive and flourish? Does it always have to be all or nothing?

LU



CW Rimbaud's Derangement of the Senses

. . . . You also talked about your interest in and considerable involvement with "the links between improvisation and mental instability." That is truly an interesting subject, isn't it? Arthur Rimbaud, Jim Morrison, Patti Smith, Fred Neil, Tim Buckley and thousands of others have long embraced Rimbaud's creative doctrine about the dangerous necessity for a "long, intimidating, immense and rational derangement of all the senses." Not healthy, to say the least. He knew that, of course. And anybody who has stepped into this zone with full awareness has known it too.

There at the mid-point between sobriety and dissolution shines a kind of awesome perfection, the music of the angels. That is the zone in which you and I and others have been able to lose ourselves and find that transcendent unity with Music. And, yes, the casualty ward awaits those who lose or totally reject reason's distant siren songs that call for restraint.

Of course, one never really knows what "too far" is until he ventures beyond the invisible line separating inspiration from self-destruction. We know "too far" only when we get there. By then, it may well be too late. A certain tantalizing thought never disappears; it continually leads one further and further — Only others crash and burn. It will never happen to me.

That "link between improvisation and mental instability" is incredibly attractive. You used the terms "feel the flame" and "the strongest burn." That's exactly it. So alluring, so fulfilling, so dangerous. How does one walk the razor's edge and manage to survive and flourish? Does it always have to be all or nothing?

I still ask myself that question, and have not yet found a completely satisfactory answer.

Somebody once told Tim that he should ease off, that if he continued, he might die. He simply shrugged his shoulders. There are those who might interpret that gesture as signifying a choice of drugs and booze over music. I feel otherwise. I think he was saying, "Music is everything. I do whatever it takes to climb those heights. We all live. We all die. In the meantime, my life is music. I do whatever is necessary to serve and fulfill it. That's all that matters. Longevity is overrated. Fire dictates all."

As for me, I don't regard myself as being that talented. I can burn all I want, but can reach only so high. And in doing so, I wind up withdrawing more and more, losing touch with everything and everybody, losing life, losing money, losing love and loved ones, and eventually losing music itself. . . . Well, you read *Blue Melody*, the

section where I was laid up in Venice 1969/70, when Tim visited me that Christmas Eve (pp. 143-144).

I just wanted to let you know your letter touched me quite deeply. You have experienced much, you have dived into dark waters and soared to clear-light heights. I thank you for your honesty and insight.

KMc

Spotlight: The Affliction

Sounds like you've been through a lot in your 42 years. It's all a great exploratory search, isn't it? The search is not only "out there," in the so-called "real" world, but "in here," the Who-Am-I question.

For many years, I was a divided soul — smart/stupid, creative/destructive, sober/drunk, clear-headed/stoned, yatta-yatta-yatta. In *Blue Melody* I spoke of these kinds of divisions, especially in regards to Tim but also in regards to myself to some extent. Of course, the primary focus was on Tim and his creative/destructive dynamics, which is why I barely mentioned the why/how I embarked upon the journey of my own recovery (pp. 189-190). That journey took a long time, but I eventually found my way into the clear, primarily with the help of a good shrink and the love of a good woman, Sonia, with whom I have lived since 1975 (after 30-plus years together, we finally got married three years ago — didn't want to rush into anything!).

When I spoke of Tim's "fear of success" and the problems it caused, I approached him and those problems with deep compassion and respect. It is not easy to take a stand and create something, anything, that's worthwhile when one is inwardly divided between fear and aspiration. As I said somewhere in the book, it's easy to want and ask for the spotlight, but when it is given to you, how do you hold up? If you feel whole inside (undivided) and confident (rather than doubtful and self-

sabotaging), then you can embrace the challenge and celebrate your strengths. If not, then of course you tend to trip up, maybe only a little, maybe a lot.

Many people struggle with this problem. Tim did, I did. A number of people I met back then and have met since those earlier times have suffered from it. I call it "the affliction." (The spectacle of golfer Greg Norman's fall from grace at the Masters many years ago; John Daly's missing the easy putt that would have beaten Tiger Woods in one of their playoff holes [and Daly's serious on-going self-destructive problems, including his recent passing out and crashing on the sidewalk]). It ain't easy to pull up and out and away from these kinds of demons. But it is possible.

I am not saying you necessarily suffer from this sort of thing. I'm just saying that substance abuse suggests that there are difficulties in living with one's self. The human mind tends to run its own course, and when one's own mind creates insufferable pain — self-criticisms, doubts, regrets, fears, the endless re-running of painful memories and judgments — then, hey, a drink, a toke, a shot, a snort, anything and everything that might give one relief is welcome. You know I understand, because you read *Blue Melody*.

As well, your letter and some of your language indicates that you have known and perhaps still know these kinds of pains to one degree or another, and these kinds of momentary "solutions" to one degree or another. I say "language," because you used the word "battling." Well, if it's a battle, then various kinds of inner divisions exist, and, as you indicate, it's not easy to deal with them. My heart goes out to you for having such feelings; and my respect goes out to you for making the effort to cope constructively with them.

KMc

Inner Division: What, Who, & Why?

What is it about pressure that drives certain otherwise good-hearted, sometimes hard-working and often sensitive, talented, intelligent folks into extremist psychotropic territory? It seems to me there may be links between creative energy, and pressure, and destructive energy.

Getting loaded in self-destructive ways seems to be the flip side of creating in life-affirming productive ways. It's one energy, just the direction is different. One direction says "Yes" to creativity (in art, journalism, music, or the workplace wherever that might be); the other direction says, "No," often in spite of the best of intentions. Sometimes the "Yes" energy seems to build up and become pressurized; it becomes too intense; the "No" energy responds, and there we go (again). What is it in us that at times resists our own positive, life-affirming intentions and their fulfillment?

That's where the term "affliction" plays a role. The "affliction" seems to be a kind of knee-jerk psychological response to the possibility of success. That is, creative effort awakens deep-seated anxiety in one such as myself, perhaps you as well, although I don't know that. In my case, how could I possibly live up to the demands of the spotlight if I actually managed to attain that position, front and center?

That, of course, takes the line of thought another notch deeper — what is it in one such as I that feels weak, inadequate, unworthy of aspiring to creative action, mental clarity, and emotional equanimity? What or "who" is it within me who thinks he can't handle it, doesn't want it, and desires only the momentary sense of tranquility and power that comes with fill-in-the-blank? Even though we know oblivion is not clear-light bliss, we really don't care. Less anxiety and more disengagement feels infinitely better than creative challenge, the possibility of criticism, and the specter of conflict, failure and/or humiliation.

Again, the "why" question appears. What is this sense of inner division, and why? And so one such as I, and perhaps you as well, seek whatever relief from anxiety

that we can find. I could go on, especially about the "what" and "who" question, but a discussion of that kind might be better left until another time.

O Hypocrisy Knows No Bounds

Really ironic, isn't it? Not to mention stupid. Alcohol is legal and sold everywhere, even in gas stations, while marijuana is illegal, and the jails are filled with non-violent pot-smoking "criminals." I know, I know. We're making progress, but only after more than fifty years since Nixon started his so-called "War on Drugs," a war that drugs have clearly "won," especially marijuana. It costs anywhere from \$10 to \$12 billion a year to enforce drug laws. So far, we've spent more than a trillion dollars prosecuting this "war," and yet all drugs are more readily available everywhere, and at prices that nearly everybody can afford.

More than 400,000 people a year die from smoking tobacco, while some 23,000 people are killed every year in alcohol-related traffic accidents. Thousands of others are beaten or murdered by people lost in alcoholic rages, and still thousands more get lung cancer from second-hand smoke. I don't know a single person who has died because of being high on grass, or who has killed somebody either willfully or accidentally because they toked a joint and felt relaxed, calm, mellow, loving and kind.

It's going to take still more time before America wakes up enough to legalize pot, regulate it, and tax it. We could virtually empty the prisons; there would be only modest increase in usage; and the billions of tax dollars pouring into the government coffers every year would go a long way toward easing the deficit.

Culturally, we're already there and we're ready. Politically and legally, however we're probably still at least 20 years behind. In today's local newspaper, I see on

page one that a new medical marijuana dispensary has opened on Main Street. On page two the local Sheriff is boasting about how he and 40 other agents eradicated more than 9,000 marijuana plants in a nearby forest (at taxpayers' expense).

Interesting, isn't it, how right-wing voters and businessmen insist on freedom, personal choice and individual responsibility when it comes to alcohol and tobacco and addictive prescription drugs, but self-righteously talk about "health" and "legality" when it comes to marijuana. Hypocrisy knows no bounds.

SL In Balance: Play Like An Angel

I've tried everything — all the booze, drugs, pot, acid, cocaine, heroin, yatta-yatta. They're all great. Each does a different thing. Each offers a completely different high, and generates a different kind of energy. Each can be profoundly useful for creative endeavors, but risks are involved. Match the substance and its high with the goal and psycho-spiritual impetus you need, and voila! the substance energizes you in that direction. Take it too far and it cripples creativity.

Sometimes you need anesthetic relief, something to just get the hell away from it all. (Ever hear the country boozier song, "Make the World Go Away"?). Sometimes you need sensuality (the combination of heroin and cocaine, known as a "speed ball" can't be beat). Sometimes you need high intensity plus mellow-mellow long-range work fuel (such as coke). Other times you need self-transcendent hallucinogenic visions. They're all great in their various ways, and humanity has since the discovery of the first psychedelic mushroom and the first inhalation of a lightning-struck burning marijuana field been cultivating a thousand-and-one ways to get stoned.

Don't know if you ever saw the film, "The Blonde Bombshells," about a group of older women who re-form a jazz band they played in as younger women during World War II. Along the way, the trumpet player woman takes a slug of whiskey during rehearsal, for which she is roundly condemned by the leader, who insists on no drinking on stage. The trumpet player woman says, "Absolutely not negotiable. I can't play when I'm sober. I can't play when I'm drunk. But there's a place in between where I play like an angel."

With any substance, control can be difficult. The blessings and relief from the high come with a potential price. (Kris Kristofferson asks the question, "Is the goin' up worth the comin' down?" on his great classic album, *The Silver-tongued Devil And I*. He was a serious boozier, a serious [and often very funny] poet, and a great songwriter.)

I would be the last one in the world to tell anybody not to drink or smoke or snort. We know the risks involved. In my personal life, I measure the value of the need and purpose (music) against the potential loss (Sonia). People such as your mother or father cannot care for others, and so they lost themselves in alcohol. You *can* care for others. No need for you to lose that quality.

Setting limits — and learning how to stay with them.

Keeping love alive — you are not the only one involved.

Not forgetting there is a tomorrow — consequences.

We always pay for our parties.

Can we find the golden mean and play like an angel?

KMc

The Empty Hole

You mentioned the feeling of having an empty hole in your life, and the bored, frustrated feelings you experience, all of which booze helps alleviate. And, too, you talked about the enhanced receptivity and exhilaration you feel when enjoying music to the hilt, the wild amusement park ride that the combination of booze and music gives you. Hey, you know I understand completely. As a fellow named Henry Lawson once said, “Beer makes you feel the way you ought to feel without beer!”

There's no question about it, that empty hole inside clamors to be filled and the exhilaration of taking a high ride on music's wings can't be topped. In my experience, there is much to be said for that eternal human combination of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. We fill in specifics and variations in our own way, but that trio has done the trick for humanity since the Babylonians invented distilleries. As ol' Ben Franklin burped and said, “Beer is proof God loves us, and wants us to be happy.”

I guess the question boils down to whether or not we can get loaded and remain aware of what's going on in our mind, and how long we can keep doing it before we begin to realize that, well, we've been here before and done this, and maybe it's become a little repetitive and boring. And, too, the consequences — hangovers, missed deadlines, broken agreements, disrupted relationships, physical deterioration, etc. When these things begin to face off against the exhilaration factor, a new dimension comes into play. Do you agree?

A division becomes apparent: we know what we like and need — intoxication, with all of its pleasures and psychological relief — but we also come to realize that there's a whole other side to our nature that suspects things have gotten out of hand and wants to quit — if not forever, then maybe just for a week. The first time I resolved to stop drinking for a week, I discovered that the first two or three days were not all that difficult, but around the third or fourth day, my system began to clamor once again for relief and stimulation. Well, hello. When this happened a few

times, I began to see that I needed help to cope with my own urges. Only when the desire to quit became stronger than my desire to head for the nearest liquor store did I begin to take serious steps to change. Maybe it's that way with everybody who visits these zones we're talking about.

Not that quitting can't be done. Thousands of people have come to terms with themselves, as you know. And the fact that you are seeing a therapist makes all the difference. Maybe on an immediate basis there are slips or even extended binges, but as long as you continue seeing the therapist, you are letting a different point of view into your life. Those seeds begin to have a positive effect. The more you take them seriously, and the more you nourish them, the stronger you become.

Pretty soon, you begin filling that empty hole inside, not with more substances, but with new meaning and value and direction that you generate yourself. At first, you toddle, then walk, then skip, then dance — and life, believe it or not, begins to feel better than before. It's not the same kind of feeling (substances give you a feeling of their own). It's a new and different kind of feeling — of inner fullness, strength, clarity, and confidence. Life takes on the quality of adventure, and that adventure is creative, instead of destructive; positive, instead of negative; affirmative, instead of resistant.

I would imagine that you are already seeing the reality of what I am talking about. Are you? With that initial sensation of inner division — part of you wants to drink; part of you wants to stop drinking — a *choice* emerges. The moment you acknowledge the division, you create an option. That option, that choice, is the first step toward inner freedom. Every time you choose to break the drinking pattern, you give a little more strength and vitality to the side of your nature that wants to be self-reliant, independent, and confident. By creating meaning in your life, you begin to leave that feeling of emptiness behind. A sense of value, purpose and possibility starts growing, rather like a seedling that with proper nourishment can grow into a sapling and eventually into a great tree.

Does some of this make sense? Let me know, won't you?

TC

After the High: the Low

Initially when you give up the substances, you fall into the kind of depression you describe in your e-mail — everything you do seems like a dead end; low energy, no interest in progressing, nothing means anything, everything feels like a lie. There's a numbing sense of hopelessness that feels like it will never go away.

But it will.

In a very real sense, it is not the soul-searching that is draining energy. It's the feeling of being vulnerable, of walking on unfamiliar new ground, of not having the strength, courage or wherewithal to cope with the rapid and sometimes overwhelming emergence of those long-suppressed demons. As a result, a lot of energy goes into the refusal to face those demons. When you had pot or booze and went unchecked and stoned for all those years, it was easy to stuff the demons down and ignore them — "Getting loaded felt great." It's that refusal to face the fears that drains energy, because all of your energy is going into the escape from the fears.

But when you give up the blinders, and sustain courage and will power long enough to enable your therapist and your friends in the pot group to help you face yourself deeply and truly, energy returns soon enough. In fact it comes back a hundred fold. Pretty soon, you start feeling good. As you confront your fears and inadequacies and cope with them, you lose the cravings for escape-from-yourself. No longer spending most of your energy suppressing discomforting thoughts and feelings, you feel new energy-streams pouring into your psyche. You gain confidence, direction, strength. In fact, you become *more* creative and energetic, not less.

By getting together with your therapist and the group, you have taken the first and hardest step toward sobriety and sanity, even as I took that first and hardest step while lying in the hospital. As I said, I feel enormous respect for you.

DS

Waking Up to the Sacred

. . . . I'm astonished at how life's events transpire willy-nilly. So little time, so vulnerable, everything so incredibly beautiful, precious. That sense of the sacred often overwhelms me. It didn't always do that, but for the past several years it has. Probably because I've been mostly clean for a long time.

Just yesterday in the plant nursery, for example, I left Sonia's side and ambled back to the rear of the nursery where a rose bush, no, a great rose TREE, has grown up through the mesh fence over the course of some twenty years. Hundreds of roses had bloomed, big ones, little ones, new ones, fading ones, all of them cream-white with red-rimmed petals. There in the heat of the day, in the quiet back part of the nursery, far away from everybody else, I smelled one rose after another, letting that magnificent fragrance transport me out of myself and my concerns. Pure bliss. Unforgettable.

The saying about stopping to smell the roses is a cliché, but the action itself — well, hey, here I am alive and well and writing about it!