

WELCOME TO MY WORLD

By Mark Matthews

Why is it that whenever our social and economic systems disintegrate into chaos, my life remains unaffected? Either I'm doing something right—or drastically wrong.

Take the recession of 2008, when millions of people lost jobs, homes, and savings. What's everyone complaining about, I thought. As a writer, artist, and dance caller my life just kept rolling along as usual. I continued to work plenty of hours—for little pay. In fact, I ironically landed my first “professional” job that year since moving to Montana in 1987 when all the laid-off workers at the closed cardboard mill applied for retraining and enrolled at the local tech school which suddenly needed English comp teachers—and I got hired.

Then comes COVID-19. I'm told to stay at home and not interact with people. It would have been harder on me if the government had ordered me to go out and socialize for eight hours a day. Even before social distancing my vocal chords sometimes grow so weak from not speaking to another human being that they hardly work. So today, as usual, I worked on art projects from morning to late midafternoon, whereupon I headed out for a long hike far from the madding crowd in a conservation area. In the evening I reworked the great American novel I've been writing for a decade and then did some research for an art history presentation I'm putting together for Humanities Montana's Speakers in the Schools program. It's the same routine most every day.

And, another bit of irony: it seems that since the schools are closed and I can't do my current presentation for Humanities Montana, which involves teaching kids how to dance, I may qualify for unemployment benefits that will exceed my current paltry income. Go figure.

RIGHT: “Slow Dancing” is a tongue-in-cheek example of “Cubist” sculpture.

FAR RIGHT: “Jitterbugging” is my contribution to the continuing evolution of modern art. I call it “five-dimensional painting.”

However, I must admit, there is one thing missing from my life that I miss dreadfully: the dance. For more than forty years now I have depended on my fellow dancers to provide me a lifeline to keep connected to humanity. Although joy emanates from my work, it does not match the ecstasy I feel when interacting with dancers, who are the kindest, most accepting and joyous people alive. I miss you all so much, and I can hardly wait to allemande, do-si-do, swing, and waltz with you again. And maybe even get in a conversation or two in between dances to exercise my vocal chords.

I often recall the words of William Butler Yeats when I think of all the lovely people who I've met on dance floors across the country and in Canada.

*For the good are always the merry,
Save by an evil chance,
And the merry love the fiddle,
And the merry love to dance:*

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