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THREE ANECDOTES AROUND MUSIC AND SPIRITUALITY

The distinction between sacred and secular music, which is now the stuff of music history textbooks, was a distinction of function, setting, and text. Was the piece at hand written to be used in a church service, for a civic event, or for private enjoyment? Such distinctions do not speak to the ability of all music to access the spiritual. About a decade ago, in graduate school, I had the opportunity to study with celebrated Bach scholar Peter Williams, who pointed out that the modern distinction between sacred and secular music was irrelevant to J. S. Bach, who inscribed all his scores "S.D.G." for "*Soli Deo Gloria*", to the Glory of God alone. To be a Lutheran composer in Leipzig in 1723 was to experience sacredness as an everyday reality.

With his films, Werner Herzog seeks what he terms "*ecstatic truth*", a transcendent experience of reality different from factual documentary truth. I respect Herzog for his close involvement in the creation of the music for his films, admirably documented in the special features on the DVD releases of "*Grizzly Man*" and "*The Wild Blue Yonder*". It is no coincidence that in the latter film, which he first subtitled a "*Space Oratorio*", the making of the music preceded the assembly of the film narrative. The ecstatic truth to which his science fiction fantasy aspires is most readily contacted through music rather than visual image or narrative.

In 2005, I titled a composition "*Ecstatic Volutions In A Neon Haze*". This was my own poetic description of a series of paintings by Robert Yarber depicting couples tumbling in mid-air above a glowing nocturnal urban dystopia. In my composition, a homage to American pulse-minimalist music, the sensuality and persistence of musical groove gradually seduces each individual musician into a unified invocation of musical ecstasy. The experience is akin to the liminal stage of ritual process, as theorized by Victor Turner, in which individual identities are submerged into a collective experience of community in which social bonds are re-formed and transformed.



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