

## DARYL MAGAZINE ZEN STONES

July 2008

DARYL HAYOTT

Dr. Richard Niles Interview

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Q: What is the function of the contemporary artist and how does it differ from the past?

A: All human beings have a primary function: survival. Life is good and makes us happy. Death is bad and makes us miserable. At least that's the attitude of Western thought. Buddhists and Hindus and other Eastern religions look at death as a natural and necessary part of life. They also believe in stuff like reincarnation. That's all very lovely but let me know what they're really thinking with a firing squad taking aim, or some doctor telling them they have terminal halitosis!

So artists, who are human, have the function of promoting life, health and happiness. So the function of the artist hasn't changed. At different periods of history, the artist has had to do this in different ways, depending on how stressful the zeitgeist happened to be. After WW1 artists helped the public express their relief by providing entertainment. During WW2 the Allies were fighting a war everybody believed in and artists celebrated the values they were fighting for.

Things went slightly 'pear-shaped' in the 50's & 60's. Everyone who lived through this period was forced in some way to re-evaluate their lives, beliefs, moral values and sense of reality. **Bob Dylan's** lyrics summed it up when he sang "the times they are a-changin'". And where previous singers had to have beautiful tone, time and intonation, no one cared about that stuff with Dylan. They needed to hear what he was saying.

Young people couldn't help thinking that the older generation wasn't so hip. They invented this thing called the atomic bomb and created a world where anyone who wasn't living in fear of immanent annihilation was an idiot. So all previous beliefs were open to question and great artists like Dylan, Allan Ginsberg, Joni Mitchell and James Brown helped people re-evaluate themselves and their culture.

Today we find ourselves in an increasingly corporate planet where the rich get richer and the general public seems happy to distract themselves from the real issues with superficial stupidity such as reality TV and fashion and sex and drugs and... I could go on but I guess you get it?

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Q: So what should artists do?

A: I'm glad you asked that. It depends on the type of artist you are. One type is happy just to entertain. That requires some talent, but remember, some people are entertained by someone falling flat on their face. Some are even entertained by Simon Cowell's brand of TV.

For me, the 'true' artist wants to both entertain and educate/illuminate – to change the audience's point of view – to make them more aware. This type of artist must reject the corporate fascism of major record labels and wage artistic guerrilla warfare using the freedom given us by the internet. The real hero of our time is Derek Sivers of CD Baby for putting power in the hands of the creative musician – power to market their own music their way – and make money doing it.

Q: Why don't you include Bill Gates for his expansion of the internet?

A: Because he charges people a lot of money for his product while Derek Sivers charges them a flat fee of \$35. Bill Gates is one of the richest guys on the planet. What does he do with his money? Does he use it to provide free high quality education for the world – especially the poorer countries, like some of the African nations and The Phillipines? They need it because they have asinine governments who purposely keep their people stupid and poor!

And speaking of wanting to keep people stupid and poor, would someone explain to me why, in a civilized democracy, the US government, with all their billions of tax dollars, can't or won't guarantee a college education to everyone in the USA? As any idiot can see, this isn't a civilized democracy. Without a well-educated population, governments can get the masses to vote for corrupt demagogues who spout asinine populist clichés and call everybody "folks". Uneducated, how can the public understand anyone who is intelligent?

Q: You certainly are ranting a lot!

A: Well, you asked!

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Q: So what you're saying is that artists have a moral imperative to make the world a better place?

A: Exactly! Now you've really got it Daryl!

Q: Isn't the word "better" subjective?

A: Absolutely not! Morality has become very unfashionable and politically incorrect. In the '60s, people rejected previous concepts of morality, but they had a new morality based on peace, love and brown rice. Today morality itself is regarded as a rather naive concept when compared to such things as greed & selfishness. Let's fiddle while Rome burns!

But if I want to have an objective judgement on right and wrong, as I said, I look to biology. Biology is what we share with all living creatures (and avocados). Survival is the universal biological objective. Therefore anything that is life promoting and life enhancing is 'good', and anything that is life diminishing and life depressing is 'bad'. That's why hitting someone over the head with a mallet is bad while giving someone a hug is 'good'. That's why drinking apple juice is good and drinking vodka is bad, no matter how much you may personally enjoy it! That's why watching a DVD of Joni Mitchell or Keith Jarrett is good and watching TV commercials or any program with Simon Cowell is bad.

So any serious artist has to be aware of this.

Q: You're some kinda guy, Dr. Niles.

A: Thanks, but that isn't a question!