

VARIATIONS ON A THEME #10

from Rich Lynch • for SFPA 225 • written in Dec. 2001 - Jan. 2002

52 and Holding, Apparently Forever

No, not my age, though that would be nice. There was one of the bimonthly blood collection visits by the Red Cross here at work recently and when I went down to the room they were using to check in, I discovered that I am now permanently ineligible as a blood donor. There was a rule change by the Red Cross in October that now bars anyone who has spent, cumulatively, more than six months in Europe since *1980*. I was way over the limit. So I'm at 52 donations – 6½ gallons – and holding, apparently forever. Or until the Red Cross' next rules change, whatever comes first.

Life in the Nation's Capital

December is usually a fairly quiet month here – Congress is out of session, the President is usually on vacation somewhere, and about half the people at work are taking use-or-lose annual leave (me included). This year has been a bit different, of course, because of the war in Afghanistan and the continuing vigilance against terrorism threats, and that has filtered down to affect most government workers. Our mail room at work was closed down for more than two months for incoming surface mail of any kind, and when it finally reopened a couple of weeks ago, I started getting mail that had been hand-stamped 'Sanitized'. On the other hand, just about all the mail that *has* arrived has been junk mail, so I guess there's some irony in there somewhere.

No music events for a while, but there have been a few holiday Embassy parties, including the annual Embassy of Finland 'Glogg Buffet'. We overestimated the amount of time it would take to drive into Washington from where we live in Maryland, and so arrived half an hour too early. So what do you do when you're the first ones to a party where a few hundred are expected? Well, I had a fairly interesting conversation with the host (the Embassy's Science Attaché), while Nicki talked to the host's wife (or tried to, as the lady wasn't entirely fluent in English). And in that party, as well as the others, the host, in his welcoming remarks, made mention of the events of September and how committed their countries were in support of the war against terrorism. Yet another sign the world is now a different place.

A Few Words About Classical Music

It's just a few days before Christmas as I'm writing this, and all the classical music radio stations are playing holiday music. Probably the most prolific composer of holiday music are the duo of Anon and Trad, but quite a few hymns and carols originated from classical composers. Examples of this include "Joy to the World," whose melody was composed by George Frideric Handel (more famous for his Christmas Oratorio "The Messiah" and his "Water Music" suite) and "In the Bleak Midwinter" by Gustav Holst (more famous for his suite, "The Planets"). By the time you read this, the holidays will be long over, but in case you're looking for a few

inexpensive disks of holiday music for next year, here are a few good ones. The first is a CD from Naxos (no. 8.550589) simply titled "Christmas Carols," a recording by the Worcester Cathedral Choir of twenty mostly well-known holiday carols. My favorite of these is "Once in Royal David's City," whose melody was composed by an obscure 19th century English organist named Henry John Gauntlett, who had turned down a chance to become a pupil of one of Mozart's students to instead become a solicitor. The chorale arrangements of these carols is pleasant, and the harmonies lush. They were recorded in Worcester Cathedral with accompaniment by its organ, and there is some resulting echo and reverberation that seems appropriate for a chorale recording.

There are also many classical music instrumental versions holiday music available; two that I like are "A Festival of Carols in Brass" by the Philadelphia Brass Ensemble (CBS no. MK 7033) and "Christmas Brass" by the Dallas Brass (Regency V20033); I really think that holiday music works better in smaller ensembles than full orchestras, and these two disks have some very nice arrangements.

Mailing Comments – SFPA 224

Ned Brooks

On computer software: "You still have WS_FTP!" Yes, I use it at work and here at home. It's still being marketed from Ipswitch, by the way, and every so often they announce incremental upgrades.

On Joe Mayhew: "Joe had brain surgery some years before he died." Nope, he had heart surgery, not brain surgery. I had thought that blood transfusion during that operation was a possible vector for how he contracted CJD, but there's no evidence and apparently no interest in investigating. In spite of the new Red Cross policy on donors (see above), I don't think there's ever been a conclusive study to show that CJD can be spread through blood. But they're apparently not taking any chances.

Norm Metcalf

On Sam Moskowitz: "Sam's research isn't perfect but it's far better than some people will give him credit for." No disagreement from me. "When [Sam] made mistakes they were inadvertent. He wasn't trying to deceive anyone." Again, I'm in agreement; though Sam did have a few axes to grind which at times (in my opinion) somewhat colored his spin on events he reported, he did not withhold facts or otherwise misreport. Let's not overreact here – Sam was one of science fiction's (both professional and fan) most prominent historians. However, Sam was a participant or non-disinterested bystander in some of what he reports on, which quite naturally colors his take on those events. There's no good way to prevent it; that kind of subtle bias would occur no matter who the historian. The only alternative approach to this, that Harry Warner, Jr. took in his two fan history books, is to mostly edit oneself out of the histories, which I find to be more objectionable.

Richard Dengrove

On the aftermath of the September 11th attack: "Getting home, as you would expect, was a zoo. Roads into D.C. were closed, as were the ones to the Pentagon. As was the subway into

D.C. and to the Pentagon.” Most of the Washington Metrorail system stayed open, though. The emergency planners apparently thought that if D.C. were under a threat of more attacks, having tens of thousands of government workers out there on the streets milling around would be worse than some possible threat to the subway system itself. As for the Pentagon Metrorail stop, luckily it’s on the other side of the Pentagon from where the attack occurred and the attack didn’t damage the underground rail. Metrorail did run trains out past the Pentagon again not too long after the attack, but they didn’t stop there. It wasn’t until the next day that police officers were assigned to some of the subway platforms; the Rockville stop, which I used then to enter the system, had three Montgomery County police officers on the platform, fully armed and ready for any trouble. After two days without any incidents, the police stood down. “I don’t know anyone of the 110 at the Pentagon who died.” Me either. But my sister, who is a civilian employee of DOD, did. Sixteen people she knew, including two fairly close friends of hers, didn’t make it.

On driving into Philadelphia: “If the directions failed me, I would travel in the direction of the signs. Which, I take it, you did for the Philadelphia Worldcon.” Nope, there were no signs. Luckily, the exit we used from I-95 was Broad Street, which leads directly into downtown Philadelphia. And the buildings in city center were so tall, it wasn’t really possible to lose our way.

David Schlosser

On movies: “No question that *Shrek* had a lot of good bits, both short and long.” I agree that it was a pleasant movie, but it also seemed like it was mostly just a series of sight gags connected by a story line. I think it will probably be nominated for a Hugo Award, but it’s not one of my top 5 for the year, and not even as good as 1999’s *The Iron Giant*.

Guy Lillian

On the MilPhil Hugo Ceremony: “I’d say the worst thing about the Hugo ceremony were and are the Japanese Seiun awards. The costumes are pretty but the presentations are a drag – and seem to take hours. But of course, now that they’re a tradition, and a whole country’s fandom is drawn up in them, how do we get rid of them?” We don’t, hopefully. They, more than anything else at the worldcon, serve to show that science fiction fandom is a world phenomenon. And their whole presentation only takes at most maybe five minutes. I know that I get five minutes worth of entertainment out of it, and I’d be disappointed if it’s kicked off the program.

On Heinlein’s *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*: “Why didn’t the imperialist Earthlings reply to the Lunan’s faux meteor bombardment with a nice nuke or two?” ***spoiler alert until end of this comment*** It wasn’t necessary, in their minds. They thought they ended the bombardment by taking out the catapult (or maybe it was a rail gun) that launched the rocks at Earth, but the Loonies had secretly built a *second* launcher. Earth fairly soon came to the conclusion that it was better to give the Loonies their independence than risk the threat of more bombardment from a weapon they couldn’t locate.

Sheila Strickland

On the return of normalcy: “With the anthrax scare in full bloom I wasn’t sure if I’d have any trick-or-treaters this year.” Me either, but it turned out that we had just about the same number

(15-20) as last year. One thing I've noticed about the kids who come to the door is that hardly any of them say 'Trick or Treat' any more – instead, they yell, 'Happy Halloween' when I open the door. Perhaps this comes from our living in a multiethnic neighborhood.

Steve Hughes

On the Leonid meteor shower: "I've never seen anything like it and I doubt I ever will again." I watched about an hour of the show, somewhere around 4am, and it was pretty good – sometimes as many as 4 or 5 meteors per minute, sometimes a minute or two without anything at all. Some of the meteors were quite bright, ending with a bright burst. Nicki had wanted me to wake her up if it got pretty good, but just about the time I decided to go get her, the fog started moving in which pretty much ended the viewing. Hard to believe that we may never get a swarm like this again in our lifetimes.

On career paths: "I never knew you were a chemist." I haven't been, since 1980. It took me five years to realize that I didn't want to be a research chemist.

On the Clinton presidency: "He could have ... downsized the Federal government..." Actually, he did. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but I think the number of Federal employees was something like 400,000 less at the end of his 8-year presidency than it was at the beginning. Also, nobody seems to be giving credit to the Clinton presidency for restoring a degree of fiscal responsibility to federal spending. The Democratic party can no longer be labeled as 'tax and spend'. If we could eliminate some of the more egregious pork barrel projects, like the shipbuilding excesses secretly inserted into the budget by Trent Lott, we'd be better off yet. (Do any of you have the same instinctive reaction that I do, that whenever I hear the name 'Trent Lott', I check to make sure I know where my wallet is?)

Janice Gelb

On job uncertainties: "For three weeks, no one knew whether they were going to have a job. ... Basically, no one got any work done for about two weeks at least." Reminds me a lot of the TVA cutbacks of 1988 that caused/prodded me to find a job here in Maryland. Except it was two or three months where much of what we were doing mostly stopped while everybody was scurrying around trying to find other jobs (our R&D division had 80% cutback). I wasn't one of the survivors of my employer's shrinkage, but I was really ready to move on, anyway. Glad to hear you survived yours.

Randy Cleary

You get the Most Amusing Typo of the Mailing Award, from a line in your MilPhil report: "I played it cool and pretended I did not know there were Writers and Editors in my mist." No, they probably realized you were in your own little fog.

Liz Copeland

No real comments, except that I thought your 9-11 quilt was extraordinary. Nicki likes it a lot, too.

Jeff Copeland

On travel: "I don't think it's possible to get much farther than Bangkok in one day." It's a long day, for sure; the routing takes you through Narita Airport and an almost guaranteed 3-hour layover. As for going to India, the one time I did it, I took the trans-Atlantic route, via Frankfurt. I remember that I arrived in New Delhi at about 2am. From six inches of the snow on the ground (in February 1995) to 95°F, it really was like the Door Into Summer.

Guy Lillian

On worst fears not realized: "I've learned that the film version of Lord of the Rings will feature a female swashbuckler as part of the Fellowship." Obviously, your source had some of his wires crossed. The nearest thing to a female swashbuckler I saw in the movie was Galadriel or Arwen, and neither of them was in the movie for more than just a few minutes. So how *did* you like the movie, now that you've seen it?

Toni Weisskopf

On travel delays: "Some stupid goober from Gainesville, GA decide[d] to waltz right through Hartsfield Airport security so he wouldn't miss his plane [and airport security] shut down the entire airport for more than four hours." That story was back in the newspaper here this weekend; he's already been fined a few thousand dollars by the FAA and is facing criminal charges that could (but probably won't) land him in jail with additional fines. You seem to be a bit critical of security for shutting down the airport (and I can understand your frustration at the situation) but as for whether or not a camera bag (which he was after) was a possible threat, how was security supposed to know what was inside? You might not think a pair of sneakers would be a threat either.

mike weber

On beer: "Czechvar, the *real* Budweiser, from Ceske Budejovice [in the Czech Republic] is the beer you have waited 62 years for." I'm not familiar with it under that name; over there it's called 'Budvar', and yes, I agree with you it's an exceptional beer. The best Eastern Europe beers I've encountered so far are Budvar and Pilsner Urquell from the Czech Republic. Żywiec from Poland, and Topvar and Zlaty Bažant from Slovakia. All are pilsners. Of these, the only one easily findable in the USA is Pilsner Urquell. Perhaps someday that will change; they're all world-class brews.

On automotive CD player options: "I want one of those cassette-on-a-string converters that go from the output jack of a portable CD player to the cassette deck of a car stereo, so that I can use my Discman-type portable player." I've never heard of that before, and it sounds intriguing, as I'd like to add a CD player of some kind before my annual March drive down to Florida for the family reunion. I'd think, though, that a portable CD player wouldn't have the ability to absorb road shocks without disrupting the playback; the built-in automotive CD players are more hardened against that sort of thing, aren't they?

Gary Robe

On being fortunate: "Can you believe the luck Dubya has gotten in the last two months?"

Sometimes it's better to be lucky than good, I guess; I'm relieved that the Afghan War did not turn into the worst-case situation that had been feared. Dubya's luck goes back well before that, of course; if everyone's vote in Florida had been correctly tallied back in 2000, Gore would be president now. Now let's see if he's lucky enough to successfully foist the recession as an aftereffect of September 11th, or even better for him, on Tom Dashele.

On classical music: "*Sheherazade* will always hold a special place for me in the classical repertoire. It was the first piece I ever heard from a live orchestra." I have yet to do that, so I am envious of you. It certainly is a mesmerizing, enthralling composition. "My recording of [Beethoven's 9th Symphony] is by Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony on Telarc." A good one. Shaw is famous for his handling of orchestra-chorale works, and brought the Atlanta Symphony to world-class status. He is much missed.

Gary Brown

On baseball: "Contraction. What a terrible idea." Agreed. I don't think the Florida Marlins are yet at risk, so your June series between them and Cleveland looks pretty firm. If any National League team gets eliminated it'll be Montreal, but that situation, at least, could be easily alleviated by moving the team to Washington, D.C. The reason why that cannot happen, of course, is that the Baltimore Orioles owner, Peter Angelos, claims Washington as an extension of Baltimore and has campaigned vigorously against it with the other owners. In my view, Angelos is as big a problem as Commissioner Selig.

Jeff Copeland

Some very interesting quotes. I've got to get a copy of Chaikin's *A Man on the Moon*.

Almost out of room, but I have enough left to mention how much I enjoyed the new *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* movie. It was so good, it completely removed the bad taste still left, twenty years or so later, from the miserable and cheap-looking Bakshi animated version which had virtually no sense of wonder. This new version will definitely win the Hugo Award later this year, as most likely will the two sequel movies in the next two years. This may be the best film adaption ever of a science fiction or fantasy book.

Regards to all!

