

Music

13 July, 2023

My whole life, music has played its part in shaping my view of things, the mood of the moment and even my understanding of the world around me. But for most of my life, that word – ‘music’ – has carried the burden of formality. That is, when I thought of music, my mind’s ear heard orchestras, guitars, singers, etc., usually playing recognizable and repeatable tunes.

Nothing wrong with this understanding, I suppose. My life has been greatly enriched by this ‘intentional’ music whether playing or listening or even just allowing it to soothe me from the background. And of course, the birds that frequent Mary’s feeders offer their own songs, the wind through the trees its comment on the weather. But in my workshop, I produce music of my own sort.

The sh-sh-sh-shnick of a smoothing plane taking feathery shavings, the slicing sound of an impossibly sharp chisel truing end grain, the high frequency stuttering of a card scraper producing fine lace each present me with melodies that need no lyrics to convey the story unfolding between worker and wood.

Apparently, I’m not the only one who thinks of these work sounds as music. I was watching a video of a turner I respect the other day. I turned on the closed captioning because I can’t always understand this woman’s accent. I noticed that when she’s not talking so that the only sensible sound is that of blade shearing or slicing wood, the closed captioning algorithm defaults to ‘Music playing.’

And it is music, you know, the music of my life. I don’t suppose I’ll ever turn off the classical music that I run low in the background while I work. It keeps me calm. But the sound of blade in wood is the hymn of my private communion, the soundtrack of my purest expression. I can’t imagine ever tiring of making it.

Having one’s own music is an exercise in sanity, in the calm and unhurried enjoyment of life. I hope mine continues playing nonstop for as long as I’m able to hear it.