

# Variations on a Theme #18

from Rich Lynch • for SFPA 231 • written in December 2002

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## I Hear Those Sleigh Bells Jingling...

It's deep into the Holiday Season as I write this, and I hope everybody will have a happy and safe end of year 2002. It's been mostly, but not entirely uneventful here, and for once I didn't completely mismanage my annual leave, so I've not had to scramble to take all my use-or-lose this year. Holiday lights have gone up around the neighborhood and the annual barrage of holiday music has also long ago started, even on one of the classical music stations. There's even been an early season snowfall. I guess it really is getting close to Christmas.

All the holiday music on the classical station I listen to makes me think this might be a good time to say a few good words about a couple of CDs that contain some holiday music. The first one isn't even classical – it's some very fine acoustical guitar music by the late John Fahey, a collection of holiday music titled "The New Possibility" (Takoma 8912-2). It's actually a combination of two of Fahey's earlier Christmas albums, and what makes the music interesting is the style it's performed. Fahey was the originator of the so-called "American Primitive Guitar" style – a rather eclectic mix of mostly down-home folk and a little bit of blues. Fahey, who was originally from the Washington, D.C. area, had been around since the late 1950s; his first album, "Blind Joe Death" is now a real collectors item (only 95 copies were pressed). Fahey became known as an eccentric, eventually ending up in Oregon where he reportedly was living in near poverty for a while, paying his rent by reselling rare classical records and pawning his guitar between live appearances and studio sessions for occasional new albums. He was long gone from this area by the time I got here and I never got to see him live, but people I know who did say it was a roll of the dice what Fahey you would get any given night – everything from an erratic drunken spaced-out introvert to an outgoing humorist, but the excellence of his playing was never variant. He died about two years ago from complications to heart surgery, but his influence on other musicians remains large – Leo Kottke, for one, owes quite a bit of his stylistic inspiration to Fahey. He's really worth discovering; he was a real talent. One other CD by Fahey I can recommend is the two-CD collection "Return of the Repressed" (Rhino R2 71737), an anthology of selections from many of his albums. It's an outstanding two hours of music.

There's no John Fahey music on the classical station I listen to, of course, but there are quite often compositions by another eclectic American composer, the great Leroy Anderson. I'm guessing his name is vaguely familiar to most of us, but his compositions would be instantly familiar. He was famous for short semi-classical pieces (a collection of which are now available on an inexpensive CD, Naxos 8.559125); the one you will hear most often this time of year is "Sleigh Ride" (hence the title to this section of my SFPazine), but there were many, many other of his compositions that were, and still are, equally popular – "The Typewriter," "The Syncopated Clock," "Bugler's Holiday," "The Waltzing Cat," "Sandpaper Ballet," "Jazz Pizzicato," etc. Even though his compositions have sometimes been dismissed as 'classical music lite', he was actually a brilliant composer; he worked for the U.S. military for part of his life and composed in his spare time. Anderson graduated from Harvard with both a B.A. and a M.A. in music, and in the early 1930s became director of the Harvard University Band. He was 'discovered' later in the

1930s by Arthur Fiedler, then only the musical director for the Boston Pops, who liked Anderson's clever arrangements and encouraged Anderson to compose music specifically for the Boston Pops orchestra. This alliance lasted to the very early 1950s, when one of his compositions, "Blue Tango," became a #1 *Billboard* hit and broadened his horizons after that.

Anderson actually did write longer, more 'conventional' classical pieces; his most ambitious composition was a piano concerto that he was never fully satisfied with, and intended to eventually somewhat revise. He also co-wrote a Broadway musical, "Goldilocks," that was performed in the late 1950s. Anderson died in 1975, and was posthumously elected to the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 1988. John Williams said of Anderson that "though we have performed his works countless times over the years at the Boston Pops, his music remains forever as young and fresh as the very day on which it was composed." And he's right!

## **Mailing Comments – SFPA 230**

### **Ned Brooks**

On stereo equipment: "I don't know what you mean by a 'compatible' turntable." One that works well with the stereo system we have, in other words. The turntable we have now needs some kind of pre-amp; it does work, but you don't get much sound volume out of it.

On earliest usage of 'fanzine': The [OED's] earliest cite is the January 17, 1949 issue of *New Republic*, referring to Langley Searles' *Fantasy Commentator*. ... What would they accept as documentation of the 1940 origin [by Louis Russell Chauvenet]?" I just looked in my 1960s correspondence file, and Chauvenet, in his February 23, 1997 letter to me, wrote that "[Sam Moskowitz] has traced the introduction of the word to the October 1940 issue of *Detours* (initial series)." Moskowitz's write-up of that research appeared on page 200 of *Fantasy Commentator* 50, which I also have upstairs somewhere.

On outdoor art exhibits: "I gather the DC elephant and donkey things are mass-produced and differ only in the surface decoration." Yes, the artists all started out with plain white animals to customize, but not all of them were customized by just surface decoration. Quite a few of them were substantially structurally modified, such as "Strom," an elephant that was converted into a Woolly Mammoth (it was, appropriately, on display in front of the National Geographic Society headquarters) or "Lucky Don Keystador" where a wooden oak cross was inset into the creature. And there were others.

### **David Schlosser**

On new cars: "One advantage the [Toyota Prius] has over the Saturn is a higher body so you don't have to sit as low to the ground, and it is easier to get in and out of as a result." I think all 2003 model Toyotas have been redesigned and have that feature. Nicki's Echo certainly does, and from what I've seen, the new Corollas do too. (I want one!) As you say, it's a lot easier for access now.

### **Norm Metcalf**

On fiction sequencing: "Allen Steele's 'Stealing Alabama' precedes his 'Days Between' and reading 'SA' first enhances 'DB'." Exactly so. They're both sections of Steele's novel *Coyote*.

On fiction sequencing (take two): "Thanks for explaining that David Brin's *The Postman* is actually a group of shorter stories, which are uneven in quality." Three novellas, actually, and I

think only the third one is inferior. The first two did a good job of keeping within the bounds of the future he 'created'.

### **Richard Dengrove**

Some very nice illustrations in your SFPazine. My compliments on your mother's artwork.

On not paying attention to what's going on in town: "I wish I had known that D.C. artists were doing variations on the parties' elephant and donkey statues, and placing them all over town." How in the world did you not know about the Party Animals exhibit? It was in the news-papers and on TV (there was a televised special documentary about it on WETA, in fact, and it was on the cover of the WETA magazine). And if you'd traveled on foot anywhere in downtown D.C. at any time between April and November, you'd have happened across many of them. There were even three of them at National Airport! "Have any survived the summer?" Yes, several. One place to look is the shops at 2000 Pennsylvania Avenue (not far from the GWU campus), where there should be at least two of them. (Before Christmas, there were more than a dozen there.) Some of the sponsors reportedly have purchased their Animals, too (the American Chemical Society, for one). And, of course, you could always purchase the souvenir book if you want to see pictures of all of them.

On new worlds: "I thought planets of other stars were discovered by the swathe their gravity made in their star's fire." Not entirely sure what you mean by 'swathe', but you're somewhat correct. You cannot detect an extra-solar planet by looking for a star's 'wobble' as the star and the planet revolve around a common center of gravity – the wobble is just too small and doesn't exceed the experimental observational error. However, if the plane of that star and planet system is mostly 'flat' (i.e., if we here on earth are mostly aligned with the orbital plane), even for relatively non-massive planets there will be a small but significant (and detectable) cyclical spectral shift observed in the star caused by that 'wobble'. This is the method that was used to find all those extra-solar planets that were discovered during the last decade. What's surprising is that it took so long for somebody to figure out that the method worked and was easy to do.

On classical music composers: "I hear that Dvořák didn't get paid what he was promised in coming to the U.S." True; his sponsor's organization went toes up. He probably would have stayed longer if the money had kept coming in, and you have to wonder what he would have done, and composed, if he had. A 10<sup>th</sup> symphony? Not out of the question.

On impractical science: "[Verne's Captain] Nemo got sodium and mercury for his ship's batteries from the water." Sodium is plentiful, yes, but mercury is a trace element – it would be much easier just to buy some from a country where it naturally occurs. And as for sodium, how do you get it from sea water? Well, you electrolyze it in a mercury cell, then distill away the sodium (or the mercury, whichever one has the lower boiling point). But where do you get the electricity to do the electrolysis? Why, from the ship's sodium-mercury batteries, of course! This 'bootstraps' logic error is similar to one that we kept getting back when I worked at TVA – well-meaning people kept suggesting that we could do away with all the polluting coal we used to generate electricity by simply using electric heaters to boil the water instead.

### **Guy Lillian**

On Hugo voting: "It still hurts to see *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* given the winner's checkmark over *Field of Dreams* – another absurd 'victory' for the Australian rules ballot." You've got a much better memory than I do, because I have no idea how the voting breakdown

went, and if *FoD* lost an intermediate lead. Sometimes inferior candidates win, as we are only too aware by now.

### **Janice Gelb**

On jury duty: “[They] actually scheduled me for a week I could attend.” It’s been probably a decade or more since I was last summoned for jury duty, and I wasn’t called (unlike in Tennessee, where you were supposed to be available for two full weeks, here in Maryland it’s only one day). I’m kind of surprised I haven’t had a summons lately, because you’re only immune for seven years after you’ve answered the previous call.

On attending the World Fantasy Convention: “As you can see from the report, I didn’t really participate that much.” Indeed. Interesting report, and I did notice that nowhere in it did you mention anything about any of the programming. I’ve only been to one WFC (the one in Baltimore in the mid 1990s), and I came away a bit underwhelmed – so much so that I’m not sure I want to spend the \$100 for a membership to the one we’re having here in D.C. this autumn. I remember that the fans were there solely as spectators – no fan-related programming, and no open room parties (that I discovered, anyway) in the evenings. I thought it was all kind of sterile compared to a Worldcon.

On snagging foul balls: “The closest one I ever saw was at the first World Series game I went to this year, which was caught by a guy two rows ahead of me and two seats over.” That probably means you were briefly on national TV. I’ve had several near misses with foul balls – twice I’ve had hand contact but couldn’t hold on. Nicki just tends to duck.

On traveling: “I’m not in the same league as Steve or Rich, as I do most of my traveling in the lower 48.” I don’t travel nearly as much as people think I do – it’s those Postcard Diaries that give me the reputation for being on the road a lot, I think. I’d say that you log far more air miles per year than I do, and I know you have far more hotel nights.

### **Sheila Strickland**

On ‘Webography’: “We have to find ten web sites on a particular topic that would be useful to a particular library audience and evaluate them.” Wow, this is exactly the type of thing I do at work, except that it’s all energy-related, rather than for general interest audiences. Here’s one of my web sites, if you want to check out how I’ve done:

<http://fossil.energy.gov/international/mexico.html>

### **Tom Feller**

On conventions: “[Constellation] was in a new hotel.” The same weekend you were in Huntsville for that convention, Nicki and I were in Silver Spring, Maryland for CapClave, the second in a new series of conventions sponsored by the local SF club, WSFA. We even had something you didn’t have to contend with, too – a sniper on the loose terrorizing the community (the CapClave hotel was about a half mile from one of the shooting sites). It didn’t stop us from going out of the hotel – a dozen of us walked about half a mile to a nice Thai restaurant one evening – but we *were* a bit more observant to what was going on around us. (Actually, there wasn’t much danger, because the police had been conducting large-scale dragnets after the more recent shootings, and downtown Silver Spring was not an easy place to get away from. We were both dismayed and relieved when the shooting that weekend was way away from us, near Richmond, Virginia. Soon after that they caught the snipers; the shooting during CapClave

weekend was either the last, or the next-to-last.)

On seemingly endless awards ceremonies: “The Seiun awards only took 12 minutes this year? They seemed endless.” For two awards, including acceptance speeches, 12 minutes isn’t too bad. It’s probably a better average than many of the Hugos, in fact. I remember that the acceptance speeches for the Seiuns were not brief, so it’s not exactly the Japanese presenters’ fault, at any rate.

### **mike weber**

On optical illusions: “Our cover this issue is an actual Lego construction [of Escher’s ‘Ascending Descending’].” Damfino how it was done; the stairway seems continuous, and keeps descending relative to its surroundings. Amazing!

On namesakes: “I do a Google on ‘mike weber’ and I get an unlimited hydroplane driver who lives in Dawsonville, Georgia.” I find by Googling my name that there is both a Hollywood actor and a retired professional football player with my name. I don’t *think* they’re the same person, but with the numbers of athletes who have made the jump to acting, I’m not entirely sure.

### **Jeff Copeland**

On environmental science: “A recent report on the Discovery Channel seemed to say that carbon dioxide in the air is continually lost to the oceans, and that the only thing that keeps up the level of CO<sub>2</sub> in the earth’s atmosphere is vulcanism.’ I think that fails to explain the ozone holes, which are fairly recent.” You’re right, but on the other hand, CO<sub>2</sub> has nothing to do with ozone depletion in the stratosphere. That’s caused by chlorofluorocarbons that disassociate into free radicals up there, and catalyze the decomposition of ozone. Now that there’s a mostly worldwide ban on sale of CFCs, the ozone hole problem seems to be getting less severe.

On famous child custody cases: “Harken back ... to a nasty custody case where the mom had consistently refused to allow the father to see the kids at all, going so far as to not produce the kids under court order. She got bunged up for contempt for something like eighteen months. She’d shuffled the kids off to live with her mother and stepfather in New Zealand to keep them away from their dad.” You’re writing about the Elizabeth Morgan case. Both she and her ex-husband (Eric Foretich) are surgeons; both had been practicing here in the D.C. area (Morgan still does, in fact). The story got quite a bit of press here, especially while she was in prison for contempt. A couple of corrections to your comment – there was only one child involved, and she was sent to live in New Zealand with the child’s maternal grandparents. Dr. Morgan was still in the slam while that was going on. She was eventually released from jail when a federal law was passed making it illegal to keep someone indefinitely jailed for criminal contempt – until then, it was open-ended. It’s true that she had some supporters on Capitol Hill, but I don’t think it took much to convince them of the unfairness of putting somebody in jail and throwing away the key for mere contempt. When she was released, she’d served more than two years. For contempt! (What would Guy say about that?) “The fact she’d lied under oath, accusing the father of abusing the kids was apparently irrelevant.” I actually don’t remember seeing anything about it being proven that she lied under oath – five expert witnesses (for the father), child protection workers all, and the police all testified they could find no evidence of child abuse by the father. However, the treating psychologist testified that she did believe abuse had occurred (but she refused to provide her records of her sessions with the child). Morgan took photographs of the child in an attempt to document the alleged abuse, but was then charged with child pornography. (I’m not sure how that was resolved.) It’s true that Morgan comes across as a somewhat erratic person, but after all I’ve

read about the case, I'm not sure who is the villain, or if there was even a crime (other than criminal contempt). Certainly, you can identify with a parent who is fearful for her child's safety, even if she takes a rather outrageous approach to protecting the child. Today, it would not be possible for the child to be sent off like that to New Zealand – a parent who does not accompany an underage child on an international flight must provide a notarized letter to the airline giving his or her permission for the child to make the trip. I don't think this change was made in response to the Morgan case, however.

### **Janet Larson**

On Hugo eligibility: "Why was *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* nominated two years in a row?" The rules allowed it then, as the beginning of its serialization was in one calendar year, and the end in the next. I don't think there was another instance of this happening, and the rules were changed to prevent it mostly because of this (I've been told).

### **Steve Hughes**

On interest rates: "When you're only making 1.2% on a loan your tolerance for risk gets a lot lower! Again it becomes harder for companies to get money to expand and *very hard* to get money for new ventures." I don't agree with this; you cannot do new ventures when the interest rate is high because it increases the return-on-investment requirements – too high a ROI and the project becomes un-doable. The easier the available of capital for new projects, the more of them that can be done (because more of them meet the ROI requirements).

On skyscraper design: "If the WTC had been built as a traditional skyscraper it probably would not have fallen." Quite possibly so. The collapse was in part due to the failure of floor trusses, which, it turned out, were an integral part of the structural support for the towers. Use of I-Beams instead of trusses, assuming the beams were solidly connected to the outside structure of the towers, might have prevented it. Except that interior supports for I-Beams would likely have been necessary, unacceptably reducing the amount of clear space on each floor.

On the cause of the WTC collapse: "The latest thing is that it looks like it was the thousands of gallons of diesel fuel stored in the buildings that did most of the fire damage and not the jet fuel." I find this very hard to believe – you're saying that thousands of gallons of diesel fuel just happened to be stored on the floors hit by the airplanes? Those were the floors where the collapse initiated (easily seen in the video of the south tower collapse), no matter what other areas were on fire. (And almost all the fire was contained on the floors impacted by the airplanes.)

On preventing terrorist attacks: "The old approach of stopping the enemy before he reaches out shores is a far better way of ensuring our security." Absolutely. Or at least, paying attention to preventative measures. Which brings me to the next comment...

On my suggestion that 9/11 could have been prevented by Air Marshals: "You know, for a sensible person you sometimes let your political feelings get out of control. You can't have been seriously suggesting that any President should have put 10 to 20 thousand armed guards on air-line flights for an indefinite period of time to try to prevent a possible hijacking." Well, there was no 'possible' about it, was there? Here's your original comment, from SFPA 227: "What if Bush had been told that terrorists would attack US airlines .. and the information was from a good source? What could he have done?" My response was: "Well, more than what *was* done, for sure. You mention putting armed guards on all flights as a possible deterrent; I believe that alone would have prevented 9/11." It absolutely would have; of that there is no possible doubt. You seem to think

that the cost of air marshals would be excessive, but how much is the cost for rebuilding the damage to the WTC and the Pentagon? Not to mention how much the losses in the stock markets post 9/11. (And by the way, my response assumed the threat was immediate, based on the way you worded your comment. I rather object to the way you have distorted the comment exchange between us, almost to the point of misquoting me.) Meanwhile, there *are* air marshals on many flights, nowadays. As for your other comment, “As for using drink carts to block cockpit doors... let’s just let that one pass.” FYI, that’s exactly what many incoming inter-national flights did prior to landing. Those things are heavy and difficult to move. If flight crews knew there could really be deadly cockpit incursions, this would be no doubt something that every one of them would have done. No disrespect intended and pardon the use of the vernacular, but why do you seem to have a bug up your ass about this, anyway?

On the Party Animals exhibit: “I would really like to see those. More to the point I’d like to photograph them.” Many are still here, and there’s also been a book published with photos of all the Animals. Info is at the Party Animals web site: <http://www.partyanimalsdc.org/>

### **Gary Brown**

On fan behavior at ball games: “That guy wasted beer to catch a foul ball at a baseball game? There are limitations to proper human behavior.” I’m happy to report to you, then, that he didn’t suck on his shirt to try to reclaim the spilled beer after that.

### **Gary Robe**

On business travel: “Jumping in a plane and heading off to Brazil for three days just seems to fit right in with the pace of the last two months.” I don’t think I’d agree to a three-day international business trip, if I had any say about it – it seems too wasteful of travel money to me, not to mention wear-and-tear on myself. Traveling south instead of east saves you a lot of time zone change, though, so maybe it’s easier on the body.

### **T.K.F.W. Reinhardt**

On orchestral performances: “We saw the Radio Orchestra of Paris, or something like that, do a program of ‘La Mer’ by Debussy, which was pretty, as it should be, and ‘La Turanglia’ by Messiaen, which was loud, childish, and just all around awful, as I suppose it was intended to be, too.” I’ve got a theory about orchestral performances – the more prestigious the orchestra is supposed to be, the more likely they will play compositions that are apt to leave you cold.

More on orchestral performances: “I did think of you while we were [at the performance] and wondered what you would make of it.” About the same as you. I prefer melodic compositions, not performances that show off the expertise and capabilities of the orchestra at the expense of the listeners. You probably have already figured that out from the classical music sections in my past SFPazines.

On enhanced DVDs: “[The enhanced 4-disk DVD of *LotR: Fellowship of the Ring* is] definitely worth the bucks, even though I’d preordered on Amazon and got it at a nice discount.” We got ours at Tower Records down in D.C., where it was on sale for about \$30 (and it even included a free pass for one to see *LotR: The Two Towers*). Did you find the Easter Eggs yet? One of them is on Disk 1. (Go to the ‘Select a Scene’ and from there to Scene 27, the Council of Elrond, and highlight that Scene. Down arrow from there and a ring icon appears. Select it, and what you get is a video of Peter Jackson telling you that you’ve stumbled across a surprise, a little

parody of *LotR* from the MTV Music Awards show with Jack Black and Sarah Michelle Geller. There's another Easter Egg on the second disk (the theatrical trailer for *The Two Towers*) which is once again accessed by going 'beyond' the last numbered scene. (An icon of the two towers should appear, which you then select.)

**Eve Ackerman**

On opera: "Tonight [Raphi is] going to see *The Magic Flute* and I'm excited for him. I think it's an excellent first opera for a non-opera fan to attend." All Mozart operas are supposed to be excellent (of course!) and this one, his last, is supposed to be delightful. I've never seen it, and I'm envious.

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Eight pages? That's not too many. Nothing else too much to report at the moment, so this seems a good place to stop. It's been a month of holiday parties, including ones at the Embassies of Russia, Slovakia, and Finland. (The Russia one was also an awards ceremony of some kind sponsored by the U.S.-Russia Chamber of Commerce. There were some notables there, invited as window dressing, and so I got to shake hands with Bob Dole. He's actually a regular guy, though he looked tired and old.)

Best wishes for a safe, healthy, and happy 2003 to all!