

DOWN TO THE WELL

Eight year old Billy and Earl running down the dirt road, dust clinging to their damp skin in the heat of the South Carolina summer morning, were headed off at the end of the lane by beefy Sheriff Brooks, a chicken squawking under Billy's arm.

"Where'd you get that chicken, son?," asked a breathless Lyle Brooks while mopping his brow. "Odean, he took it, Mr. Brooks."

"Where he at?"

"Probably at the Baptist Church, sir."

Odean was also seven years old and made up the occasional threesome although his friends, Billy and Earl were white. Odean loved listening to the sound of the big choir that his mother led in the Baptist Church. Even though the pew was hard, he could sit and sit lost in the harmonious sounds that were grand enough to eclipse the harshness of what life could be. Billy and Earl took a chance leading Mr. Brooks to fetch their friend on the other side of the tracks that ran through town. They needed Odean.

"Odean Pope, come on out here!"

"Yessuh, Mr. Brooks?"

"Odean, now you know you stole that chicken, don't you boy!? Because if you didn't, then those men, they gonna come and kill your family the way they done with old man Haywood."

Odean was frozen in the hot summer sun. Color eased to darkness as the boy felt his blood turn to tar. Who could forget how old man Haywood was tied to the back of a pickup and dragged to his ragged death? Odean looked from Earl to Billy and from Billy to Earl as they both looked away. It was just last week at the July 4th fireworks display that Earl's father told him he needed to address his friend as **Mr.** Earl.

"So you did steal that chicken, now didn't you boy!?"

Although I dramatized this chilling story, the essential facts are accurate. Odean was locked up in the town jail for three days and three nights until his frantic mother could get the \$25 to free him. Young Odean was terrorized and traumatized; he was a seven year old innocent child who was voiceless and soundless. He was betrayed by his friends, cruelly separated from his mother, threatened with a torturous death for his family and was treated as though he was subhuman. It was Jim Crow, Ninety-Six, South Carolina. Odean has spent a lifetime finding his voice and sound. There is a musical phrase in every solo Odean has played since the 1970's that sounds to me like a cry for help. I cannot reproduce the soulful sound but I know it each time I hear it. I know that

wail comes from deep down in the well.

Undoubtedly, the soul scarring that Odean suffered at seven along with everything else he experienced, especially in childhood, are down in that well. I've referred to the well in previous reflections as the reservoir or treasure trove that everyone possesses.

Neuroscientists refer to neuronal activity and in my clinical lingo it is the unconscious. Especially creative people have greater access to what is down in the well and can, in fact, dip down to draw forth earlier memories, impressions, fantasies, sensations and feelings to spark inventiveness. In a corresponding way, music can be a trigger that evokes an emotional response and brings forth earlier mental content (from down in the well) that we try to understand with thought. An analogy can be made to dreams with both manifest and latent content. We can just enjoy the music, similar to thinking of just the manifest dream or we can interpret the music and/or ourselves in reaction to the music, thereby having a richer experience (as we do when we try to understand the deeper meaning of a dream). There can also be an emotional interplay between performers and between performer and listener who form a special musical relationship that can replay earlier relationships. I like to think of this happening when I (and others) hear Odean's music setting up a reciprocal ring where resonance occurs between listener/performer, performer/deeper meaning, listener/deeper meaning and so on.