

Clapton as Writing Tool

By Holly Lisle

When I stall in the writing, I cannot just push my way through. Stubbornness just shuts down my machine. I have to stop, back off from words, lose myself in some wordless activity that removes my mind from the treadmill for a little while.

For years, my preferred activity for this had been solitaire, which I detest. It creates the necessary mental silence very quickly, allows my subconscious time to play with the problem, and maybe even push its answers through the little translucent barrier between the two minds.

I detest solitaire. Fourteen years into doing this professionally, I like it less than when I started.

So I'm switching over to Clapton. Or more precisely, to Clapton's version of Classical Gas. I've been working on it at pathetically irregular intervals since November 8th. (I discovered that the other folks in the house did not actually have fun listening to me repeat the twelfth and thirteenth bars twenty times in a row while attempting to make the time change from three-quarter to four/four and still hit the right strings. Imagine that.)

At this point, I'm solid at half-speed on the first seventeen measures. Wobbly but still hanging in there on the next three.

It's when, on the twenty-first measure, the piece switches from three-quarter time to four/four, AND goes boogieing up to the eighth, ninth, and tenth frets and all sixteenth notes that I completely fall apart. Six measure of that, followed by a measure of five/four time, followed by one of six/four, and then back to four/four, and I'm a sizzled critter steaming in a pile on the floor.

So, today, nails freshly filed, guitar perfectly tuned, and music stand and guitar waiting at a workable ninety-degree angle from the desk, I have my solitaire replacement. Working out a new piece of music is as wordless an activity as exists (well, unless, twenty repeats into the same two bars, I'm still missing a critical shift, in which case it gets pretty colorful. Probably another reason I ought to practice in private.) It does do a good job of silencing conscious thought.

So Clapton might be a workable writing tool. I'll let you know how it goes.

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