

Variations on a Theme #15

from Rich Lynch, for SFPA 229 • written in late July 2002

A Bit More About Classical Music

I was in such a hurry to finish and mail my previous *Variations* that I didn't even mention one of the more interesting classical music events here in Washington. It was a piano recital on May 20th at the Embassy of Slovakia by students of a local school of music and art. Seventeen students performed that evening; the first, and youngest, was a five year old girl. When she sat at the piano bench, her legs were too short to reach the pedals, so they had to use an extender device that had pedal extensions. Her performance was anything but small, however; she played a fairly difficult *Rondo* by Mozart from memory. At that point I knew it was going to be a memorable evening.

Most of the student pianists that night were pre-teens, but the music they played was anything but – selections included compositions by Chopin, Rachmaninoff, Beethoven, Liszt, Prokofiev, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, and Grieg. One young lady played the difficult last movement from Beethoven's "Appassionata" piano sonata, which is one of the compositions you often see in recitals by famous concert pianists. Concert rules were in effect that evening; every one of them played from memory – there was not a single sheet of music in evidence.

The music was very good to excellent, but that really wasn't the most interesting thing about the event. On stage, they all played wonderfully, but when they were seated waiting their turn, it was like a high school study hall, with whispering and giggling. Even though many really were child prodigies and some of them even played almost to the level of a professional concert pianist, they were still just a bunch of kids.

But since I've described some of the local musical child prodigies here in the Washington area, I should probably recommend a few CDs with compositions by probably the greatest child prodigy ever, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who played a recital before Empress Maria Theresa when he was five and who began composing when he was six. There are many, many recordings of Mozart's compositions for piano available, of course, so that makes it fairly easy to find a couple of inexpensive ones to recommend.

One of them is a collection of three of Mozart's piano sonatas (Naxos 8.550448) pleasantly performed by Hungarian pianist Jenő Jandó, including my favorite, the Sonata in A Major, K.331, whose first movement is an interesting set of variations on a theme (in this case, on a simple melody) and whose third movement is the familiar "Rondo Alla Turca" – the "Turkish Delight" melody. Another Naxos disk (8.550201), again featuring Jenő Jandó as pianist, has two of Mozart's best piano concertos, including the 20th, whose middle section (Romance) is one of the most wonderful passages ever written for piano. (If you have a copy of the movie *Amadeus*, the middle section of the 20th piano concerto is the music they used over the end credits.)

If you're at all interested in classical music, Mozart is a good place to start. These two disks, each priced at less than \$6, are definitely worth the money.

Party Animals Invade Washington!

I'd heard they were coming, but it wasn't until the morning of June 12th that Nicki and I finally got to see one of them up close and in person. We were leaving the shuttle bus from the airport parking lot at the U.S. Airways terminal at National Airport, on our way to Huntsville for the DeepSouthCon, and there it was – a pachyderm, with ears outstretched like wings and a with a spiffy jet engine backpack, whimsically named “Bush Pilot.”

There are 200 of these sculptures around D.C. this summer, 100 elephants and 100 donkeys, all painted in different themes, designs, and motifs by local artists. The “exhibit” began in April and will run through the end of September, after which the beasts will be auctioned off for the benefit of the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities. So far, I've seen only 13 of them, and I haven't really gone out of my way yet to track them down.

My favorites so far, besides “Bush Pilot,” are “The Divine Miss Donkey” at Dupont Circle, which is a pretty good spoof of Bette Midler, the “Carousel Donkey” at Farrugut West Metrorail Station, which is a really nice recreation of a carousel animal, complete with pole, and “Prima Donkey” at the 2000 Pennsylvania Avenue shops, a ballerina. There are a couple of (incomplete) online galleries of the beasts:

http://www.dcpages.com/Tourism/Party_Animals/party_animals.php

<http://www.partyanimalsdc.org/gallery/animalList01.shtml>



DSC and Midwestcon

I've still got a bit of room left here, so I guess I should write a bit about DeepSouthCon and Midwestcon. Six months into the year, and these were our first two conventions, just two weeks apart! Not sure what that says about us – I remember when we lived in Tennessee, we usually attended nine or ten conventions each year.

Anyway, we had a pretty good time at each of them. The Huntsville DeepSouthCon was the first DSC we'd been to in probably at least a decade. Lots of old friends were there, of course – Mike Rogers and Ken & Julie Scott from Chattanooga and Pat & Naomi from Huntsville, plus many SFPAns. There was a moderate amount of programming, and the concomm did not put us on very many panels so we had a lot of time to sit and talk, always one of our favorite activities at conventions.

Midwestcon was even more laid back, but that's normal. It's an eleven hour drive to the Cincinnati area from here, so we left on Thursday, as we'd have to leave for home on early Sunday morning. Lots of parties all weekend, and more socializing with friends like Howard Devore and Bill Bowers whom we never get to see anywhere else but at Midwestcons. It was a pleasant weekend.

Okay, out of room. More a bit later in the mailing!

Rich