

PULL/PUSH

(A Bits-&-Pieces piece)

by Frank Gagliano

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You ask me how the blind Oriental came to play the garbage can cover in front of Bodoni County City Hall?

I will tell you.

Once upon a time, not very long ago, a young violinist by the name of Pull My Jambe went on his first world tour. The young Pull was very pampered in his own country (a small ancient mountain city called, High Tessatura, located between Manchuria and Siberia), and much was expected from him on this tour.

Pull would bring glory and big bucks back to High Tessatura; to that end, Pull was given every luxury and comfort and convenience as he traveled. He could purchase anything he wanted. He traveled with a retinue of managers, secretaries, cooks, his very own gold Port-O-John—and five Head girls (whose sole job was to give Pull "head" whenever he required it).

Tonight, Pull was to be the major soloist of the evening, scheduled to open and close the orchestra's concert in the new Performing Arts Center & Breadsticks Factory (The PAC&BF) in a place called Bodoni County, U.S.A.

At first Pull had been honored to be booked as soloist for this prestigious, inaugural concert (He even put on a brand new Caucasian mask for the occasion; the blond one with the little turned up nose). But when Pull saw the program and what he was scheduled to play, he became troubled. On two counts:

Count #1) Pull's performances were to be sandwiched between-- Five Bruckner Symphonies; a concert version of the entire Ring Cycle by Richard Wagner; the First, Second and Third Symphonies of Gustav Mahler; Beethoven's, Eroica, Pastoral, and Ninth Symphonies; a two hour kazoo transcription of The Star Spangled Banner; Strauss's, Also Sprach Zarathustra and Four Last Songs (to be performed by the minor soloist of the evening, a seven year old, four-foot soprano from Mozambique).

Count #2) Pull did not know the two pieces he was listed to play.

Now, Pull was a very controlled Asian person — was taught, in fact, to be ultra controlled, stoic and tight-assed by his venerable master Mr. Push) — but opening and closing a two-month-long program, to be played in one night (and it was made clear to Pull that he was expected to sit on stage throughout the concert) and not knowing the pieces he was scheduled to play in front of 20,000 paying customers, made Pull feel less than secure — and even, for the first time, made his rage visible as it rose from his heels to his face cheeks and made the face cheeks burn under the smiling mask with the WASP upturned nose and blond hair.

So, to calm his nerves, Pull called for his Head girls, but they did not answer his call. Then he called for his secretaries and cooks and managers. He was told that they had defected. So

Pull tried to call his New York booking Management. But the New York office told Pull that pampered young violinists from small mountain Asian countries weren't selling any longer and that they were letting him go and that from now on he would be on his own and made a rude sound and then they hung up on him.

Abandoned. Alone. For the first time in his life, the pampered Pull had to deal--on his own!-- with a crisis in his career--in his life--so he tried to contact the Bodoni County Orchestra's Business Manager, Mr. Fettucini. But Mr. Fettucini couldn't be reached by phone. Because of the storm. Which was quite severe; so severe, in fact, that when he looked out the window, Pull saw that the water had already reached the second floor windows and that the rain showed no sign of letting up.

So Pull tracked down the Bodoni County Orchestra conductor, Maestro Sewickly, who was getting ready for the concert by painting his toenails scarlet in his dressing room, and Pull asked Maestro Sewickly if anyone could really expect him to play the two concertos that he did not know.

Pull was so agitated that he took off his WASP mask and waved it under the nose of the conductor. The Maestro was shocked to see that Pull was Asian. "Why, you're Asian!" said shocked Maestro Sewickly; who then made a quick mental note, in Pull's honor, to conduct tonight's 10-month-long concert with chopsticks.

Then Maestro Sewickly asked Pull to please blow on his toes while he looked over the scores of the concertos Pull was scheduled to play and was bitching about.

"Why," said Maestro Sewickly (after inspecting the scores), "these are works every solo trombonist should know."

"But I'm a violinist!" said Pull.

That made Maestro Sewickly furious and he re-Hush Puppied his toes and icily suggested that Pull "pull yourself together and pray to Buddha or some other Asian Machuh for guidance" and then pushed Pull out of the dressing room and slammed the door at Pull's back.

Pull, with WASP mask off, then tied together three metal music stands, two saxophones and a kettle drum, draped them all over his person, stood on the window ledge and got ready to jump into the raging gutter rapids.

Suddenly, behind Pull, there was a crash. Pull turned and saw that the glass in the oval wall mirror he had been ordered to carry with him wherever he went had fallen from the oval frame and had smashed onto the floor; and in the glass's place was the face of Pull's venerable old music master and all-around teacher and reigning disciplinarian — Mr. Push.

Mr. Push, always stern, said, "It has always been understood that I would be the one to tell you when to de-mask and de-live." And then, of course, venerable Push created on the spot one of his famous epigrams. "Because," epigrammed Push, "on your own you cannot throw flower petals onto the Ventura Freeway and expect the Cherubim of Malibu to aim their smiling tushies on you."

Pull was stunned. Here he was, WASP mask off, and on the verge of de-living himself out of fear and frustration in a

foreign place called Bodoni County, U.S.A., and his old venerable disciplinarian Master, Mr. Push had, in twenty words, aimed his verbal shaft of bullshit into the heart of Pull's angst; and Pull, as usual, didn't understand a word of it.

However, Pull, with bowed, obedient head (and in pain from the weight of the music stands and saxophones and kettle drum) automatically fell into the ancient "Knowledge By Epigram Combat" he had been forced to learn when, many, many years before, Mr. Push had caught Pull trying to plug a Peking Duck with his Lo Mein and, as punishment, forced Pull—for the rest of his life—to the "Combat." And, of course, in those "Combats," Pull was always defeated; and those defeats kept Pull subjugated and dispirited.

Would Pull be defeated this time? Somehow, if defeat came this time, Pull knew that it would really be over for him, forever and ever.

With no manager or hangers-on now, Pull wanted to be the one to make the decision about whether to keep the WASP mask on and/or whether to de-live.

And so, the "Knowledge by Epigram Combat" commenced:

"Do you suppose, my young Pull," said the pushy Push, pushing for an opening advantage, "do you suppose that the seaweed girdle coverting the kiwis of the Scandinavians can also smile on a country like Tallahassee?"

Pull immediately used the strategy of answering a question with another question.

“But, Master,” re-questioned Pull, “cannot a leaf of Springtime survive being used as toilet tissue in the outhouse of despair?”

“Only,” replied the old, but strong-voiced Master, ‘only if the bark of winter sprouts watercress in the sinuses of eternity.”

“But how,” insisted Pull, who's back was beginning to break, “can the compost heap of sorghum breed ice cream in the cavities of a flounder's naval?”

“The same way,” responded the now exasperated Master, “the same way that the bedbug lies dormant in the discarded wrinkles of an armadillo who has just had a face lift.”

“But if that is true,” pressured Pull, “how is it that the lice found in a stale blini often procreates even when gargling?”

“Because,” said the angry and now winding-down Push, “because the Sandy Lom yeast makes the mud rise on the tittie-bog and spread legs of mankind's horny plain.”

“Then who,” insisted Pull (getting stronger and stronger) and moving in for the kill, “who will answer the cayote's yelp when he licks the sap from the private parts of the hollyberry tree and dives into the flotsam of the swirling lake to try to save the giant anchovy from being sucked down into the gelatin of the kielbasa caves-of-lost-puspimples where all the world's suctioned cellulite is stored?”

This, of course, was too profound for the totally exhausted venerable Push to parry.

“I am old and full of wind and vocal nodes,” said defeated Push, “and I tried to interfere to save you--keep you tied to the authority that made you—and even got some broken glass up my nose for my troubles, when I smashed through the umbilical mirror of bondage; but I see now that the itchy back of your arrogance is beyond the scratch of my despairing old claws and I fear that I do not understand the world and its young any longer; so I shall retreat to the great rice fields among the fluted plains of pain. Goodbye, young Pull; from henceforwardbackwardandbeyond—you are on your own. I’m outta here.”

And venerable master Mr. Push. in a puff, passed over.

And then a clap of thunder followed by a lightning bolt struck the metal music stands still tied around Pulls neck and recharged Pull's sinking soul and made the kettle drum, also still tied to his person, reverb right into the heart of his coccyx and prostate and, as if freed from some terrible cramp in the back of the scruff of his scrotum, Pull pulled himself up; threw off the inner weight that had made him an Asian wuss all his life; flung away for good his WASP mask and violin (he always hated that damned violin!); beat with his bare hands the kettle drum, and, note-perfect, played on percussion the two trombone concertos he had never learned.

Yes! Pull, finally, had out-epigrammed his teacher, his father figure, the venerable asshole Push — and Pull was free enough to say that out loud now, as he loudly ejaculated:

“I HAVE FINALLY OUT-EPIGRAMMED MY TEACHER, MY FATHER FIGURE, THE VENERABLE ASSHOLE PUSH.”

And Pull, a man suddenly possessed, showed his own de-masked face to the Bodoni County world and played at the open window of the concert hall as the rain rained in on him; and the Ark, carrying the audience to the concert, dropped anchor, and all twenty thousand aboard got to their knees, broke wind and, soaked to the soul, listened in awe and reverence to the now percussionist Pull pound the kaka out of those skins.

And Pull continues to live in Bodoni County. And he sleeps in the raw and makes love to little brunette kettle-drum groupies on a bed of broken glass in his own platinum condominium-coffin. And, by day, he stands in front of the Bodoni County City Hall and beats out complicated ditties on garbage can covers.

Pull wears dark glasses and pretends to be blind. And watches. And, on occasion, he tells tales to the passing parade of the lost and lonely:

“--and so” (one tale might begin) “for his many sins, little kumquat was turned into a turtle and he swam the marshes and swamps and looked for heknewnotwhat but did a lot of slow turtlethinking and he imagined that he was a tall rockandroll lead guitarist playing in an apse at ourladyoftheboringbeat and people were kneeling in front of him and he blessed them by voiding his holy water on them—

but then that incarnation pisspassed and kumquat became the foreskin of a legendary Christian stud and then became the payus of an orthodox Jew and then the finger pulling on that payus

and also was transformed into other things quite charming things like the wellstrummed and tongueflicked southcentraluvula of an active talentless starlet

and then became gross things too like caked-up buggers in the nostrils of a very hairy Serbian brigadier general and a hemorrhoid in the bum of a sedentary congressman

but soon found himself in open water and swam to a barge that was a free floating garbage barge filled to overflow with stinking garbage from a large stinking city that no one wanted and had no captain captaining it

so finally kumquat turned into the skipper and ferried this garbagebargewithoutacountry, like some stinking Flying Nazi, and loved the endless aloneness of it all since kumquat knew that aloneness was the essence of life

and could always have a combat-of-the-epigrams with the seagulls and ask them things like

is there a puffcloud in the sky that god uses to powder and deodorize her armpits

and kumquat would imagine the seagull answering, only hogs that belch have the kind of warts that give milk

and Pull might then respond with but does that not mean— and on and on it would go like that until the end of time.

And so, without leaving his garbage can in front of the Bodoni County City Hall, Pull went on endless, wonderful journeys of the soul;

as despairing turtles, armadillos, sand hogs, orangutans, calamaris, etc.; and never, never, ever again took off his dark glasses.

But, he never ever again wore a WASP mask either; or any other mask; and, like most people in Bodoni County, lived sadly ever after.

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