

# Variations on a Theme #40

From Rich Lynch \* for SFPA 244 \* written in Feb.-Mar. 2005

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## Happy Birthday to a Legendary Composer of Fire and Water

I'm starting this SFPazine on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, and today is the birthday of the famous Baroque era composer George Frideric Handel (1684-1759), who was born nearly a third of a millennium ago in the Saxony town of Halle in central Germany. His parents were not musically inclined so it is fortunate that, by about age 10, they found that the boy had a real talent for and interest in music. What followed next was several years of informal instruction from the town organist, and by his mid teens his abilities had evolved to the point where he became seriously interested in composing. In 1703, when he was 18, Handel moved to the city of Hamburg, then the operatic focal point in Germany, where he finished his first opera the following year. Following that, on the invitation of Prince Ferdinando de Medici, son and heir of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, it was on to Italy for several years where he enjoyed both success as a composer of operas and oratorios as well as (more importantly) patronage from the nobility there.

Handel returned to Germany in 1710 to take the position of court composer and conductor in Hanover, but within a year he had left that for greener pastures, this time in London, where he lived for the rest of his life. His life in England might have very well have been difficult – not long after he moved there his former benefactor in Hanover became King George I of England, and the new king was a bit displeased that Handel had left Hanover so abruptly. What reconciled them was an orchestral composition Handel debuted for the king during a royal party on a barge in the Thames River in 1717, and it remains famous and popular to this day – the first “Water Music” suite.

After that, the road to success and prosperity was secure for Handel. He became a naturalized British subject in 1738, and the two decades before that were mostly spent writing operas and oratorios. But it wasn't until 1742 that Handel achieved his greatest success in what is the most famous oratorio of all time. Handel had received, in 1741, an invitation from the Lord Lieutenant in Dublin, Ireland, to write a new oratorio for debut there the following April. It was to be religious in theme, so Handel wrote it in three sections, about the birth, passion, and resurrection of Christ. Some of the libretto was derived from the Bible and some from the Church of England *Book of Common Prayer*. It became known as “Messiah.”

After that, Handel's compositions were mostly oratorios, and he wrote them at a prodigious rate of about two per year. He still found time for some orchestral compositions, though, and in 1749 created another ever-famous and popular work, the “Music for the Royal Fireworks,” for a festival in celebration of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle that ended the War of the Austrian Succession. About 1751, Handel started to lose his eyesight due to encroaching cataracts. Medical science was not advanced to the point where it could provide any help, and, indeed, a series of operations that attempted to save his vision instead left him completely blind. After that he was still able to continue to conduct orchestras, and also (with the aid of a close friend) revise some of his earlier compositions. But on April 6, 1759, he became ill while conducting a performance of “Messiah” and died a few days later. Thousands attended his funeral and according to his wishes, he was buried at Westminster Abbey.

As you might expect, the legacy of Handel is huge, almost larger than life: according to one biographer, “The wide range of expression at [Handel's] command is shown not only in the

operas, with their rich and varied arias, but also in the form he created, the English oratorio, where it is applied to the fates of nations as well as individuals.” Instead, I think I prefer what another biographer wrote: “Handel’s legacy lies in the dramatic power and lyrical beauty inherent in all his music.” More than a quarter of a millennium after his death, his music remains timeless and immortal. And it will no doubt remain so for at least the next quarter of a millennium.

### **Jack Laurence Chalker (1944-2005)**

It wasn’t unexpected, and the news spread rapidly through the various sf listservers:

*It is with great sorrow that the family of Jack L. Chalker announces his death at 11:12 am on Friday, February 11, 2005.*

Jack had fallen ill near the end of 2004 and had been hospitalized in an intensive care unit. But his condition had slowly deteriorated instead of improving, and by the beginning of February he was no longer responding to outside stimuli. There were several obituaries that were written about Jack; here’s one that appeared in one of the local newspapers:

#### ***Jack L. Chalker, 60, science fiction writer***

*BALTIMORE (AP) “Jack L. Chalker, who wrote more than 60 science fiction and fantasy novels, died of kidney failure Feb. 11 in Baltimore. He was 60.*

*A Uniontown resident, Mr. Chalker was one of Maryland’s most prolific authors and won numerous awards during a career that began in his early teens. His 1977 novel Midnight at the Well of Souls, about a walking, talking plant with brains in its feet, sold hundreds of thousands of copies.*

*“He was one of the greats in our field,” said Catherine Asaro, of Columbia, Md., president of Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Inc. “He always had something provocative to say, his creativity in imagining different universes.”*

*When Mr. Chalker was a teen, he started a literary magazine, Mirage, that he produced on an electric mimeograph machine and assembled with friends in his home.*

*“He would write famous authors and see if they wanted to write free non-fiction pieces for his magazine, and a surprising number did,” said his wife, Eva C. Whitley*

*The magazine earned the 14-year-old Mr. Chalker a nomination for the Hugo Award, the genre’s highest honor, presented by the World Science Fiction Society. Mr. Chalker would be nominated for three more Hugos in his career.*

*Mrs. Whitley’s favorite book was 1979’s And the Devil Will Drag You Under. “His most memorable scene had two giant King Kongs on the Empire State Building, battling for control of the universe,” said Mrs. Whitley, who married Mr. Chalker in 1978 aboard a ferryboat on the Susquehanna River.*

*Mr. Chalker was 13 when he took a bus from Baltimore to the District for his first science fiction meeting. He was hooked. Several years later, he and a high school friend founded the Baltimore Science Fiction Society, holding regular meetings in friends’ homes.*

*Mr. Chalker later organized the society’s first Balticon, an annual conference, now in its 39th year, that has grown from a few dozen attendees to as many as 2,000.*

*“It’s a relatively small field, and because science fiction has so many conventions, it’s very hard not to meet 90 percent of the writers,” author Mike Resnick said.*

*Mr. Chalker traveled as far as Australia for conventions, and on his Web site he proclaimed plans to attend this year’s World Science Fiction Society convention in Scotland.*

*He received hundreds of letters and e-mails every year, and he used to respond to all of them, his wife said.*

*“He just never forgot that he was once a little teenage boy running around science fiction conventions, and he always tried to make it a good experience for others,” she said.*

*Mr. Chalker also wrote several books about the writer H.P. Lovecraft and owned a publishing company, Mirage Press.*

*A funeral service is planned for Monday, Feb. 21, at Marzullo Funeral Chapel in Baltimore.*

*In addition to his wife, he is survived by two sons, David Whitley Chalker and Steven Lloyd Chalker, both of Uniontown.*

Nicki and I attended the memorial service for Jack, and it seemed a bit surreal to us (and not just because most of the attendees were sf fans). The minister was one of Eva’s co-workers who was also the head of a black Baptist church somewhere in Baltimore. He brought along two of his associates from the church, but they seemed so inexperienced that neither of them could get through a scripture reading without stumbling over every fifth word or so. (One of them kept getting prompts from a fan standing nearby, who gave him correct pronunciations for some of the words.) The two readings, both lengthy, seemed not to have all that much to do with the subject of loss and bereavement. And then there were the songs...

The first one was sung *a cappella* by one of Eva’s friends; I’m guessing she was probably a folksinger, and she definitely had a good voice. But the song seemed more than a bit out-of-place for someone whose ashes would soon be scattered: it was Billy Joel’s “I Love You Just the Way You Are.” (Nicki thought a better choice would have been Warren Zevon’s “Keep Me in Your Heart for a While”) A bit later, the same woman sang a more appropriate song for the evening, *Amazing Grace*. It was familiar enough to all of us there that most people joined in, at least for the first verse. She decided to sing all four verses, though, and the number of voices dropped off with each succeeding verse – many people sang with her for the second verse, some sang the third verse, and a few stalwarts made it all the way through the fourth. There was an organist present (another of the pastor’s associates), and partway through the first verse he jumped in as accompaniment to all the voices. Unfortunately, he chose a different key than the woman singing, so for the first two verses the singers and the organist fought a grim battle for supremacy, with the singers finally giving in and dropping into the organist’s key at about the beginning of the third verse. The recessional song was “I’ll Fly Away” (an uplifting traditional country-folk song you may remember from the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*). About half of the people there sang it that way, but the rest sang it as a dirge and the result sounded a bit, well, different. I think Jack would have been amused.

To be fair, there were some parts of the service that were memorable, and in a good sense. Jack and Eva’s younger son Steven read some of the many short notes and remembrances e-mailed from fans around the world. Mike Walsh spoke for a few minutes of Jack and his contributions to local fandom. Jack and Eva’s older son David told some anecdotes about his dad. (I wish there had been much more of these kinds of remembrances.) There were about 125-150 people there for the service (including some, such as Ron Bounds, that I hadn’t seen in decades), which pretty well overfilled the hall of the funeral home. Afterwards, Eva arranged for a reception at a downtown hotel (“Jack L. Con I”); it would have been nice to spend a few hours there with fans we don’t get to see very often, but by then it was after 9pm and it was more than an hour to get home from there (with work the next day). So I’m hoping there will be a Jack L. Con II next year. Jack was a friend to me for more than 25 years, and I will definitely miss him.

I can think of many conversations we had over the years, but right now I'm choosing to remember back to a happier time, when Nicki and I had lunch with him and his family at Noreascon this past Labor Day, not long before we headed our separate ways down the road back to Maryland. There was lots of smiles and pleasant talk. No way I could know that would be the last time I'd see him.

## **Mailing Comments – SFPA 243**

### **Sheila / OO**

A correction to the contents of SFPA 243 – my *Variations on a Theme* #38 was actually 6 pages, not 2, so that will bring the mailing's page count up to an even 300 pages.

### **Ned Brooks**

On Heritage Foundation events: “Do they make any money on these affairs?” Nope, but the luncheon seminars are not meant for that. They don't cost all that much (they've been catered by Subway lately), and they help fulfill whatever the Foundation's mission is for spreading their gospel, or somesuch. Once in a while the speaker or topic is high enough profile that C-Span will tape the event for broadcast. It's all about maintaining the organization's profile and visibility.

### **Janice Gelb**

On TV Reality series: “I became hooked on a reality series, *America's Top Model*.” The only one I watch, unless you count stuff like *Monster Garage* and *American Chopper*, is *The Amazing Race*, which is mostly lacking the pretentiousness of some of the other ones. It's also a good way to vicariously experience other parts of the world I'll probably never travel to.

On George Gershwin: “Where did you hear/read the ‘Ed Wynn’ version [of the derivation of the name ‘Gershwin’]?” A couple of online bios of Gershwin, at least, provide that information: <http://www.balletmet.org/Notes/GeorgeG.html> and <http://www.uurockford.org/sermons/S2001-16.htm>.

On possible worldcon GoHs: “You mention several people [who should be honored as Fan Guest of Honor] but not my own hopes for Nippon '07: Ben Yalow. He can't be chosen by most worldcons because he is on their committees or organizing bodies, but he was not involved with Nippon.” Yes, he would be a terrific choice for a worldcon FGoH, and I hope he will allow circumstances to permit it to happen some year. I also think he would be a worthy recipient of one of those special Committee Awards, which is still possible in 2007. (Not that I would expect the committee there to think of it, though.)

### **Richard Dengrove**

On *F&SF* ‘being nominated’ for a Hugo Award: “There was one vote for it [at the 1964 Worldcon] for Best Amateur Magazine.” Ah, that explains it. To me, ‘being nominated’ is *not* the same thing as ‘receiving one nomination ballot’. Sorry that I misunderstood what you were referring to.

On repro techniques: “Use a dot matrix [printer] for a mimeo stencil and not an electric typewriter. The dot matrix prints a much better page.” Perhaps, but it probably depends on the equipment being used. Nicki and I had pretty good results with both, until the era of laser printers and commercial repro came upon us.

**Tom Feller**

On travel annoyances: “I dread the day when you can use a cell phone on an airline flight.” Me too. It was bad enough on the subway on the morning commute when I worked down in D.C. – trying to zone out for half an hour or so but failing because somebody had an urge to gab, loudly, with the office or some significant other. Airline flights are much longer than subway rides, and you can’t move away from the noise to a different car.

**David Schlosser**

On animated movies: “Who else has seen *Fantasia 2000*?” I have, but I have yet to see the original *Fantasia* all the way through. “The bit based on [Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue”] is ... the best of the new vignettes they did.” That vignette had the strongest story line; my favorites were the flying whales (to Respighi’s “Pines of Rome”) and the opening abstract geometric shapes vignette (to the opening movement of Beethoven’s Symphony no.5).

**Guy Lillian**

On moving: “Rosy and I are still exhausted from the task that ate the past two weeks like a zombie at a screaming victim: packing up and moving.” I can imagine. Nicki and I have now lived in Maryland longer than we did in Tennessee, but the memory of that chaotic three weeks following the 1988 Nolacon seem as fresh as yesterday. When I found out I had gotten the job in Maryland we had three weeks to close out all our worldly affairs in Tennessee and relocate to Maryland, including packing, getting the house on the market, locating temporary housing in Maryland, getting the movers contracted for the pickup and storage, and the physical move itself. The first of those three weeks was spent at Nolacon. The fact we were moving hundreds of miles away didn’t seem real to us until the very last few days, when the physical and emotional chaos became almost overwhelming. (I remember telling people at Nolacon that it was like I was reading a book and came to a passage that read, ‘Rich and Nicki are moving north’ and thinking, ‘hm, that’s interesting, I wonder what will happen next’.)

On the ‘PandaMania’ pandas: “[Mib the Panda] toasts them with bamboo.” There were several interesting designs, done as miniature maquettes, that were never made into full-size panda artworks. One was an homage to Mickey Mouse in sorcerer’s clothing (“Pantasia”) and another was a glittery bejeweled ornate mosaic (“Fabbearge”). I had an idea for one I wish had been made – a panda dressed as a baseball player in a pinstriped uniform, with the number 8 on its back: “Yogi Bearra.” Ah, if only I were an artist...

**Norm Metcalf**

On *F&SF*, once again: “You say that *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* being nominated for Best Fanzine is an Urban Legend. ... *F&SF* received one nomination for Best Amateur Magazine of 1963.” Point taken, but in my view, receiving one vote in the nominating process is not the same thing as being nominated. To me, ‘being nominated for a Hugo’ means being one of the shortlisted five nominees on the final ballot. Apologies for misunderstanding what you were referring to.

**Gary Brown**

Condolences on the passing of your father. Nice remembrance of him; he led an interesting life.

As for Alan Hutchinson's letter: "Rich Lynch ... was in St. Petersburg and didn't call? The bum!" Erm, guilty as charged, I guess. But I don't have his telephone number!

On the cost of housing: "Home prices here have not just shot up, they've gone through the roof." Absolutely. Nicki and I could not afford this house if we were buying a home today rather than at the end of 1995. One of my contractors told me that when she was looking to buy a house, she saw right off that no houses in my entire zip code were priced in the range that she could afford.

### **Jeff Copeland**

On movies: "[Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*] is a violent exploration of a completely screwed up jewel heist. It works out badly for everyone, except, perhaps, Steve Buscemi's character." No 'excepts' – it seems pretty clear that Buscemi's character meets his end too, from the eruption of gunfire off-screen near the end of the movie. And as for Elvis-JFK-rampaging mummy films, "[*Bubba Ho-Tep*] is well worth the two hours." Well...maybe. Nicki and I saw it at Noreascon, and while the premise and some of the scenes were amusing (and even a bit bemusing), there didn't seem to be enough there to make it more than a 'see only once' kind of movie.

### **Toni & Hank Reinhardt**

On the perceived threat of Islam: [Hank] "If you wish to refute my arguments, then read the Koran, the Traditions and then a history of the Moslem Expansion plus a history of Mohammed." I never claimed you didn't know anything about Islam, just that you were most likely wrong in your opinion that the Islam religion is involved in a world war against the rest of the world. I've seen no evidence to support this; the most you've been able to do is show some evidence that the Islam religion is in danger of being hijacked by a few thousand terrorist extremists, but we were already aware of that. Your expertise on Islam is truly impressive, and I will bow to you for that. But I remember back when other people with claims of great expertise assured us doubters there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. That didn't make them right, did it?

On the size of government: [Toni] "I think of Bush as liberal because of his pro-government growth projects." If, by that, you're saying that government is out of control with its spending, most people would probably agree with you. I don't think it's any one person's fault, though – once the Republicans gained control of Congress, they demonstrated they were just as capable as the Democrats in spending money, especially on pet projects inserted into spending bills. There does not seem to be a way to prevent this from happening, as long as it is perceived that voters reward legislators with re-election for bring money back to their congressional districts.

On luncheon seminars at conservative think-tank institutes: [Toni] "Glad to hear the audience didn't have knee-jerk reactions to your comments contradicting their speaker. Just what I'd expect of good, open-minded conservatives." Yes, it was refreshing. But another way of looking at it might be that every once in a while there's a speaker who is so way off in left field that even staunch conservatives find him indefensible. (That said, I should point out that quite a few of the people who attend these events are probably not staunch conservatives, though there are obviously many of them, or at least people who vote Republican, present there. I go to these events, when I can, because they are interesting, not because I agree or disagree with what's being advanced.)

Yipes, out of room! Next time: Lynch Family Reunion 2005 upcoming, and a trip to Spain...