

Calliope

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Well, in the beginning, the Lord created the angels and their voices and harmonies to sing His unending praise and glory. He created the birds of the air to praise Him with their song. And He created Man, and music, and musical instruments to further sing his praise.

The Devil, in his dark domain, looked out on this. He wrinkled his brow and frowned a devilish frown. Things were not good. True, he had given the crow its caw, and the mule its bray -- that helped even things out. And for every man or woman the Lord gave a good singing voice to, the devil let ten believe they were just as good -- crows and mules in human form.

But these latest developments -- especially Handel and Bach -- these had upped the ante considerably. Now, the violin had been a big help in restoring the balance, truly devilish in its seeming simplicity. Only a few of the few could play it even tolerably, when so many thought they could -- to the consternation of those nearby -- for every songbird, a hundred crows. Nothing warms his devilish heart as much as a bunch of adults squirming through the torment of children trying to play the violin.

But, something new was needed -- something strong. Something that would carry the Joker's signature and tip the balance back again. So he wrinkled his devilish brow. He twitched his devilish tail in thought. And thought... And thought... And thought...

...And it came to him! A devilish gleam filled his eye; his brow unfurled and a devilish grin spread from ear to ear; a demonic cackle filled his domain! Man's weakness was his pride, and this would use his pride in his inventiveness and turn it sideways! The steam calliope! A steam crow that could be heard for miles around! Never in tune, stubborn as a mule, and nothing but loud! Just let them try and play Bach on this! Might as well try to teach a mule to waltz!

So he gave Man the calliope -- and threw in the bagpipe, accordion, and four string banjo for good measure to torment and tease. Then he sat back, smiled a wry devilish smile, and waited for the trouble to start.

But damned if Man didn't find something good in it! Sure- there were those who ranted and raved against calliopes; but most of those, especially the so-called serious musicians who denounced calliopes as demeaning or unprofessional, why they were his people already.

No, Man put calliopes on showboats, steamboats, and in circuses, and used 'em to call people from miles around -- to laugh, to see the wonders of the Lord's creation, and to be entertained.

And as for the music -- why most of the serious stuff was so complex that few people could either perform or enjoy it; but the calliope -- it was only good for simple tunes that everyone could enjoy. And there were even people that liked the way the thing sounded! (From a few blocks away.)

So he sat there in his dark below and fumed. And every time a calliope sounds, and people young and old alike respond with childlike joy and wonder to its call, he fumes more -- and ponders again and again the wonder that is Man -- who can find joy and good in anything, even a calliope.

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Aboard the Mississippi Queen