

LOOKING UP (Blog entry number one, by Eliot Fisk)

(This post makes reference to the recently released movie starring Meryl Streep and Leonardo di Caprio called “*Don’t Look Up*”. In this film an asteroid is heading straight for planet earth, but a corrupt American government with Meryl Streep’s character serving as president and di Caprio’s character serving as a befuddled, if well meaning scientist, completely fails to act. The reaction to the deadly asteroid streaking towards earth is simple: denial and wishful thinking, hence the title: “*Don’t Look Up*”. In the film the failure of all those in power to protect humanity results in the obliteration of human life on earth.)

I woke up this morning (January 14, 2022) and, as I often do, went to my phone to check the various news outlets.

As usual, I was confronted with an endless litany of bad news: climate change accelerating, omicron infections exploding, Putin about to rape the Ukraine, American voting rights under threat, and (not my favorite journalist but he has a point) even the usually optimistic David Brooks bewailing America “coming apart at the seams” in the *New York Times*.

We also read in today’s paper that, in a life imitates art coincidence, an asteroid *has* just (*a few days ago!*) passed by rather too close to planet earth.

Yet even that fails to nudge human beings to prioritize their common survival!

Instead, we seem stuck in a revolving cycle of mutual recrimination, venting of frustration and a solipsistic inability to *look up!*

I’m not sure how much of this is really worse than ever or just proof of the famous adage of Charles Dickens (in his historical novel about the French Revolution, *A Tale of Two Cities*): “It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.”

Regardless of how history may sort things out, the news *has* been difficult to take, and for quite a long time!

Then all of a sudden it hit me with primeval force:

amidst all the shouting and finger pointing, the lies and distortions, and the denial of the humanity of people who may not agree with us, music has all along been quietly suggesting a different path.

In fact, the musical visionaries we revere have always directed our gaze upward. The sacred art to which we musicians have devoted our lives still gives us the chance for a reset and to bring others along with us.

It is old cliché to say that music is our universal human language, but we’ve all experienced this phenomenon.

Beethoven, deaf, his body falling apart but his spirit undaunted, could dream the dream of a family of humankind united under a common sky. A few short years before his own death his spirit could leap out of the weakened body that housed it and send the words of Schiller into permanent orbit: telling us we are indeed one human family and not just a petty assembly of competing, selfish, barely evolved apes!

Any time anyone tries to make music on this earth, or participates as a listener or in any other way in the magic of music, that person is responding to the higher truth of the timeless message of music and helping to point humanity towards a better tomorrow.

Eliot Fisk