

DR. DONALD ZITHER ON "THIS IS NOT MY BODY"

(a speech given at Penemunde Universitäts Kollegium des Ethno-musicologie in 1985)

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is Dr. Donald Zither speaking to you from Penemunde Universitäts Kollegium des Ethno-musicologie in West Germany. I would like to talk about the song "This Is Not My Body" as written and performed by the Anachronisms. I intend to engage in an exploration into the depths of its structure and its meaning, especially as they relate to the problems of the individual in modern society.

Not having paid any attention to the details of the music of the Anachronisms until very recently, despite the fact that my son is one of their members, their ingenuity is all the more striking. How should I begin. (pause). Unlike most other musical groups and without even trying, the Anachronisms have managed to incorporate into their lyrics deep philosophical insights into the sociological and psychological problems of modern society and its individuals. This lyrical ability adds immeasurably to the power of the music itself. I am not saying something new; it has been long espoused by many others, the most notable and noted person being the distinguished Canadian professor of musico-ethnology, Professor Hardwick Herpes of the Freelton Academy of Research Techniques. His discourses on the subject are infinitely fascinating and, indeed, intriguing.

But, now, back to get back to the matter at hand, which is an in-depth exploration into themes inherent in the song "This Is Not My Body". The song was composed by Sid Herpes, whose lyrics are noted for their biting satire and their concise to-the-point comments about the problems which face the individual and society. And these insightful lyrics are confidently carried over to the listener on the wings of the most adequately-crafted music with a driving rhythm which accentuates the desperate urgency of the words. In fact, the very first thing which one notices about this song is the unrelenting urgency of the music, which brings to mind memories of "The Druid Beat". Indeed, "This is not my Body" fulfills the promise of greater things to come which was made by the Anachronisms when they bombarded the world of music, and, indeed, the world as a whole, with that previous song and album, "The Druid Beat". Yes, indeed, extremely well-crafted songs they are. But their emotional force can be enhanced, almost astronomically, when they are sung by the right person.

In the case of this particular song, the voice of the singer is well suited to the sense of insecurity of the lyrics and to the sense of urgency of the music. The well-phrased singing of Hector La Paunche greatly enhances the strong druid beat rhythm of the song, and the two of them together carry the full import of the lyrics to the listener splendidly. The song gives one the feeling that, although the singer realizes that he is in such a dreadful position as not possessing his own body, he can do nothing about his desperate situation. The person possesses his own shoes despite the fact that he does not possess his own body. The song places

the listener squarely in the shoes of this person. This song forces the listener to ponder the opposite of the well-known saying, "If the shoe fits, wear it.". The listener must ponder the following. If you wear your shoe, must it be the case that it fits, especially if you are not in possession of your body. Indeed, the song forces the listener to confront many of the deep-seated problems which exist in our society but which most of us choose to ignore.

Now, I will proceed to discuss the song itself in more detail and its multi-faceted symbolism. The song is about many things, not only about the psychological problem of the person singing about the fact that the body he is using is not his, nor about the physical problem, if, in fact, the body he is using is not his own body. It is about the problems of society in general, especially those of materialism and consumerism. The song also brings to mind a problem which has occupied the efforts of many a philosopher -- the mind/body problem. But what the song is really about is the individual psyche's struggle with the demands of materialism. Such a battle can lead to a strengthening of the psyche; but it can also bring about problems such as that of our particular individual. Even if his problem is not a psychological one, but is, as he believes, a physical one in which he has somehow lost possession of his own body and has acquired someone else's, the very fact that he managed to lose his body is testimony to the fact that psychological stress has taken its toll. It becomes obvious from the things he mentions in the song that the pressure comes from the demands of materialism.

There is a polarity between stability and instability found throughout the song. In a desperate attempt to find secure objects or ideas to offset the insecure feeling of not having his own body, he finds many seemingly stable things around himself, such as his shirts, his trousers and his shoes, but these are insufficient to allay his terrible trauma. Let's take his shoes as an example. Shoes are very solid things. They help a person to keep his/her feet on the ground. The person in the song knows his own shoes and knows where they are; the same goes for his socks, if he wears any. Yet he believes that the feet inside those socks, inside those shoes, are not his. And when he turns to money, what many consider to be something one can always count upon, he finds that even that most worshiped idol in the materialistic pantheon is not solid, but goes round and round without stopping. He says "'Round and 'round the money goes /

Another definite thing which he mentions is the Law, which is something that Western society especially holds sacred. He says, "This is where they make the Law." Now, this place which he mentions might be the judicial system or some other institutional apparatus, but I do not think it is. I think that it refers to the human mind, which is the ultimate source of the Law. With the aid of social and institutional tradition, which is the memory of humankind, as it were, the individual brings once more the gift of Law to his day and age; he makes the Law. Although the person in the song realizes this idea, that his mind is where the Law originates, this pales in comparison to his overwhelming problem, that the body he is in is not his own. For, he ends the verse again with "But this is not my body". Indeed, for him, all other things pale in comparison to this overwhelming problem.