

A Winter Solstice Gift For You

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It may seem incredible to me (and to some of you, too), but it is nevertheless a fact: I have been editor of the *American Rationalist* for ten years now.

It was in 1996 that Dr. Gordon Stein, the former editor, died, and soon after I was offered the editorship by the Rationalist Association of St. Louis, the publisher of *AR* at the time. It was exactly ten years ago: The November/December 1996 issue is the first one I officially edited. Among the distinguished contributing editors at the time were Walter Hoops, Paul Kurtz, and Frank Mortyn. Marge Mignacca was already here, and so was Bernard Katz. C. Lee Hubbell was the Associate Editor and Barbara Stocker, the Managing Editor.

It may be that I sometime feel the same way as the guy who wrote the following famous lines from a very famous song: „And then one day you find ten years have got behind you. No one told you when to run, you missed the starting gun." Maybe I should have done more. Or maybe another editor would have done a better job. I don't know. All I know is that I am not taking anything for granted any more. And not taking for granted anything any more also includes the likelihood that this may or may not be the last issue of *AR* I am editing. After all, as I explained earlier in this issue, I am now living in the here and now. The future is just a mirage. So is the past. If *fortuna* hits, I will be prepared to move on.

Such a memorable anniversary — 60 issues of the *AR* — calls for some reflection ... and a gift for all of you who have supported us during the decade. So I am offering a gift, a winter solstice present.

I have always been fascinated by music, certain types of music, that is. I have little interest in jazz and almost none in country music, for example. Otherwise my music tastes are quite cosmopolitan. I am likely to be blown away as easily by Pyotr Tchaikovsky as by Amon Amarth, a melodic death metal band from Sweden: I love to listen to „Swan Lake," but I also love to listen to "Across the Rainbow Bridge."

Without music I would probably not be able to live sanely. Like Vonnegut, I think there is something magical, something supra-rational, something ultimately mysterious about music. If I ever believed in a god, it would have to be a god of music, music being the only evidence that there might be somewhere a being, who although indifferent to our fate, is benevolent enough to give us the consolation of a heavenly melody.

There is more, but this is enough. My time may be running out, and my space on this page, the last page of this edition of *AR*, certainly is. And I still need a quarter page to present my gift.

For years now, over three decades in fact, I have been collecting gems of music. I have collected hundreds, and I listen to them obsessively, compulsively. My music collection has given me endless hours of pleasure. I hope these gems will also give you pleasure.

In search of these gems, I often have my radio on 24/7 to monitor the music market. Or I will spend hours listening to sample recordings online on Amazon.com, for example. Much of what is played by radio stations in the US is trashy, commercialized music. But once in a long while, after digging in a mountain of dirt and garbage I will find a gem — I guess the only way to find gems. I would then record it, as well as write down the artist's name and the title, if those are available. If not, I would then try to track down the artist somehow. Usually I would eventually identify most musicians or bands. In a few cases, I have never been able to determine who the artist is. I may not find out ever.

Below I am offering ten gems that I consider masterpieces of the kind of instrumental music usually called New Age (not a good name). The label doesn't matter; the music does. The list is strictly mine; I make no claim to be a music expert and couldn't care less if experts should disagree. But I do care that you like this music and that it will give you at least some of the pleasure it has given me.

Now is a good time: this is, after all, the great Pagan-Humanist holiday of the Return of the Sun, our first and only „god" who actually exists and makes all life possible.

I wish you all — *AR* readers; our colleagues from the Center of Inquiry, the publisher of *AR*; and Charles Klotzer, our man in St. Louis who has printed all these 60 issues of *AR* — a

Happy 2006 Winter Solstice. Below is my gift: the ten best electronic-instrumental compositions I have found in the last 30 years of my life:

1. TANGERINE DREAM, "Rubycon," Part I (CD: Rubycon)
2. DAVID LANZ AND PAUL SPEER, „Behind the Waterfall" (CD: Natural States)
3. CUSCO, „Milky Way" (CD: Mystic Island)
4. DON HARRIS, „Pirouettes and Promises" (CD: Vanishing Point)
5. ASHRA, „Midnight on Mars" (CD: Blackouts)
6. DAVID ARKENSTONE, „Ancient Legend" (CD: Valley in the Clouds)
7. EXCHANGE, „Without Cause" (CD: Between Places)
8. DAVID LANZ AND PAUL SPEER, „Rain Forest" (CD: Natural States)
9. DAVID ARKENSTONE, „Continue to Be" (CD „Spirit Wind")
10. TANGERINE DREAM, "Part I" (CD: Ricochet)

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