



MAY 1987

Redd Boggs'

SPIROCHNEGG

THE BRAVE FLIES

One morning long ago Jim Harmon and I were sitting in a (you won't believe this) cheap (did you?) restaurant in Los Angeles eating breakfast. We had never been there before. The unfailingly good weather allowed the proprietor to keep the front door open almost permanently the year around, but across the doorway he had hung something that resembled a bead curtain, only with a series of cotton tufts instead of beads tied to the strings. The curtain was swaying gently in the warm breeze like a hula skirt. "What's that for?" Jim asked the proprietor, pointing at the curtain. "Oh, that's to shoo away the flies," he explained, slopping a refill of coffee into our cups. As he said that, we watched a swarm of flies sailing blithely in and out through the fluttering lines of cotton tufts.

THE FREEWAY TO PARNASSUS

While I was in Montgomery Ward shopping for a new wristwatch rain began to fall dismally. After a look outside at the cold grey drizzle I decided to walk through the store to the exit nearest where my car was parked. As I passed by the television department a whole bank of TV sets arranged along the wall was flashing vivid colors in the rainy gloom. It was a display almost as boggling as that of the main control room of the *Vanguard* or the *New Frontiers*. Just then all the TV screens were showing the same thing again and again repeated: a commercial for a record set or audio cassette with a name something like "100 Immortal Melodies of the World" ("not sold in any store"). As I glanced up, all the pictures began to roll the titles of those hundred familiar melodies, and the first, or one of the first, was Brahms' "Lullaby."

"Poor Johannes!" I thought to myself, remembering the mysterious autumn beauty of his fourth symphony. "He worked many years composing symphonies, songs, and chamber music, and all that work was for nothing. He achieved immortality merely by writing his 'Lullaby'!"

I didn't notice the titles of the other "immortal melodies," but they are easy to guess. Bach, "Air for the G String," Mendelssohn, "Spring Song," Dvorak, "Songs My Mother Taught Me," Saint-Saens, "The Swan" from "Carnival of Animals," Debussy, "Clair de lune," MacDowell, "To A Wild Rose," right down to Gershwin, "Summertime" from "Porgy and Bess." Just by writing one little piece all these composers assured themselves of a share of as much immortality as human beings will ever attain. They might as well have stopped then and there; their fame was assured. But most of them went right on for years and decades, writing other music that nobody will ever hear if he sticks to "100 Immortal Melodies of the World."

Back around 1495 Leonard da Vinci painted the "Last Supper," and could have laid down his brushes forever, having made himself immortal. Instead, he continued to work for another quarter of a century. Michelangelo sculpted the marble statue "Pieta" around 1500, and yet a decade later he was crawling around on lofty scaffolding while painting the ceiling of the Sistine chapel. Rembrandt did the portrait

once called "The Night Watch," and persisted in turning out 600 other paintings and 300 etchings as well. And then there was Whistler....

Shakespeare could have quit, insofar as immortality is concerned, once he had written "A Midsummer Night's Dream," or for that matter need not have written a single play; he had written the Sonnets, just one of which would have gotten him into the anthologies forever. Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and was still busily engaged in writing when he died in 1870, though that early work was sufficient to make him immortal. Shaw wrote "Pygmalion" in 1913, and continued for some reason to write other plays for another 37 years. Mark Twain published *Tom Sawyer* in 1876, and wrote many other things till nearly the end of his life, in 1910.

Asimov wrote "Nightfall," his single most famous story, in 1941, as everyone who was reading *Astounding* at the time will easily recall, and continues to write stories, novels, articles, and science books down to the present time, 46 years later. Heinlein wrote "By His Bootstraps" also in 1941. He could have quit right then and there -- sometimes I wish he had -- having assured himself of at least a small niche in the Science Fiction Hall of Fame, but he too continues to write.

Nearly all of the great ones are known, or could be known, chiefly for one famous work: a work that is known to the general public above everything else they created, a work that lands them in the encyclopedia or in the standard reference book. Of course most of these great artists couldn't know that they had already written -- or painted or sculpted -- the work that they will be remembered for. But sometime or other, often very close to the beginning of their creative life, they reached the pinnacle of their creativity, and everything was downhill after that.

They kept on, as industriously as ever, even after their "Blue Danube" or their *Fathers and Sons* was before the public, even if they were dimly aware of the fact that they had already succeeded. Many of these people needed the money, for one thing. They needed the egoboo, for another. But there is something more. These artists great (like Shakespeare) and small (like Heinlein) are all of them concerned with more than money and egoboo, at least during one segment of their lives. Even the most crassly commercial writer in the world (Jaqueline Susann, let's say) is far more occupied with the working out of the particular piece he or she is writing, while it is being created, than about money or fame. If it's a novel, the sentence-by-sentence and page-by-page progress of the story is more important than the two-million-dollar contract that awaits the completion of the work. If this were not so, those inept-looking, overbearingly pompous, half-ass and all-too-human writers you meet at conventions or autograph sessions would be no more than they look. But sometime or other -- unless their wives do their work for them -- these people sit down at the typewriter or word processor and play the game of creating a work of the imagination and the intellect. Some of them succeed very well; some are even geniuses at the job. That's not important while the act of creation goes on.

SPIROCHETE : Number 40 : May 1987. Edited and published at the Sign of the Idle Gestetner by Redd Boggs, P. O. Box 1111, Berkeley, California 94701, for the one-hundred-ninety-ninth mailing of the Fantasy Amateur Press association. "When we remember that we are all mad, the mysteries disappear and life stands explained." -- Mark Twain. The Spirochete heading is by Gretchen Schwenn.

Poor Johannes! indeed. Another 200 years from now, maybe all of Brahms' works will have vanished, except for that little "Lullaby." But the time traveler from A.D. 2187 who goes back to tell him of this sad fact isn't going to divert him -- at least more than momentarily -- from the composition of his latest string quartet. "Get out of here," Brahms would probably growl. "If music lovers of tomorrow never hear this newest work, then that's their bad luck. Shut the door after you, and let me work!"

A PIDDLE IN PIEDMONT

"F-F-For godsake!" I protested helplessly. "You can't be serious! Can't you wait till we get home?"

"You idiot!" Gretchen snarled. "Stop at a service station -- anywhere! No, I can't wait. You know how diuretics affect me. These Lasix pills are powerful stuff."

We were driving home one summer evening from the College of Holy Names -- that's on the hill overlooking the Warren freeway in east Oakland -- where Gretchen had conferred with one of the teaching Sisters on business of the West Coast Association of Women Historians (Gretchen was secretary-treasurer at the time). The VW's spin-dizzy was going sour, and we had elected to drive home on surface streets.

"Do you see any service stations anywhere?" I asked. "I don't. Just hang on, if you can."

"I can't," she said urgently. "You'd better turn up one of these dark streets and I'll use the bushes."

I was a little shocked. "Do you realize where we are? We're in Piedmont, or near there. This is the goddamndest motherfuckin'est ritziest community in the whole Bay area. Everybody here has passed 'Go' a dozen times and collected two million dollars. Ol' Bob Silverberg lives somewhere around here. Hell, the cops would probably run us in just for driving a VW on one of their sacred streets."

"The streets don't seem to be paved with gold," Gretchen pointed out. "Turn up the next street ahead. *Hurry!*"

I did as she asked. I drove a couple of blocks uphill at full throttle and slammed to a stop alongside the biggest and fanciest mansion on the street. I chose it because it had a big front lawn and lots of shrubbery. Gretchen jumped out of the car and disappeared into the leafy darkness while I sat and contemplated the twinkling lights in the flatlands below. It was a beautiful evening, and a quiet one. On this residential side street nobody came or went while we were parked. Everybody was in his underground vault counting his gold ingots.

Gretchen returned after a while, signaling that all was well. Beginning to breathe again I got us the hell out of there. We reached Grand avenue and Lake Merritt after many twists and turns on a street that went sharply downgrade, both topographically and socially. We came on home.

All the way I laughed and shook my head. "Everybody else thinks of Piedmont as the great bastion of the filthy rich," I told Gretchen. "But -- what a wonderful joke on the Piedmont plushbottoms! -- from now on I'll think of it as the place where you took a leak in the bushes."

And I always have.

THE BANG AND THE ECHO

*After the Bang that gave us birth
By making stuff to build an Earth
And light to see by out of dark
From something smaller than a quark,
Then nearly twenty eons passed
As the creation grew so vast
It made a haven for the human,
And even more than that, the Woman!*

*That was the blueprint and the plan,
That's why the universe began:
Allowing Her to come to be,
The treasure of humanity.
Behold her perfect breasts and hips,
And most of all, her perfect lips
(The envy of each Ms and Miss)
That open sweetly, not to kiss,*

But just to say...

Stop, you're smearing my makeup, and I just put on fresh lipstick. It's a new shade, do you like it? It's called Summer Apricot. It isn't red or orange, but it's, well, sort of apricot. It goes good with my hair, and dammit, trying to smooch me you're mussing my hair. You'll get it all tousled like it is in the morning no matter what I do. Do you know how long a girl has to fiddle with her hair to make it look this good? I don't have nice hair to begin with -- it's just a long hank of hair, and sometimes at home I grab it with both hands and just scream in anguish at the trouble it causes me! You ought to see the shampoo and conditioner and tint I have to use. But it's a secret about the hair tint. You wouldn't really know I used it, would you. It's very subtle, and the fact I use it isn't at all obvious. It's just like my normal hair color, only more so.

And take your hands away -- PLEASE! Just because I decided against my better judgment to wear a blouse that shows a little cleavage doesn't mean I'm the type of girl you think I am. Listen, buster, I'm just a hometown girl, like the girl next door back in Omaha. I'll bet you didn't guess this about me, but I go to church every Sunday, except when I have to work swing shift and can't get up in time. You'd think they'd have more than one service so people like me could go when they get up late.

But I'm sort of your basic Christian -- you know, I believe in God and Jesus and David and Goliath and all that. Maybe it's oldfashioned, but I do. I'll bet you, on the other hand, are one of those cynical people who thinks the world was created a million years ago and we're all descended from monkeys like Einstein claims. Not me. I believe God made the world just like it says in the Bible. You should read the Bible more instead of thinking about sex and trying to feel up all the women you meet. You'll find the answers to everything in the Bible and everything you want to know about the creation isn't in those awful scientific books the preachers warn us about on the radio every Sunday morning, but in the Bible itself. Just read *John 3:16* or *Genesis* or whatever it is, and you'll discover the real truth about the creation of the world. If you're through messing around with me let me go freshen up and then let's go out and get a McB.L.T. I'm hungry.

I'm always in the lowerarchy of the hierarchy.
