

## *MEANINGFUL BACKUP PLAYING: ANALYSIS*

(1)

After careful study, you have rejected conventional Western guitar tunings as bourgeois and limiting. You eagerly await the instruction book that comes with the Mordovian seven-string zmérz that you ordered online, and figure that with a little adaptation you'll have a bright new tuning to inflict on your session buddies.

(2)

You decide after long thought that since learning the notes of a lot of tunes is plainly going to be beyond your skill level, you shouldn't have to pay any attention to what the melody players are doing, as long as your accompaniment FEELS GOOD to YOU. You persist in this belief in spite of nearly being stoned by an angry mob for repeated use of an F-diminished resolving to a B flat minor ninth in the turn of "The Bucks of Oranmore". As you recover in hospital, you give careful consideration to giving up Irish music in favor of Uzbeki death chants, until you read in Wikipedia that one of the better-known death chants is directed at Uzbeki "flort-kneef", roughly translated as "backup musicians who screw around with the harmony".

(3)

A well-intentioned but misguided friend gives you a book that says "Irish traditional music is normally based on a I - IV - V or I - VII harmonic structure." Instead of trying to figure out what the hell the Roman numerals mean, you decide to become a "harmonic anarchist" and begin using your session time to explore challenging new harmonies of your own. You spend a lot of time trying to listen to Bartok. You get pissed off when you can't strum along with any of his chamber music, but you rationalize your failure by blaming your over-exposure to bourgeois and limiting

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Celtic music. In the meantime you begin to notice fewer and fewer musicians at your regular sessions, and the ones that remain have all started wearing earplugs. There are a lot of empty seats at your end of the table. That cute Donegal waitress who smiled at you occasionally doesn't seem to be working session nights any more. Everybody (including you) knows that you pay 50 cents more for your beers than anyone else at the session.

(4)

Before YOU started blazing new rhythmic trails at your Sunday evening session, reels were generally 4/4, hornpipes 2/4, and jigs 6/8. The new enlightened you considers these fractions to be bourgeois, limiting, and not a little patriarchal, and you begin experimenting with 5/4 and 7/16 and other trigonometric functions unrelated to Irish music. You start listening to old Bob Marley tapes and spend a month figuring out where the backbeat goes. You're surprised one evening to find that your regular session - which you started - seems to have moved to another pub. Nobody is sure where, but the places you hear mentioned are all at least twenty miles away, even occasionally in another state. The lack of straight answers begins to concern you. Is that another angry mob in the parking lot?

(5)

The only gigs you get these days are with 78-year old box players who wear hearing aids in both ears and whose wives drive them everywhere. You find yourself playing a lot of nursing homes for \$25 "gas money". You send emails to ITM superstars reminding them of your availability, but they get returned with a lot of cyber-gibberish meaning "addressee unknown". You show up to play at a céili and end the night in the parking lot getting stoned - not by cannabis as formerly, but by an angry mob (different from the other ones). Back in your favorite hospital, you begin to wonder whether

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being on the cutting edge of Irish trad accompaniment is worth all the trouble.

If any of this sounds familiar, I respectfully suggest that you seek professional help immediately. Soon you'll be able to contact the "Zouki Cultural Labs Backup Help-Line" for assistance. It will be up and running as soon as we re-purpose the "hostesses" who used to cover the "ZCL Love Problems" hotline we had to shut down. Cost of the call will be a mere \$25 per minute, but imagine the embarrassment it will save you!

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