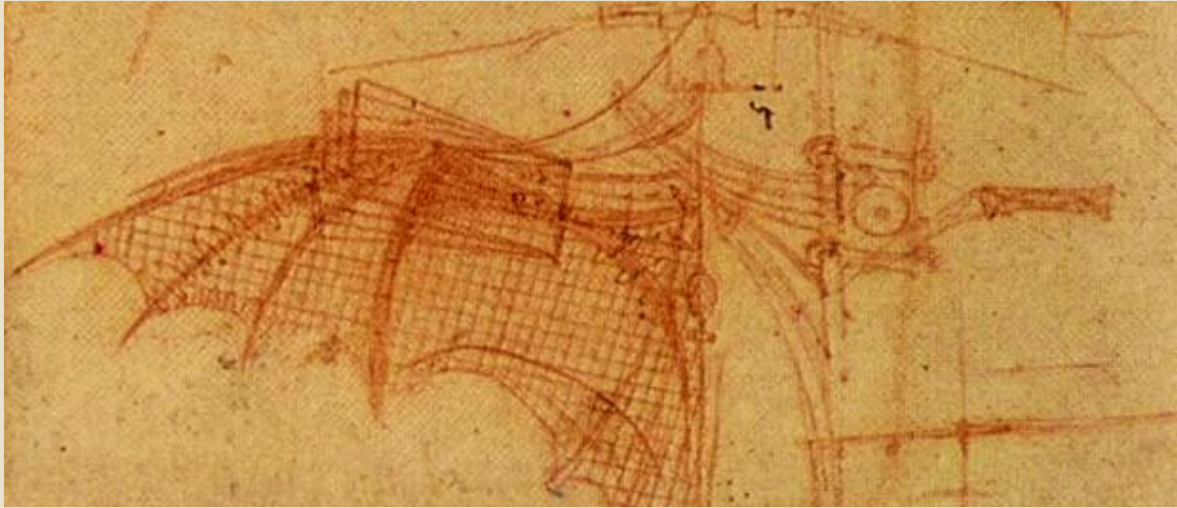


alice and the subterranean wonderland band

c2012 by Keith Harden



"Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast." Lewis Carroll

You feel like you're flying... ain't nuthin' better... Tonight you're flying and a couple of nights ago you were playing musical instruments you hadn't played before with complete mastery... sweet dreams... You and your bandmates are playin' some snazzy bluegrass guitar licks... mandolins are choppin'... banjos are blazin'... fiddles are fiddlin'... a sweet sounding woman is singin' a high & lonesome song...

They say you may still have unfulfilled ambitions if you fly [sans plane] in your dreams or at least that's one interpretation. Lately your dreamflights take you over meandering streams... winding rivers... nice little lakes... You're in and out of a good dreams that generally come about 30 minutes before you fully wake up. These bodies of water of course indicate that you have to get up outa bed and go to the bathroom then you're back to bed... back to dream a little while longer.

You wake up and squint at the light of the late morning but you're still not ready to get outa bed. You're still somewhere between dreamtime and coffee when logic and

proportion have fallen back asleep into the sleep of the sloppy dead. You lazily ponder the similarities between the the 'language of dreams' and the literary nonsense genre and you've got a couple more nonsensical dreams to go before noon. Other than lazily strolling through the summer garden making a daisy-chain and pulling some weeds, you have no real plans today and because hot weather makes you feel sleepy and stupid you decide to stay in bed and close your eyes for even a little while longer... driftin' and driftin'...

As the refill valve slowly floats and the stopper accepts it's fate and the hissing of the water subsides, you lay back down in bed and put a pillow over your ears knowing that you may or may not have to get back up and shake the handle on the terlet. They can send a man to the moon but can't make a quiet blah blah... You re-snooze at the exact moment that the water stops and sits on the wet side of the bacteria-brown scumline inside the porcelain back of the terlet assembly. You are never not impressed with the amount patience shown by the chemical formula H₂O and you wonder at it's ability to bravely sit and wait for it's fate of being flushed into duty, flushing doodie...

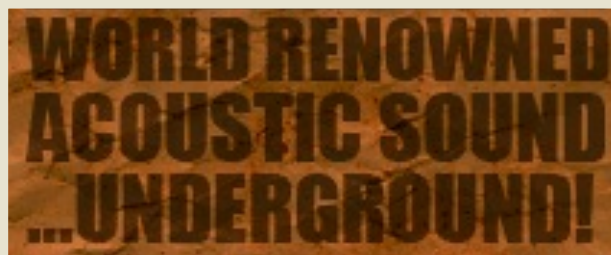
You might be out of the house for a month but the water in the tank waits. Except for a certain amount that's evaporated, the rules of engagement are clear and cloudless. Water must behave according to the laws of physics and the most well known law is gravity. Whether the White Knight talks backwards or forwards, when hand meets handle the water mindlessly rides down into the bowl and that's a real no-brainer because water has no mind. Water does it's thang, flushing, swooshing, washing, cleansing it's way to the sanitation district facility miles away from most residential neighborhoods but the trailer park near there is not so lucky when the wind is right [or would the wind be wrong]? Water has some of the strangest properties found in nature. We all know that it can be liquid or a gas or a solid but did you know there are 19 types of ice? Water is everywhere in rivers, streams, babbling brooks, lakes, ponds, seas, oceans and swimming pools and water is essential to life. Water is the absolute best except when you're five years old and you drink way too much Koolade and you have to pee real bad but the pills Mother gives you didn't do anything at all to eradicate the boogieman hiding at the bottom of the stairs...

When the tank is full and silence is complete you shift from alpha to beta waves and you feel your dream-body floating through a tunnel [no, not a sewer, this is not your

subconscious acting in a symbiotic relationship with the toilet innards although your mind is often in the gutter and you've had lots and lots of sex dreams but in all your time spent in here in Dreamland you haven't had one single wet dream but on the other hand you've never flown as a result of your own volition in Awakeland].

You begin flying again and wow, it feels so good with your arms spread like wings. and you're zooming through the air through the tunnel curving downward, descending through big round tubular shaped hallways that are lined with cobblestones... you are flying but no, you're not a bat or a hornet or an underground raptor chasing a snow bunny down a rabbit hole, you're still fully human. This is a familiar feeling because in *your* dreams you are a frequent flyer...

Down, down, down you reach what seems like the bottom or the floor of this underground world and you see rows of wooden church pews with folding chairs behind them [the cheap seats] and the place is quite crowded with people and birds and animals including a duck, a dodo, a lory an eaglet and several large playing cards. This anthropomorphically integrated congregation of sorts was listening to a concert performance by internationally known stars of stage and screen Alice and The Subterranean Wonderland Band [ATSWB]. For an underground cave this is a relatively intimate venue and the kind of place Alice always used to play when she was just small [time]...



**WORLD RENOWNED
ACOUSTIC SOUND
...UNDERGROUND!**

As you approach the bottom floor of the cavern it serves as your landing strip and your legs come down and you run for a couple of seconds, a few light steps till you get your footing and your safe landing is complete [Fatal crashes are statistically rare during REM sleep, it's much easier to die in a car crash while sleeping especially if the driver is awake at first, then falls asleep]...

Am I being too parenthetic for you? I'm sorry, I'll try to reign it in... Can you fill out this survey below? It'll only take ten minutes... Not interested? Only one more more question, OK?... Would your reading pleasure be heightened if things were more paragraphical?

This dreamflight was a veritable breeze as they say in flight school, with only one leg, no annoying layover at LaGuardia, no switching planes in Detroit or Atlanta, no lost luggage, no pat-downs or security checkpoint hassles, no men on chessboards getting up telling you where to go. You didn't even need a cape or a superhero costume to fly, your pajamas are aerodynamically designed specifically for comfort and that's what keeps the customer satisfaction high and in fact there is no complaint department for this dream-airline and talk about cheap! There are no planes to maintain, no pilots to hire, no flight attendants or even airports. No credit cards or passports are needed, your ticket to ride is your subconscious desire to rise above your current status, not in the sense of climbing the social ladder but more in the sense of freeing up your creative potential. You don't even need a social security number just a place to turn off your mind, relax and float downstream and fall asleep...

This trip to the netherworld was pre-plane old-school sleep-flying, the kind of air travel done by anyone who could muster up the levitational anti-gravitas. People in the olden days like our first president George didn't have Air Force One and didn't need it because he understood the concept of freedom from years of piloting himself whilst sleeping. Washington and his white horse Pegasus winged it quite often. As for the nocturnal plane-less air adventures of our second president, Jefferson? Airplane was not a word he knew. He dream-flew with more than ample arm-power that was part of a strong constitution and overall good physical health which came from doing a lot of farm work as a boy. Thomas declared his independence from gravity during many dreamful nights...



So after your safe landing you're getting your bearings and your PJs magically transform into standard issue boot-cut Levis and a denim shirt with pearly snap buttons. It's like you've just had some kind of mushroom and you're seeing things because you're not surprised when seriously lightweight and comfortable Dr. Martens appear on your feet. Maybe in the next dream your subconscious will afford you some Birkenstocks...

The 'pewed' faithful gather down here in The Underground every night because there's no TV or internet in Dreamland. All are enthralled by the silvery sound of Alice's truly original voice. Once in a generation someone comes along and sings so beautifully, so straight and true it seems to be a heaven-sent gift...



This 'one in a million' voice reverberating through the cavern sounded quite a bit like the voice of Alison Krauss but this particular singer was a wunderkind from another time altogether, maybe a couple hundred years ago. Alice looked like the Alice [or her nearly identical twin sister Lacie] from *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland*... Even her speaking voice was mellifluous. Could it be history repeating itself repeating itself?

She couldn't help but see you flying in and looked over to where you were standing in the back and motioned for you to come and join the band for a song [only in a dream, right?] and put the strap hooked onto a gorgeous A-style mandolin over your shoulder and strummed the first notes and nodded for you to go ahead and play...

Somehow in this squishy reality you know just what to play and it seems to fit right in with what the other musicians are doing. Alice's angelic voice soars above the music and quivers its way into the space between the molecules into a place you can't see but you've felt... that space where the air itself shivers and shakes. Her voice seems to transmit some strange spell that surges through souls. Hers is a nocturnal aural emission that soothes savages, nine-to-five secretaries, rednecks, Nashville mayoral candidates, European tourists and US government census bureau employees...

Alice looks you right in the eye while hers gleam and twinkle and you feel a bolt of soft gentle lightning surge one iota past your threshold of pain for an instant but that recedes a nano-second later and you are comfortably ecstatic like your first trip on mescaline [don't forget, this is still a dream sequence]. The pure unadulterated impulse of love in the form of a musical note travels right through your heart and then proceeds to move up and down your spine and the backbone of anyone in the vicinity. The place practically fills with a pool of tears... dang me, take a rope and hang me, she sings so purdy she makes your heartstrings ring...

It's hard to believe that she didn't win but she wasn't even a finalist when she sang on NBC TV's hit show THE VOICE. They found out she mostly existed only in The Underground and there are major partisan political differences between the Down Under Dreamland Democrats and the World Wide Awake Mad Tea Party. Most think the real reason she was denied a smashing victory in the sing-off was not politics but jealousy. Cee Lo Green and Blake Shelton went gaga for her but rumour has it that she wouldn't go to dinner with Adam Levine [she hates tattoos] and that she and Christina Aguilera were like oil and water. Alice respects Christina's singing talent but thinks she's a nasty-ass ho-bag...

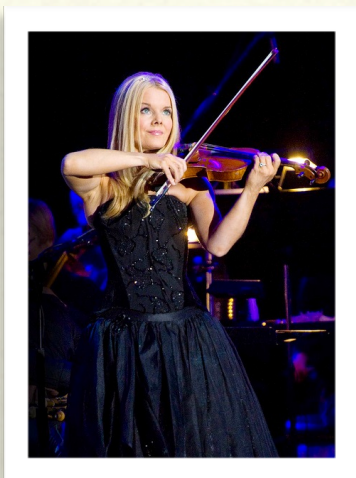
Speaking of subterranean mandolins and things with strings, some of the smartest people in the world who study quantum physics and ponder the universe 24/7 say the fabric of the cosmos may be comprised of lots & lots of little strings,



unimaginably small [there's no pill that could ever ever make you that small]... Oh so many strings... gazillions of strings... more like a gazillion times a gazillion with a gazillion zeros stretched out to forever... a number of strings so huge it's beyond our ability to comprehend... All of these strings all vibrating at their own individual wavelength... String Theory is what they call it. Maybe that's why we resonate with lutes & guitars & mandolins & banjos & bouzoukis & cellos & dulcimers & pianos & stuff... all those vibratin' strings...

Did I mention that this Alice plays fiddle really well, just like AK and has been playing well since she was a little kid... a pure prodigy in a league of her own. Makes you think that there may be some bleed between parallel dimensions...

As close as I can figure it, The Golden Voiced Fiddler likes to get down to earth [beneath the earth] once in a while with people and/or musicians of the Commons. She knows what the great composers of yesteryear knew, that some very elemental, essential human things can be learned best from the simple, beautiful melodies and customs of everyday people. With time and effort and the meddling of the genius-class, the commoner's folk-craft can be forged into higher art. So Alice gets down with the regulars, the Joe-six-packs and the Jane-Does, The Bobs & Bettys, the Jack & Dianes and she is unselfconsciously comfortable and sweet when mingling below. She has 467,000 followers on twitter and her tweets are not about going shoe-shopping. She doesn't muddy her message with such triviality. Under the hashtag @alicewunderkind her 140 characters are used to impart pearls of wisdom or even beautiful haikus but remember you can only receive them if you get on her e-mail newsletter... contact her at ATSWB@dreamlink.net...



So here I am well into the good part of the dreamcycle strumming this mandolin and singing harmony with Alice and her Subterranean Wonderland Band down in the Gathering Of The Underground and all eyes are on her and though she is always the center of attention she is nonchalant and unpretentious having learned the value of humility. She kept her head and received two thumbs up when she sang for the Red Queen of Hearts and other jaded royals & knaves... When above ground

she wears Jackie O sunglasses not to be hiding her celebrity [which is huge in underground circles] but because she spends altogether too much time down in the darkness below and it takes a while for her eyes to adjust..

Alice is a natural platinum blonde of Icelandic descent, so fair she was sometimes mistaken for albino when she was very young. She came from some high-falootin' ancestors whose bloodline can be traced back to Finland but they fled to Greenland then to America to get away from the Nazis in WW2 and were so impoverished after the war they wound up living in a remote deer hunter's cabin in Kentucky on the Cumberland Plateau. She knows the difference between a rainbow and a moonbow and shit and shinola she knows the value of networking and all artists and musicians need patrons of the arts like Dukes & Duchesses & Earls and those courted by Earls and they need the philanthropic assistance of the well heeled and those who've inherited fortunes that were made in the Gilded Age. Alice has done her time and paid her dues and she was tired of needing food stamps to survive so by golly once she got on the path she never looked back. She sought all revenue streams from passin' the hat at basket houses, to Rockefeller endowments & McArthur grants and ticket sales from Carnegie Hall. When asked about her 'druthers Alice said she likes playing for people in the uppercrust of society and needs their generous donations *but* she feels more connected to her roots when playing for the unter-volk as they're sometimes known. It's the downtrodden, the wretched, the poor, the 'real' down-home folks who have the truest appreciation and understanding of her gift...

The songs that Alice and her band were playing down in sub terranea were brand new to me and even though I'd never played them before I started to get in sync with the other musicians. I tried to get the scoop on the sitch from the players next to me but they weren't inclined to say much between songs. They muttered and grumbled like servants who didn't want their master to hear what they were saying and they seemed to be afraid of displeasing a towering presence like Alice who sometimes seems to be ten feet tall. She is known to have a temper and when angry can count the songs off at a ridonkulous tempo that can give you tendonitis if you try to keep up. Still, our musical back and forths were bordering on telepathic with not much more than quick glances and cues and a wink was as good as a nod. Against all odds I kept progressing in my performance ability from one song to the next. Riding on the sonic wave created by Alice's voice we [as a band] scaled the stairs to new heights by leaps and bounds...

I had never taken mandolin lessons and had barely even strummed a G chord on the little 'gourd' but I was holding my own on this little eight-string sunburst finished beauty. Perhaps Alice had sprinkled wonderland-mushroom powder and fairy dust all around the bandstand. Or perhaps my new-found chops came from some kind of divine intervention...

In light of all the other dream-distortion effects and the general hookah smoking caterpillar like squirminess of the situation, perhaps I'd made a dark deal with the Devil himself long ago without realizing it. I had been to 'the' crossroads of Highways 61 and 49 in Clarksdale, Mississippi and jokingly said I would sell my soul if I could play the mandolin like Bill Monroe or Sam Bush or even like Charlie McCoy [not the Nashville session guy who is a great harmonica player and musician but the old blues guy who played with the the Mississippi Sheiks back in the 1920s, 30s and 40s]...



The band took a fifteen minute break and we popped into the Dreamland Hookah Bar right across the back alley from the Gathering Of The Underground venue to smoke a bowl. I couldn't hold back any longer I just had to let it blurt so I asked "Hey guys, [yeah, it was mostly guys] how long have you been here, how long has this band been together?" A brave Asian stand-up bass player with a perpetual smile looked around to make sure Alice couldn't hear him and told his story...

"When I was a teenager I fantasized about being famous and I wanted to be the best cellist who ever lived so as I laid down to sleep one night and looked out the window at the sky from my bedroom window and I said I would sell my soul to play the cello as well as Paganini played the violin... Being self-motivated and full of youthful energy and desire I sacrificed the fun of my childhood to practice cello and piano, I entered college on a scholarship at the age of 16 and then played first chair viola with the New York Philharmonic for ten years then switched to cello when the position opened... I figured I'd bide my time till the Philharmonic's cellist retired and I would reach my desired destiny... One day when buying forever stamps at the post office I was killed in a random shooting by a postal worker who went postal after being fired and losing his pension after they found thc in his urine on a surprise spot check designed to ferret out USPS employees who used drugs... I was sent down here when Alice was recruiting players for the band and they force-fed me this piece of cake then put this unwieldy double-bass in my hands and I've been stuck here for what seems like five years but I'm not sure... It's a nightmare trying to keep the banjo-ist from rushing the tempo... I don't know if this is a bad dream, a full-blown night terror or if this is purgatory but I'm guessing I'm here because I said I'd sell my soul to be a great cellist... "

Next, the guitarist of the band told his story... He leaned in and said, "Over time I have formulated a theory as to why I may be here... In college I was a music major but I minored in philosophy... They filled my head with pretzel logic and we debated the meaning of existence and railed against the persistence of deism and the absurdity of monotheism and upon advice from a dormouse I fed my head and fed it some more with the contents of the bottle that said DRINK ME and between that and the academy's form of knowledge-based bias my life became one long continuum of conflict without resolution and one opinion was as good as the next and I came upon conundrum after conundrum and ran squarely into a paradox till my head ached and my soul was so full of existential angst that I had a mystical out-of-body experience which led to an epiphany wrapped in an enigmatic nervous breakdown and I confided in my [catholic] university adviser that I had no faith and that life had no purpose or meaning and I saw no point in living... At that very moment I was struck by a bolt of enlightenment and this was my once in a lifetime chance to shout 'Eureka' without embarrassment... It couldn't be simpler... Once I realized I was afraid of dying and that I was much too cowardly to actuate the mechanical process that would result in my suicide, I decided that living was the way to go... Out of the blue I slipped on a banana peel at a fresh fruit market in Miami and fell right into the path of a Mercedes convertible and as the lifeforce was leaving my mortal coil I unwisely blurted out four little words... 'there is no god'... Why I didn't utter something sweet as my last words like 'tell ma that I love her' or even something silly like 'ah oh spaghettios' I'll never know..." The guitarist continued his story..

"They say that when you die God sends you down here to the Underground till you admit he [yes, he is an old white-haired guy with a beard and white robes] exists, but so far I've seen neither hide nor hair of Him and it's been several years... I haven't seen

Jesus or Buddha or John Lennon or anyone holy... I learned a hard lesson... Never casually say things like 'I'd sell my soul for a [_____]' and never admit to being an atheist and only reveal your agnosticism in the North Country... As for when the band first started this gig..", the guitarist said, "Go ask Alice... I think she'll know..."

I understood the moral of their stories being this... don't toy around with soul-sales or insider soul-trading or atheism and take a real good look at gift-horses in the mouth and always know that charitable contributions have strings attached and when you wish upon a star and your wishes are going to be granted by someone in the record biz make sure it's more than a verbal agreement, make sure you get it in writing and make sure you get an entertainment attorney to look it over and beware of hidden cameras at stop signs and audio recorders and super-pacs and too-gig-to-fail banks and be ready at all times to click your heels together three times and say out loud "there's no place like home"...

When we returned to the Underground stage Alice was waiting there and asked, "Well what do you think after your very first set? I hear the potential for some absolutely fabulous mandolin music coming from your strong, sure hands and the gig is yours if you want it." I felt like I was being pulled apart by two opposing teams of horses. I steeled my will and resolved myself to finding a different dream. I laid that beautiful little sunburst mandolin down, down, down and woke up, up, up and there next to me on the bed was my oldest friend, Stella. Looks like the lonesome blues are my true calling. I picked up that Stella six-string and played an old song by Mississippi John Hurt,

"I woke up this morning with the Monday Morning Blues.." I added my own original couplet as the last verse, "I'll see you little Alice when the veil's done come around, I'll see you little Alice, when the veil's done come around, Down in the Wonderland when I'm six-feet underground.."





about the author... Keith Harden is a lifelong scribbler, note-taker, collector of stories, lyricist, songwriter, musician, singer, graduate of the folk-blues-rock & roll-school of hard knocks playing every kind of gig imaginable for more than 40 years. He has recorded and released more than ten albums of music from folk to blues to americana and alternative rock. He was born in the tiny town of Tolono, Illinois and lived in California (when his dad was in the army stationed in Santa Barbara) he then lived in Ohio for part of his teenage years, and back to Illinois for a lot of years then lived several years in upstate New York. Keith currently lives in Nashville, Tennessee.

for a complete bio, photos, music, etc go to;

www.keithharden.com

615-484-0726

keithharden@aim.com