

True music secrets revealed

If you promise to listen closely, I'll let you in on a secret. But first I should explain why it's a secret.

I have experienced how talent-seeking music listeners find discouragement from the music of this generation. Groups lack performance, consistency and hard work, so they often slip out of the system.

Yet, my oracle of truth, my secret — this band has climbed the music rhombus, singing only to pay homage to the gods of the night sky. They play modestly, letting their talent carry them to success, not money.

My concern with revealing my secret is knowing it's going into the right ears. If I tell you my secret and, say you don't personally investigate the music and instead begin a habit of trusting others' opinions of what is good and what is bad music, then you would be zipping through the forest with the curdling fleas; confused, meager and unaffected by the music.

If I can trust you will listen closely to my secret, I'll let you in. You don't necessarily have to like them, but you should have an appreciation for a more diverse talent. Although this may sound as if I'm undermining my readers, I would gladly invite you to listen if I could know you were sincere.

Why am I so selfish about my music?

Well, perhaps some of you can recall listening to certain music because of an older sibling. My older brother didn't find my interest as flattering. He condemned me from any and all of his music. On a good night, Brian would allow me to stand in his doorway and plead to borrow a piece of paper, let alone anything having to do with music.

He is a musician, and I learned that musicians are very protective



Lara Duda

of these things. Something happened one night in the spring of 1990 that would change the aura of the Duda household forever. Brian decided at some point during my sophomore year — his senior year — in high school that the quality of music seeping through our thin walls had finally gained his musical approval.

On this notable evening, he came knocking at my door (which in itself was curious because he usually would pound). He came to ask me if I wanted to listen to a new bootleg his friend from out East just sent him.

"It's pretty cool. You can borrow it for awhile. You may actually like it," he said. So, of course, I jumped at the opportunity and listened to the treasure my big brother had given me. I stared at my old boom box while a guy sang to me about a "tipsy fuddled boozy groovy elevated prime did edit her hellborn elf child." It was different to say the least. These bizarre sounds and instruments somehow created a tune of intertwining rhythms that sounded pretty good until ... chhhhhkkkkkkshhhhhh click!

My eyes popped and my stomach knotted. The situation was an unfortunate entanglement of my brother's new tape and my death was flashing before me. But instead of reaching for the nearest knife to quicken my fate to come, I began

to operate on the plastic.

For two hours I untwisted, cut, taped and reeled the thread back inside the plastic container. When I finished I prayed for a few minutes, went to my brother, handed him the tape and said, "Thanks, Bri. Yeah, you were right; they were pretty cool."

It worked, I guess, or at least I got away with it, because he never said a word. I had not only saved myself from losing the respect from my brother I had waited my 14 years to earn, but I received an extra gift on the side — Phish, that's my secret — the greatest musical talent of the decade and beyond.

And if you know someone who believes music is more than just a good beat or provocative lyrics, you'll already know what I'm getting at.

My concern with letting people in on Phish is that, although the group is fairly new in the popular music industry, they have already have a following — kind of like the Grateful Dead. And some trendy or undedicated listeners might listen because they're "cool," or maybe even because drugs can sometimes be found at Phish shows — like most concerts.

And that's not what people should be looking for in music. A Phish listener should appreciate the talent and endorse the creativity. My brother was waiting until he thought I understood this concept, he told me later. Call it selfish, but music for we die-hard listeners is personal.

So, if you're willing to take a dip along the suspending drift of Phishy waters, go ahead, but I give it to you as I would any secret.

With the trust that you'll listen.

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Support wholesome TV: Watch 'Christy'

For some, it's Holy Week, and the broadcast networks are responding in their usual ways. Reaching back into the archives they are giving us the ancient film "The Ten Commandments" with Charlton Heston in his water-dividing role of Moses. And we're getting another look, for the umpteenth time, at "The Sound of Music," starring Julie Andrews when she was still a virgin and before her gender-blurring role in "Victor-Victoria."

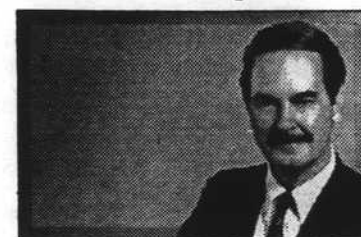
Most of commercial television remains a garbage dump, from the daytime talk shows that feature trash talk and trashier people, to the nighttime foul language, partial nudity and the portrayal of dysfunctional lives as normal.

But wait. CBS is resurrecting a show that, when it premiered last Easter, attracted more than 30 million viewers and for six straight weeks delivered higher ratings than the network's average for its time period all last season (or this season). The demographics were good, especially among women, whom networks and advertisers love to reach. But for reasons known only to the alien life forms called network executives, the show dropped out of sight after its initial episodes.

Yet remarkably CBS is giving the show "Christy" one more try. This Saturday and next at 7 p.m. CDT, CBS will air two new episodes of a story set in Tennessee's Smokey Mountains featuring some of the loveliest scenery and most wonderful acting one is likely to see on network television. The series is based on Catherine Marshall's best-selling book, set in 1912, about a young teacher in Appalachia who succeeds in making a difference in the lives of poverty-stricken children. (Speaker Gingrich and President Clinton, please note.)

This week's story, "To Have and to Hold," is full of the virtues we once promoted as a nation: selflessness, reconciliation and family closeness. It takes a little getting used to — no special effects, nudity, profanity, car crashes or other gimmicks often used by the networks to appeal to our lower natures.

If ever a show — and its writers, producers, actors and



Cal Thomas

sponsors — deserved to occupy a regular time slot on a network, "Christy" is it. One of the executive producers, Ken Wales, believed in the story so much that he mortgaged his house and spent all he had just to buy the rights from MGM, which was sitting on it with apparently no intention of bringing the story to the screen.

If "Christy" and any other show like it is going to succeed, it will need an outpouring of support from people who have been critical of television. Groups that regularly condemn television's content and sometimes boycott its advertisers now have a wonderful opportunity to show what they're FOR.

Thinking about "Christy"'s fight for life, I recalled a conversation I had some years ago with the then-president of NBC Television, Robert Mulholland. He said that on one prime-time night, CBS had broadcast the 1981 Best Picture Academy Award-winner "Chariots of Fire," and NBC counter-programmed with a film based on a Jackie Collins novel.

"Guess which film had the higher ratings?" he asked me. It was the trash film, of course. The implication was that CBS had given people what many said they wanted, but they failed to respond in sufficient numbers.

The next two Saturday nights are opportunities for those who want to see some light shine in the network darkness. Turn on your sets, watch "Christy" and then flood the network and sponsors with letters of approval. And buy the advertisers' products. This may be one of the few chances left for good television.

It's time for those who have been making so much anti-TV-programming noise to put up or shut up. There couldn't be a better vehicle than "Christy." Moses and the Von Trapp family can wait.

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Ethnic humor not always funny

In these sensitive times, you would think that a U.S. senator would be hip enough to avoid clumsy attempts at ethnic or racial humor.

Especially a senator from New York, with its diverse population.

But Sen. Al D'Amato stuck his foot in his mouth when he went on a radio show and ridiculed Judge Lance Ito's handling of the O.J. Simpson trial by jabbering in what he thought was a Japanese accent.

His clumsy performance made headlines and was broadcast by the TV networks for the whole nation to hear.

Now he has had to sheepishly apologize to angry Japanese Americans and anyone else who was offended.

As foolish as D'Amato was, I can sympathize with him. Like him, I am part of a generation that used to take ethnic jokes for granted.

And like him, I once managed to blab myself into an embarrassing situation. The memory still makes me cringe and feel ashamed.

It happened when I was the best man at a wedding and the master of ceremonies at the big reception banquet.

As emcee, I thought I would get the crowd loose with a few jokes.

So I told the one about how the German field marshal and the Italian general who were mapping last-minute strategy before leading their combined armies into a great battle against the Allied forces in World War II.

When the meeting ended, the German field marshal said to his orderly: "Otto, get my coat." And he put on a coat of blazing red leather.

The Italian general pondered that for a moment, then said: "Hey,



Mike Royko

that ainta bad idea. Luigi, getta me my brown pants."

Well, about half of the audience laughed heartily. But the other half just stared coldly at me.

Then I remembered — the bride was of Italian ancestry and I had offended her many Italian-American relatives.

Instead of shifting gears and leading them in a song or a toast, I foolishly decided to tell another joke.

It was the one about the guy who walks into a joint and said to the man behind the counter: "I want a Polish sausage sandwich."

The man behind the counter said: "Excuse me, sir, but are you Polish?"

The customer indignantly said: "What kind of question is that? If somebody came in here and ordered a salami sandwich, would you ask him if he were Italian? If someone wanted a corned-beef sandwich, would you ask him if he were Irish? So just because I order a Polish sausage sandwich, why do you ask me if I'm Polish?"

The man behind the counter said: "I asked you that, sir, because this is a hardware store."

Well, now the bride's Italian relatives chuckled a bit, but the groom's side scowled in obvious

disgust.

And too late I remembered — the groom was of Polish ancestry, so I had offended his many Polish-American relatives.

At that point, I should have told the orchestra to strike up a tune and got everyone dancing so they could work off their anger.

But I panicked and foolishly tried to save the day with one last joke.

It was the one about the two Irishmen who lurched out of a bar and looked up at the sky.

One of them said: "Look, 'tis the sun."

The other one said, "Nah, you're daft. 'Tis the moon."

And they leaned against a light pole and argued: "'Tis the sun. ... No, 'tis the moon."

Then a third Irishman staggered out of the bar, and they said: "Tell us, friend, is that the sun or the moon?"

The third Irishman looked up, then shrugged and said: "How should I know? I don't live in this neighborhood."

There were a few soft snickers, but a voice came from a man sitting nearby. "An unkind stereotype, my boy, and a corny one at that."

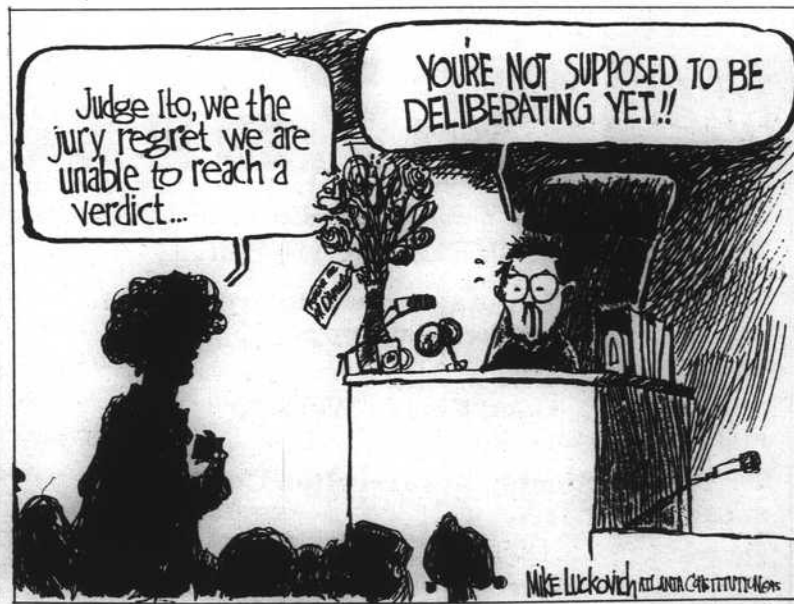
It was the family priest who had married the couple. He shook his head sadly and sighed.

And I remembered — he was from Ireland and a teetotaler to boot.

Well, I have never felt more foolish in my life. Fortunately, the orchestra began playing, so nobody was listening when I said:

"Hey, did you hear about the man from Mars and the farmer's daughter?"

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