

Birds of Mars Digest

Number Thirteen

May 2022



The 8 by 10 Series [75—81]
Paintings and comments by Chris Gentes

Drawings [78-97]

Birds of Mars Video Show [2201]

Introduction

In the back of my mind I am always thinking about making videos. In May I developed a format for presenting videos called “The Birds of Mars Video Show.” This arose out of a few creative activities including videotaping birds in nature, making paintings for the “8 by 10 Series”, recording original music, and videotaping actors working on scenes.

The intention is for each show to be twenty-one minutes long with six segments of 3.5 minutes each. Each segment may have an original song as a soundtrack. The sequence of segments is as follows: (1) Titles for one minute and then nature footage for 2.5 minutes. (2) Acting. (3) Art Being Created. (4) Spoken Word. (5) Fashion or Design. (6) Photo Essay 2.5 minutes and end credits/comments one minute.

Someone, if interested, could go back through all of the *Birds of Mars Digests*, as well as some of the books I’ve written, particularly *Birds of Mars Reader* (2019) and *Seven Movie Scripts* (2020) to learn more about my video creations through the years.

Chris Gentes
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June 1 2022

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The 8 by 10 Series [75—81]

All paintings are acrylic on stretched canvas except as otherwise notated in the main text. Size is either 8x10” or 10x8” depending on whether the painting is in vertical or horizontal orientation.

Index for earlier paintings from “The 8 by 10 Series”

- 1—24: *Birds of Mars Digest Number Seven* (Apr.—Oct. 2021)
- 19, 25—32: *Birds of Mars Digest Number Eight* (Nov. 2021)
- 33—40: *Birds of Mars Digest Number Nine* (Dec. 2021)
- 41—49: *Birds of Mars Digest Number Ten* (Jan. 2022)
- 50—61: “Colorcubes”: *Birds of Mars Digest Number Eleven* (Feb. 2022)
- 62—74: *Birds of Mars Digest Number Twelve* (March-April 2022)
- 68, 70, 74, 79 & 80: “Cruellas” *in progress*

May 2022 Paintings

- 075 Misty
- 076 Body and Soul
- 077 Play This 1
- 078 Play This 2
- 081 Allegro Impetuoso

I'm going to take this opportunity to list the paintings in the 'music' series to date within the greater series of paintings which I refer to as the "8 by 10 Series":

63 Modulations 1, 64 Modulations 2, 69 Novelette, 71 Harmony, 72 A Semitone, 73 Allegro con brio, 75 Misty, 76 Body and Soul, 77 Play This 1, 78 Play This 2, and 81 Allegro Impetuoso.

75 Misty is the seventh painting within this music series. I painted this one a few weeks before writing these comments now, so I don't recall all of the particular decisions and reactions that happened while painting it. So I will see what I can remember while looking at the painting and write about that.

How I made the staffs. I found a sheet of some kind of synthetic rubber that had a 3D pattern of lines on it. Perfect to make a stamp. So I carefully cut a strip which had five of these lines. I glued this onto a piece of cardboard and after it set I applied some paint directly to my new 'stamp' and proceeded to impress five rows of these 'staffs.'

By the time I was making this one I had already settled into a 'routine' of what it means to make one of these paintings. A sheet of paper on which something relating to music is written. A background. The area on the bottom right where I sign my name. The notes and musical symbols. Letters that make up titles, composer's names, tempo directions, and song information. This is a fairly narrow collection of things to paint. These are my chords if you will. I can arrange them in many different

ways—these become analogous to the ‘voicings’ of the notes of those chords.

I wanted it to include the plastic binding thing along the edge. The song is in the Real Book—a collection of standard jazz tunes, and that is how these books are usually bound. I used the stamp of the lines sideways toward the right and that looks like the other pages.



75 Misty, 8x10 inches, Acrylic on Canvas.

76 Body and Soul is one of those songs that you've got to know as a tenor saxophone player. One year ago (June 2021) I made a real concentrated effort to learn it, and eventually, for the most part, I was able to do so. Since then I've continually been working on memorizing various chord changes and developing my ability to improvise over them. I've also been working on deepening my understanding of music theory.

In particular I've been looking at the subject of "Thorough Bass" and trying to learn as much as I can about it. There are many primers from previous centuries on the topic and I am wading through this large data-field in an effort to deepen my own understanding of the subject.

One thing I am realizing is that the composers of the 1700s and 1800s seemed to think about music in a fundamentally different way than those I know of in the 1900s and 2000s. There seems to be more emphasis on tonality—consonance and dissonance. Music is seen as a progression from one state to the other. Intervallic.

It still is thought of in terms of consonance and dissonance, but it seems as if the way of thinking of this flow is with chords progressions. The information of the modulations is within the chords.

This process is akin to learning a language. There is a syntax. Information is conveyed. There is a fundamental core (a set of parameters based on physics and the human form) from which all musical possibilities arise. Systems arise out of this playing field of possibility and from these

77 Play This 1 is an unusual painting in that it contains within it a rendition of a lesson from a music book from the 1800s. I wanted to make a painting of it because I thought how funny it seemed that a two-hundred year old book had rules about how to play something. I also thought it was funny how it said “of rendering some chords.” It seems so formal and old-fashioned. I like how it is telling the reader how to play something. A 180 year old music rule.

These old music books are filled with so many examples and exercises like this that I can't imagine how anyone would have the time to understand them all, let alone play through them. It is all so much work and time.

There are twelve keys in music. At least on piano, one wants to be able to play something in all twelve keys. That means understanding what the thing you are going to play is—a universal form. And then knowing how to play that universal form in a specific key. The notes and fingerings and arrangements for each key (at least on the piano) are unique. That means learning something twelve different ways. And each song may contain hundreds of things to know—and that means knowing how to play these hundred things in each key. $100 \times 12 = 1200$ ways.

It is an endless proposition. There is not enough time.

Take Example 14—as shown in the painting. Here we are given instruction on how to make a more harmonious sounding chord progression. It instructs us to play a G triad in first inversion rather than root position when moving to a C triad in 2nd inversion. Play this instead of

I painted **78 Play This 2** for all of the same reasons that I painted the previous painting. Here I deliberately let everything have a painterly look to it. I wanted it to look like ‘a painting.’ I left in all of the drips and rough brush marks. I used some stamps as well.

So what is this a painting of?

It is a painting of some musical notation that contains information. It is an instruction of how to play something in a specific manner so that there is a more harmonious progression of music.

It is also informed by all of the paintings which came before it in the “8 by 10 Series” of paintings. A look has evolved, including a spot where I add my signature.

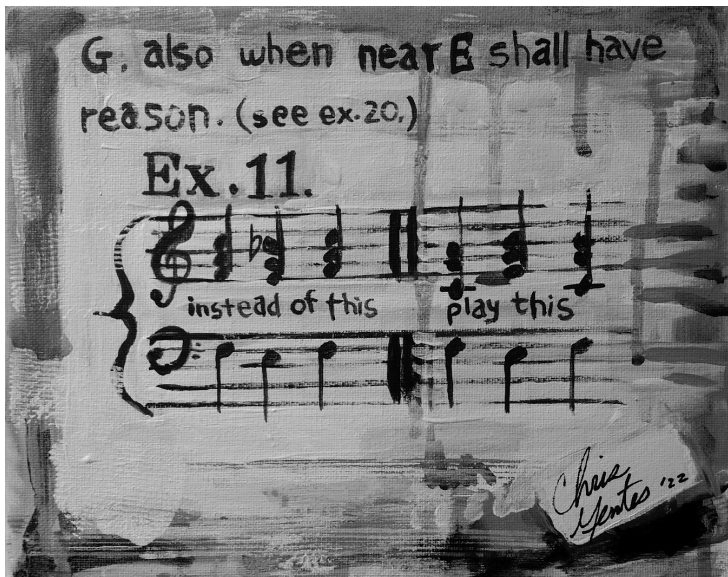
And what is the information? The bass notes are F, E and then F again. The first set of chord voicings, the ones that you are discouraged from playing, are an F triad, an E diminished triad, and then the F triad again. No, instead play this: An F triad in first inversion, then the E diminished triad, and back to the F triad with a C lowest.

So one would need a way of knowing what this meant. A universal understanding. Then one would need to know it in each key. So, if one spent five minutes working this out for each key, an hour would be needed.

The universal understanding of what this might be would go something along these lines: “This is a progression of the triads F to E diminished and then back to F. If F is the I chord, which it seems to be, then E diminished would be the vii(b5) chord. So this progression

is I vii(b5) I. The I triad should be played in first inversion, with the fifth below. Now apply this to each key.

For example, in the key of B the first triad would be F#, B, D#. The next triad would be the vii(b5), which in the key of B consists of A#, C#, E. And then back to F#, B, D#. Each key for five minutes an hour. Playing the first ten exercises just to get to exercise eleven would take 10 hours. There are thousands of exercises.




78 Play This 2, 8x10 inches, Acrylic on Canvas.

81 Allegro Impetuoso is a painting that is based on a suggestion by a friend whom has one of the earlier paintings from the “8 by 10 Series” in his collection. He had seen some of my other music notation paintings, and one day in May I saw him on Strong Avenue where he gave me a suggestion for a painting. Something based on the Fugue in D Minor by J. S. Bach. The Chromatic Fantasia.

So this is the painting that evolved out of that. I am working on a few more as well based on this composition.

There is quite a lot to say about this painting and what went in to making it, however it doesn't seem as if that would be interesting to read about. Maybe I will record something about it for a future Birds of Mars Video Show.

For now I will return to the topic of how all of the old music books are always cautioning, almost berating the reader to avoid parallel fifths at all costs. Below is an extract from a book about modulations from 1884 which I found particularly humorous.

* Thereby making, with *c*, moving to *g*,  the faulty progression called *parallel Fifths* (less properly, *consecutive Fifths*), the *bête noire* of beginners in Harmony. Fortunately, the modulations of this method are all so arranged that we can never by any possibility encounter so dreadful an apparition.

Faulty progression?! The Bete Noire! A dreadful apparition! This is how the author characterizes the sound of these parallels fifths. He assures us his method will help avoid them.

In the index of Helmholtz's 1877 The Sensations of Tone we find the following entry: "*Fifths, consecutive, why forbidden.*"

He explains why they are forbidden, but doesn't necessarily agree that they should be. He says this is a rule which sprang out

of musical advancement into polyphony. A rule that works well with ‘quiet, gentle, well-contrived’ ecclesiastical ‘stream of sound’ music. But, “where music has to express effort and excitement these rules become meaningless.”

Helmholtz then points out that hidden and false relation fifths are found in abundance in the chorales of Sebastian Bach, a composer otherwise very strict with their harmonies.



81 Allegro Impetuoso. 8x10". Acrylic on Canvas.

Drawings [78—97]
May 1-31, 2022

- 078 Major Seven Study Sheet
- 079 New Practice Sheet: Diatonic
- 080 New Practice Sheet: Modulations
- 081 Basic Practice Sheet 1
- 082 Basic Practice Sheet 2
- 083 Scales Practice Sheet
- 084 Lesson One
- 085 Movie Idea
- 086 Song for movie idea 1
- 087 Song for movie idea 2
- 088 Study: Naima
- 089 Study: Bach letters
- 090 Video Show #2201
- 091 Photo Journal Test
- 092 Video Show #1
- 093 Video Show #2
- 094 All Triads
- 095 Triads Practice Sheet
- 096 Consonant Triads
- 097 Related Keys

Birds of Mars Video Show

Scenes & Music for Films

I am interested in understanding and creating music, painting, video, and writing. But what does that mean?

It means, of course, many things. One of which is, at least, the journey of discovery. The unfolding of the creative process. Time is required. Everything is not simultaneous. There are various parts to the whole which occur in sequence. Not everything is known ahead of time. There is a process—the creative process. An artist is the one who decides and creates. That usually means intention and a plan, as described below.

I use the term artform to describe a completed work of art, whether a painting or drawing, sculpture, video, or musical composition (or combination of all of these), or something else. The creative process involves:

- A decision to create the artform.

- A plan to make the intended artform.

- The activity of making the artform.

- The completion of the endeavor and a tangible artform.

- The reflection upon the experience of creating the artform.

- The response of others to the artform.

When video is involved there is also a documentation of the process at every step.

Anyone who reads all of this will know that I am interested in documenting things. I am also interested in the experiences of others and how they relate to mine. All of this informs any subsequent creations.

Birds of Mars Video Show #2201 Scenes & Music for Films

MPEG-4, 960x540

15 minutes 14 seconds

The show begins with upbeat piano music. The titles are shown—"Birds of Mars Video Show". The titles are animated in black and white with an occasional lens flare.



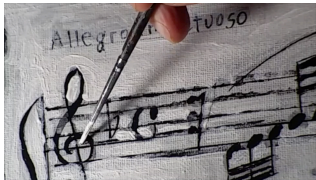
After one minute a great blue heron on a nest with four young herons is shown. The piano music continues in the background.



At 3:40 there is a sequences of spontaneous improvised acting with Kaylita and Joe.



At the 7:22 there is a close-up sequence of painting *81 Allegro Impetuoso*. The music is based on the beginning of the Bach fugue in D minor.



At 11:00 there is another sequence of acting with Kaylita and Joe.



At 12:10 there is a sequence of thirty photos of graffiti—a photo essay. The music is an original composition with synthesizers.



At 14:40 the end credits roll as follows:

Birds of Mars Video Show
Scenes & Music for Films
#2201

Featuring Spontaneous Improvisational Acting by Kaylita and Joe.
Music, videography, and editing by Chris Gentes.

This is where I would add any information about the show. For example I might write about how while I was taking photos of the graff for the photo journal segment a bicycle patrol man rode by me in an out of the way alley. Was it just a coincidence? The very next day all of that graff was buffed over.

Also, I mentioned to a friend that when I document graff I always end up randomly meeting the taggers, and then sure enough, the next day I saw someone putting up stickers. I went to talk to them, but they got nervous and rode off on their bicycle. So that happens as a matter of course.

Birds of Mars

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15:14—End.