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## Bum Virtuoso

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One night during my sophomore year at Berklee, I was walking with my roommate George, back from a bar to the apartment . While crossing Kilmarnock St. onto Peterborough St. we saw a known junkie sitting in a doorway, fidgeting, and pretending to play a guitar which had no strings.

As it turns out, George knew him. They had met on "Berklee Beach," the stretch of sidewalk on Massachusetts Ave. between Boylston and Belvidere St. The two of them connected based on there mutual affinity for controlled substances.

"Hey Man. You need to get some strings for that thing man." George said. "You want to jam on this?" He pulled the gig bag from his shoulder, and took out his guitar.

"Heh! Yeah yeah! Le'me see." said the man placing his unstrung guitar against the building, and reaching for George's Les Paul.

We exchanged a glance, as if to say; "this ought to be good," and tried to hold back from laughing.

The homeless man immediately began to play an incredible chord solo of "Autumn Leaves." He might as well have been at the Village Vanguard. He executed beautiful, wide intervocalic voicings, walking bass lines and a savvy improvisation over the changes.

Simultaneously, and slowly, George and I turned towards each other, our mouths agape; unable to process what we were witnessing.

Was this really happening? Did we just hand a guitar to a crack-head who proceeded to play better than either of us could?

Apparently so.

He played for quite a while, transitioning from one jazz standard to another. Each was executed as brilliantly as the other.

He said something that I cannot recall, and handed the guitar back to George.

We were two blocks away from our apartment. While crossing the first we were silent, still in shock and slightly humbled by the experience. By the second we could not control our laughter.

"No one is going to believe this one man!" George said.

That was not the last time we encountered the homeless-virtuoso. As it turns out, he was an in-demand session player in the 1970's, and was living off of some residual royalties, on the street.

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