

DON RICARDO'S REPORT FROM THE HIGH RHINE... 26 FEBRUARY 2014

Birdsong heralds the mornings, as twittering and skirmishing for a nest site under the tiles, a group of smaller sparrows gang up on a starling. The *Amseln*, or blackbirds are busy hunting worms in the garden. The little white *Schneeglocken*, the snowbells are up and the trees beginning to bud. The farmers are out plowing from early until dark. Down on the Rhine, the swans are displaying, holding their stiff wings extended like dragons. The water is down, awaiting spring runoff.

This hasn't been much of a winter, nothing compared to parts of the US. Even central Texas has had worse weather. The Swiss are calling this a *Winterli*, with the diminutive "li" attached to the end, the same way the Spanish affix "ito" or "ita" to the end of nouns to indicate smallness, and sometimes affection. A thin skin of ice covers the puddles in the mornings when I ride my bike out past the town. Quickly gone as the day warms up, I don't believe we've had any afternoon temperatures below freezing. It hasn't been a good year for the kids to go sledding, as we've had no snow at all this year. If I were a kid I expect this might piss me off, but I have to say I've much enjoyed my morning rides this winter.

Work goes forward on my new book project. Two or three writers of my acquaintance have begun and finished books in the time it has taken me to come up with a story and begin my research. So be it. I have another friend who's been working on an historical novel for ten years and counting. As I mentioned in the last newsletter, I've decided to try a novel this time. Based on a story I came across in the *Galveston Daily News* a few years ago, it's about two people caught up in the Storm of 1900. I've already written a song inspired by this story, called "All of This Was Mine" that will be coming out on our next CD. Marcus Stevens, a Montana novelist, wrote a book called *Useful Girl* that was inspired by a song of mine by that name. My plan is to try and perform the same alchemy with the Galveston story, and see if I've got a novel in me.

It's feels good to be back at work on a long term project. It may be there is no better feeling than doing the work you were meant for. The years erode our strength and elasticity and parts show wear; but a core remains: sound, polished with use, dependable, ongoing. Now to my amazement these characters from 1899 have begun to take form and speak to me in my dreams. I strive to listen and figure how to get it down.

In other news the long-vanished Johnny Cash album *Out Among the Stars* will be out next month with "Baby Ride Easy" occupying the second slot. Meanwhile, I have been nominated as Songwriter of the Year for the 12th Annual Texas Music Awards to be held in Linden on March 22nd. This is a considerable honor, twice-bestowed. I'm not a believer in music as a contest, but I feel grateful for the acknowledgement of time and the work put in over the years. This is all good news, especially for a long-time expatriate—or should I say Texpatriate—living in Switzerland. I feel humbled and grateful.

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In recent news from Switzerland a referendum to propose quotas on immigration passed by a narrow majority. Greeted by rumbles of discontent from the European Union and Big Business, the outcome elicited dire predictions from the press. The EU will have to renegotiate any number bilateral agreements. My take on this is that the Swiss don't like to be steamrolled into submission to an organization they chose not to join. Democracy is messy and interferes with business.... An update on a story in the September issue: after tearing up the flat that had been provided him, Carlos, the kick boxer was sent back to the general jail population. Only to be rescued by a higher court who turned him free. I don't know if he will be on the street, or if he will be given a new flat. In a bizarre spin-off story Edith just related this morning, the Thai boxing institute in Basel Land where Carlos trained came under attack last night by a band of 30 masked men wielding baseball bats. People were seriously hurt. Was this an attack by a rival martial arts warlord? The police are puzzled. These are strange doings in the land of cheese and chocolate. I'll be following this one, so stay tuned and we'll see you down the road.

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26 February 2014

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Books and records: In news of special interest to U.K and European readers, my music-travel-fishing memoir *Pleasures of the High Rhine* is now available in print edition through Amazon. Signed copies are available through My Texas Music.

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