



Journeying Past Susannah

(January 1, 1946 – May 19, 2001)

“Jazz artist Susannah McCorkle gives a concert — with songs primarily from the great American Songbook — as she hurtles to her suicide on NY’s West 87th street”

This Susannah McCorkle blurb is a new one. Got the idea from rereading Arthur Miller’s last play, *“Resurrection Blues.”* An opening *“Resurrection Blues”* monolog by the character Jeanine, a failed Revolutionary, and a failed suicide, relates what she (Jeanine) was experiencing as she hurtled down from the third floor of a building — only to miraculously survive. It’s a quasi-comic tour de force, establishing the entire tone of Miller’s *“Resurrection Blues.”* . . . Jazz and cabaret artist

Susannah McCorkle did, alas, succeed. . . .From Wikipedia: *“She died by suicide at age 55 by leaping off the balcony of her apartment at 41 West 86th Street in Manhattan on May 19, 2021. She was alone in her home at the time. The police immediately entered her home after identifying her body and found no evidence of foul play. Suicide was ruled the cause of death.”*

At the time of her suicide, Sandy and I lived on West 87th Street. Our bedroom faced the back of McCorkle’s 87th Street apartment building.

Motive? . . .Depression? Perhaps. Perhaps not.

Perhaps the answer to the dramatic question, *“Why”* she killed herself, is in the songs she chose to record; they ran the gamut of human emotions, as only those—primarily American Songbook’s genius composers and lyricists she gave voice to — often achieved. And she would often include unknown songs of the masters; introduce me to songs I did not know. For example, in her Irving Berlin award-winning tribute, *“Let’s Face The Music and Dance,”* McCorkle couples Berlin’s standard, *“Everybody Knew But Me,”* with his (unknown—to me), *“When You Walked Out The Door, Somebody Else Walked In.”*

She was also proficient in Portuguese, and a great interpreter of the songs of Brazilian composer Antônio Carlos Jobim. Her superb mix, in her English/Portuguese recording of Jobim’s brilliant *“Waters of March,”* was a big hit.

From Wikipedia: “In Brazil, March is typically marked by sudden storms with heavy rains and strong winds that cause flooding in many places around the city. . .

which typically would carry sticks, stones, bits of glass, and almost everything and anything.”

Here's part of Jobim's unique lyric: "A stick a stone/ It's the end of the road/ It's the rest of a stump/ It's a little alone/ It's a sliver of glass/ It is life, it's the sun/ It is night, it is death/ It's a trap, it's a gun/ The oak when it blooms/ A fox in the brush/ A knot in the wood/ The song of a thrush/ The wood of the wind/ A cliff, a fall/ A scratch, a lump/ It is nothing at all/ It's the wind blowing free/ It's the end of the slope/ It's a beam / it's a void/ It's a hunch/ it's a hope/ ...

After reviewing all her albums —and in today's zeitgeist and from my older age —I'm convinced that the answer to the question of why McCorkle's sound and her journey to suicide so haunts me anew, and in a special way— the *why she did it*, might be found in her unique mix of song titles chosen for her compilations. And perhaps . . .specifically, and especially . . . in that Brazilian song collage of fragmented images, "Waters Of March." —Or was it in that husky-tinged voice that could both swing into joy — while breaking my heart?

Worth my working on for some sort of theatre piece. No?

FG

(Pittsburgh, 14 January 2023)

McCorkle album samples (MP4s)

1) "Waters of March" (Jobim) / 2) "Remember My Forgotten Man" (Harry Warren/Al Dubin) / 3) "Love Walked In" (George/Ira Gershwin) 4) Medley: "Everybody knew but me"/"When you walked out, somebody else walked in." 5) "Let's Face The Music and Dance" / 4-5 (Irving Berlin)

