

Variations on a Theme #6

from Rich Lynch • for SFPA 221 • written in April-May, 2001

Florida 2001

For the second year in a row, the big event of March was a family reunion down in Florida. This one was as much fun as last year's, and it wasn't as much a hassle for me to get there this year, as I was able to share the driving with my oldest sister (who lives not far from me, in Arlington).

We only went to two baseball games this year – the Yankees in Phillies in Clearwater on Saturday, March 24th and the Tigers and Blue Jays the next day in Dunedin. Neither game was all that memorable, as it turned out – the Yankees played mostly a bunch of no-names (except for Bernie Williams, who made a nice defensive play and Chuck Knobloch, who got four hits). It was even worse for the Tigers-Jays (I defy anyone to name any three players on the Detroit Tigers); in fact, the most memorable moment of the entire game came in the first inning, when the Jays' starting first baseman, Carlos Delgado, got ejected from the game for arguing a called third strike. I'd never seen that happen at a spring training game.

Next year I'll have to drive by myself again; the only reason my sister wanted to drive this year was that we were bringing a computer to the seniors community where my mom lives, so that the people there can get email access (some of them were really excited about it). Total mileage for the trip was well over 2,000 miles, and it did get a bit wearing on the way back (we stopped in Florence, South Carolina, for the night, a place that seems totally devoid of anything of interest, except fairly inexpensive motels).

It was my sister's new car that made the trip as comfortable as it was, but by the time we got to Florence, we were both ready to call it a day. At the interstate rest stop just before we got to Florence, as we were dragging ourselves back to the car for the last stretch of interstate for the day, we noticed a couple of cars we decided we wouldn't mind owning, if we only had more of an income than we do. One was a brand new top-of-the-line Jaguar, looking ultra-comfortable and able to blow the doors off anything on the road. But the second was a cherry-red '57 Chevy convertible, in stunning, perfect condition; what memories of the 1960s that brought back! No telling what either of them would cost; certainly they were both out of our league. As we were pulling out of the rest stop to head farther north, I asked my sister if she could have only one of those cars, which would it be?

She only smiled.

Life in the Nation's Capital

One of the things I like about this area is that there's always something interesting going on. It's not yet tourist season (that starts in a few weeks when the cherry blossom trees start to bloom), but even so there are plenty of things that are worth checking out, and many of them are free.

For instance, there's the DC Environmental Film Festival. It's a ten-day event, international in scope, with the apparent goal of increasing awareness about conservation and ecological issues concerning the global community (I'm assuming this because their web site doesn't really state what they're trying to accomplish). It's mostly family-oriented fare, with everything from 4-minute



cartoon shorts to documentaries to feature films. Many of the events are hosted at some of the embassies in Washington: Nicki and I went down to Finland's embassy on Monday, March 20th to see *Tommy and the Wildcat*, a Disney-type 'true life adventure' type of movie set in (as well as filmed in) the northern Lapland area of Finland. The movie turned out to be not all that well-made, but it was fun and the setting was spectacular. And afterwards, the Finnish Embassy had a reception that was almost as good as the one they hold every year for their Christmas-New Year holiday party.

Another free event came to a close in March – the year-long Smithsonian's 'Piano 300' exhibit, which was a celebration of the 300th anniversary of the invention of the piano. And it was a multimedia event, with recorded and live music, hands-on interactive displays on how pianos work, and manuscripts by Mozart, Chopin, Liszt, Gershwin and Ellington. There were also some antique pianos on display, including one of the three remaining pianos made by the



inventor of the instrument, Bartolomeo Cristofori of Florence. There were more than two dozen pianos on display, of all kinds of designs – it was interesting to see how the instrument evolved over the past three centuries. One of the pianos used by Mozart was there, as well as Liberace's over-the-top rhinestone-encrusted Steinway. And there was a lot about some of the piano 'superstar' performers of the 1800s and 1900s, including – Chopin, Rachmaninoff, Paderewski, Louis Moreau Gottschalk, and Franz Liszt. Every Thursday, at noon, there was a docent tour of the exhibit, led by a pianist who played some of the antique instruments present at the exhibit. Over the year it was there, I visited the display four or five times; it was only a short walk from my office. I never got tired of it, and each time I visited it, there was something to discover that I'd missed on previous visits.

Only one musical event over the past couple of months – the Corcoran Gallery of Art hosted an evening of piano music on April 17th, including compositions by Bach, Chopin, Brahms, and Schubert (including some four-hands compositions), by four pianists from Lithuania, with a reception afterwards featuring Lithuanian food (I ate way too many desserts). It was a pleasant evening.

About Classical Music

This would seem to be a good time to recommend some piano music. I've looked through my collection of classical music CDs and the first thing I noticed is that more than half of the collection is piano music, either solo or with an orchestra. I like classical piano a lot, but there is an enormous amount of classical piano music available and the few hundred CDs I have don't even scratch the surface on what's available. So what's the best way to discover what 'the good stuff' is, at least from one's own personal viewpoint?

One way is to listen to collections of piano music by some of the more famous composers – Beethoven, Chopin, Rachmaninoff, etc. After all, they didn't get to be famous for nothing. In some of my previous essays about classical music, I've recommended disks by all of these composers. There's a disk of Beethoven's most famous piano sonatas (RCA 09026-61443-2) by the renowned pianist Artur Schnabel; Beethoven's works for piano signified a drastic change in how the piano would be used in classical music – instead of the subtle and delicate melodies of Mozart, Beethoven's compositions sometimes required the pianist to hammer the hell out of the instrument, and could not have been played at all without the evolution of the piano, soon after the time of Mozart, from essentially a piece of fragile cabinetry with strings into a more robust and durable instrument fairly close to what it is today.

I'd also recommended a collection called "The Essential Chopin" (Sony Essential Classics SBK 51338) that's the best single disk I've found so far of Frédéric Chopin's shorter piano works. Listening to Chopin's compositions, especially when performed by a good pianist, can bring on many moods:

exhilarating or soothing, delightful or pensive. The music is complex to perform yet uncomplicated in theme, and is appropriate for almost any occasion. And, for longer piano compositions, I'd recommended a budget-minded disk of Rachmaninoff's second piano concerto and the "Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini" (which is also a piano concerto in all but name) by Andrei Gavrilov with the Philadelphia Orchestra (EMI Red Line 7243 5 69829 2 5). The Rach2 is a particular favorite of mine, a thing of beauty filled with familiar themes yet requiring great technical competence by the pianist; it's what the piano concerto evolved into during the so-called 'Romantic' era of classical music of the late 1800s.

Another way to find out about 'the good stuff' is to take an even broader approach – find an album that contains a selection of works by many different composers, a kind of 'best of the best'. The good news is that there are plenty of those, it turns out, and most of them are not very expensive. One I can recommend is one that I found for less than \$4.00 at Tower Records recently, a CD titled "Piano Favorites" (Seraphim CDE 7243 5 69028 2 4). The pianist, Moura Lympany, is pretty good, but she's so obscure that I had to do an Internet search to find out that she's from the U.K. and her recordings date from the 1960s and earlier. The music, though, is anything but obscure – it includes such famous works as Beethoven's "Für Elise" (the music that Schroeder plays for Lucy on his toy piano), Mozart's "Rondo Alla Turca", Dvorak's "Humoresque", Schumann's "Traumerai", Debussy's "Claire de Lune"... twenty compositions in all, about half of which will be recognizable melodies. If you're at all interested in trying out classical music to see if you like it, this inexpensive CD would be a good place to start.

Mailing Comments on SFPA 220

Norm Metcalf

On Sam Moskowitz: "A lot of challenges to Sam Moskowitz's statements are by people who are annoyed that he was correct." Perhaps, but it's pretty well documented that SaM could have his 'facts' wrong from time to time. As an example, here's an excerpt of an article by Dave Kyle that appeared in *Mimosa* 21:

And there's another example of his deliberate or unwitting pettiness which I have just learned about at the recent San Antonio worldcon. Because of his recent death, his name came up in the Ops Room and Mark Blackman, a Lunarian and veteran con volunteer, told me a story which startled me, irritated me, and yet amused me. I simply had to put it on record and asked Mark to write it in my ubiquitous convention memory book. Here's what he wrote: "Oddly, my last conversation with SaM was to correct him on a point of fan history regarding you [Dave Kyle] and Lunacons. A Lunarians information sheet had listed you and SaM as founding members of the club. He came to me to 'correct' us. Dave, he said, was not involved with the Lunarians for its first year. The next time I saw [SaM] I told him that I had checked the minutes of the very first Lunarians meeting, November 1956. Not only was Dave involved, but at that meeting he was elected [the club's first] President. Moreover, SaM himself was not present at the meeting, but as he had expressed interest, was, as a courtesy, considered a founding member." That was SaM, you bet.

You mention that "there are some errors in SaM's published works, most made by his editors and typesetters," but SaM was certainly not immune to errors of fact, just like every other fan historian from time to time. He was an important chronicler of the history of science fiction fandom, but infallible he was not.

On the origins of Denver fandom: Your mini-essay was quite interesting, and I will be looking forward to your revisions to Robert Peterson's essay about the early days of Denver fandom. Is this still on your schedule?

Ned Brooks

On the aerodynamics of a home run: "A struck baseball, everything else being equal, would travel further the higher it started above sea level – the gravity is lower and the air is thinner." The difference in gravity between sea level and Atlanta (about 1,000 feet) is so miniscule that it wouldn't affect the trajectory of a baseball; it's the lower air resistance that's the culprit. You'd have to go miles and miles above sea level before you'd notice any lessening of gravitational force.

On typewriters: Mighod, you have several hundred old typewriters in your collection listing! Where do you keep them all?

Guy Lillian / *Challenger sub-micron*

Some good suggestions for Hugo nominees here. You write that we should "Name nominees for whom the Hugo will mean the most." A worthy idea, but this is still supposed to be an Award that honors the 'Best' rather than the 'Most Deserving'. (Actually, what we now have is an Award that honors the 'Favorite' or 'Most Visible' but that's probably a discussion for another time.)

DSC Flyer

This is a strange-looking DSC! A dealer guest of honor?? A *posthumous* guest of honor???? (Who the hell was 'Bandit', anyway?) How were these people allowed to win the bid? (Why wasn't Hank there to slap them around a little and tell them about DSC traditions?) I can hardly wait to hear who they decide to give the Rebel Award to.

Guy Lillian / *Spiritus*

On this year's Mardi Gras: "It ... was Rosy's first." And also the first Mardi Gras in a long time that you don't have any bare boobs photos to reprint. Cause and effect?

On the new postage rates: "I understand that Media Mail, ostensibly he replacement for Book Rate, is meant for videotapes and the like – not books, and certainly not fanzines pretending to be books." It *is* the replacement for 'Book Rate' and you *can* use it for mailing fanzines. We printed up some stickers like the one shown here; the mailing cost works out to be \$1.30 for up to one pound (up from \$1.13 before the rate increase). This isn't really all that bad; the most egregious part of the rate increase is the overseas rate, where it now costs \$3.80 per fanzine (up to one pound via the 'Economy/Surface Letter Post' rate) to mail to Europe and Australia, if you use the U.S. Mail for that (and we don't).



On fanzine publication dates: "The new issue of *Mimosa* came out since *Challenger*, just as the Hugo ballot went forth. I applaud your superior timing in fandom's wit-testing chess game, but I had to beat the postage increase." It was in our colophon, but I guess you must have missed it – *Mimosa* 26 was intended as an 'End of Millennium' issue, so it occurred to us we should perhaps mail it by the end of the Millennium. As it was, we barely got it out to beat the postage rate increase ourselves. If we were really concerned about wanting to ensure being nominated for a Hugo Award, we would have timed the issue for February. Satisfied?

On possible Worldcon Fan Guests: "Yes! Terry Jeeves for Fan GoH at the next British worldcon! I'll suggest it!" He should be given the honor, for sure. As should Ron Bennett, who was another Brit actifan from the 1950s and 1960s. Both very worthy, and I really hope one or both of them is FGoH in 2005. And if we look toward the next Australian worldcon, in 2007 or 2009 (I can't remember which year they are bidding), there are several good FGoH candidates, including John Baxter, Robin Johnson, Merv Binns, and John Foyster. It would be nice if some of these would be considered for non-Aussie

worldcons, but that would be too much to expect.

On Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars series: "I'm a fan of *Blue Mars*, but I loved *The Martians*, too. Its stories should have filled last year's Hugo ballot, but nary a tale was mentioned." Some of them were reprints, and not eligible. This includes the best story in the collection, the novella "Green Mars" (which is not the same story as the middle section of the *Mars* trilogy) which I consider one of the ten or fifteen best shorter works of science fiction I've ever read. I think the best story of the collection that was eligible for Hugo consideration was "Arthur Sternbach Brings the Curveball to Mars." Sternbach was also a character in the novella "Green Mars", written at least 15 years earlier; Robinson doesn't forget about old characters!

Sheila Strickland

On Kage Baker: "I'm surprised you had trouble finding her books." Since my last SFPazine, I bought *In the Garden of Iden* from Amazon.com, and I've read it. It's a good book. And just a few days ago, Nicki was scrounging around the last dregs of the local Crown Books going-out-of-business sale and came up with a copy of *Sky Coyote*, the next book in the series (I haven't read that one yet). I'd made it a point to look for it when I was there a few days earlier, and had somehow missed it.

Steve Hughes

On Finnish beverages: "I do believe I've had Glogg. ... A girl from the Finnish Embassy ... had some great spiced wine with her." Yes, that's the stuff. At the Embassy event they served it warm, with some raisins in it and other stuff I couldn't identify. Very good, but it was potent; a few glasses of that and I wouldn't have needed a buffet. Or much of anything else.

On the stock market decline: "I'm afraid that the worst is yet to come and we're going to see the market go down by about another 50% overall before the decline stops. Say a DOW of around 6000." This seems a bit overly pessimistic to me; if that was going to happen there would have to be other, equally bad, things going on in the economy, and it doesn't appear to be happening. The cut in interest rates and the better-than-expected earnings info that appeared at the end of April for several DOW companies has sent the DOW back up again.

More on the economy: "[The economy] actually crashed last year during Bill Clinton's term when the stock market fell by about 30%. That's a pretty good crash by most people's definition. It's a great pity that Clinton didn't have time to look after things..." Big disagreement here, on almost every point you've tried to make. For one thing, you've played a bit loose with what happened in the decline – only the NASDAQ suffered a 30% decline (it's actually been more than 50%; the NASDAQ was above 5000 at one point); the DOW only went down about 10%. I wouldn't call a 10% decline a crash. And if you look at the cause of why the NASDAQ went down by 50%, you find it really had nothing to do with Clinton – the NASDAQ is heavily technology dependent and carries many of the venture capital-financed Dotcom companies that had all those high-profile IPOs in the past couple of years. Once they went public their stocks all went sky-high, and you wound up with absurdities like Yahoo.com having a greater book value than General Motors, while only a very few of them were even making a profit. But then it all changed, about a year ago – the venture capital guys and other financial movers and shakers got tired of waiting for the Dotcoms to become profitable and decided that stock values should in fact reflect companies' actual performance, not just pie in the sky. And so the bubble burst, and all those inflated stock prices came down to where they probably ought to have been all along. And this made people scared of technology stocks in general; companies like Microsoft and Cisco started taking a hit. So I don't think you can blame anyone in particular for what is basically a paradigm shift. Even Alan Greenspan couldn't have prevented the NASDAQ's drastic decline.

Richard Dengrove

On computer problems: “When I boot up or reboot ... it is ... possible that I will end up with a blank screen with lines at the top. Which means the computer is hanging.” You mention that the computer is made by Nvidia, which I admit I’m not familiar with. So why didn’t you buy a Gateway or a Dell? I had a Gateway at work which was such a good machine it convinced me to buy one for home. And I have a Dell at work now, which is every bit as good. I’ve learned my lesson about computers a long time ago – when in doubt, buy brand name.

On embassy parties: “The Japanese embassy a number of years back sponsored a party for librarians. All-you-could-eat sushi.” That’s one embassy I haven’t been inside yet; I don’t even know where it is. Embassy parties are don’t-miss events, though, and I’ve only rarely been disappointed by the hospitality – or the food!

Jeff Copeland

On company rewards: “So I took part of the bonus I got for my last patent application, knuckled under and finally got myself a Palm IIIxe.” You’re working for a company that appreciates its employees. I last worked for private industry 1975-80, as a research chemist (it took me five years to finally realize I didn’t want to be a research chemist, but that’s another story), and in that time there were many patent applications filed under my name, and I eventually wound up with eight United States patents as inventor or co-inventor. But whereas you get a nice bonus for each application filed, what I got for all the applications and the eight patents that did result was zippity-doo. Perhaps that was one of the things that colored my feeling that my career path lay elsewhere.

On long-distance travel: “The advantage of traveling trans-Pacific is the flights break such that you get an overnight someplace in southeast Asia like Tokyo or Bangkok.” *You* do. I’ve never had that luxury in the few times I’ve gone trans-Pacific, mostly due to limited travel budget and the perception that it would cause a public uproar about the U.S. Government wasting money by allowing its travelers to live large with unnecessary overnight stops. Anyway, I’d probably just slog on even if a stopover was an option; I’d rather just get there, I think.

On nutso Republican congressmen: “Bob Barr, ... the right-wing loon Georgia congressman, filed a bill to impeach Bill Clinton in the first month of his presidency. Of course, the impeachment was for the Whitewater land deal – which wasn’t a crime, let alone a high one, nor took place when Clinton was president.” Representative Barr continues to make his presence felt here in Washington, even after his favorite target has left office. Barr is threatening to tie up annual funding for the Washington area’s Metrorail rapid transit system unless the National Airport station is renamed as the ‘Ronald Reagan National Airport’ station. (The naming of Metrorail stations is a prerogative of the local governments where the stations are located, though the WMATA board has approval rights.) Barr seems intent on imposing federal will on local governments, something that Reagan himself railed against many times. Anyway, I agree with you that Bob Barr is definitely a candidate for the Dillpup Hall of Fame.

Trinlay Khadro / Dewachen

A lot here about Nepal; I can assume this is a country of interest for you? If so, have you read a collection by Kim Stanley Robinson titled *Escape from Kathmandu*? (It’s a trade paperback from Orb Books.) It’s not really fantasy (though there are Yeti in some of the stories), but it’s a very entertaining read.

Janice Gelb / Trivial Pursuits

On DUFF: “Once [Pat & Naomi] get back [from Australia], I’ll send them the box of DUFF

donations [and] make an official announcement that they are taking over as administrators, publish a last financial statement, and that should be it for my duties as administrator. It's been a fun and rewarding run." And as I told you earlier, I think you have been the overall best DUFF representative/administrator ever (though I might give Dick & Leah and Pat & Roger equal regard if they ever publish their trip reports). You've done a lot to keep DUFF financially healthy, and have been very visible in support of the fund. Pat & Naomi have a tough act to follow!

On centrism: "I'm curious whether you're still as optimistic about the possibility of a centrist Bush coalition given his recent environmental and charity funding proposals." It's still early yet. We shall see. So far, even though he's shown a few signs it will be partisan politics as usual, nothing really outrageous has happened, and there's no outward signs he's sold out to the right wing like his father did. If anything, he's shown a willingness to compromise once he's become convinced his original proposal won't win. So I'll keep an open mind.

On the music of Saint-Saëns: "Interesting to see this note about Saint-Saëns just after seeing *Fantasia 2000* and the hilarious flamingo routine to 'Carnival of the Animals'." The section of "Carnival" that was used in the movie was just the 'Finale'. I hope you get a chance someday to listen to the entire suite; there are some even better segments, like 'Aquarium' and 'The Swan'. Even though this has turned out to be one of his best-liked works, Saint-Saëns apparently disliked "Carnival of the Animals" because he felt it overshadowed what he felt were some of his more significant works. It originated, apparently, as a kind of private joke for the enjoyment of some of his friends. Would that all of our jokes become so immortal.

Eve Ackerman

On movies: "*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* [was] possibly the best movie I've seen this year. It was all wonderful – the strong heroines, the cinematography, the costumes, the music – it was grand." Totally agree, maybe even more so since I think it's the best movie I've seen in several years. Since it's an adapted work (the middle of a series of books), there could be a prequel, with more of Chow Yun-Fat and Michelle Yeoh. Someday.

Randy Cleary

On computer woes: "I upgraded the CPU ... [and] then tried to maximize the memory to 128 MB but when I installed it, it would not boot. it then would not boot with the old memory, either." See earlier comment to Richard Dengrove – never again will I do anything but Buy Brand Name when it comes to acquiring another computer. It couldn't have been cheap to get a new Pentium MMX and the memory upgrade; by then you're about half the cost of a new system from Gateway or Dell – one that's guaranteed to work!

On political parties: "Political parties are more alike than they are different." If you exclude the radical wings of both the Democrats and Republican parties (and assuming you're referring only to the Democrats and Republicans), I'll agree. The centrists are pragmatists who, for the most part, put the good of the country ahead of partisan one-upmanship. Problem is, all too often control of the parties is not with these centrists.

Janet Larson

On New York politics: "What do you think of the allegations that Hillary [Clinton] bought the New York [Senate] election with some of her husband's pardons?" Sounds to me like a bunch of sour grapes from the Republicans, seeing as how she won the election by such a huge margin. New York is becoming much less of a Republican state (not that it was much of one to begin with) so it's not at all

surprising a Democrat would win a statewide election there.

On movies: "I think *The Matrix* sequel is going to be a prequel." Well, Keanu Reeves is involved in both new sequels (that are being filmed at the same time); how could you have a prequel with him in it? (His character, Mr. Anderson, became aware of the Matrix at the beginning of the movie.) I'd expect there will be some kind of flashback or back story, seeing as how it would be nice to know more about the origins of the Matrix, but it seems doubtful they'd spend an entire movie on it.

Gary Brown

On excesses: "I signed up for the DirecTV baseball package, which will give me 35 games a week above and beyond those broadcast on free TV." You'll do your SFPazine between innings? That's a lot of baseball!

Toni Weisskopf

On election reform: Pat Gibbs states that "After the latest Presidential election those on the losing side have been calling for the abolition or reform of the electoral college." Perhaps a few, as there are in any election, but Pat makes it seem like there's been a massive sour grapes outcry for change from the Democrats, and that's just not so.

On the stock market: "I find it interesting that the Democratic spin on the market bubble burst is that it's because of W. Bush's pessimistic comments on the economy!!" Cheney's, actually. I've already given my take on that in my comment to Steve Hughes, but I do think Cheney's comments were a bit careless, even if I don't think they had a significant effect, or at least more than a temporary effect, on the stock markets. The head of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, has learned to be very careful what he says in public about the stock market; his words can cause downturns. The Office of the Vice President is also influential, and I'm sure the big investors take note of anything Cheney says concerning the economy.

On taxes: "I personally would like to see some serious tax revolt in the next few years!" I'm not against reducing taxes, but I think it should be a much lower priority than paying down the national debt. If a tax cut is desirable as a way to stave off a recession, so be it, but it should be as minimal a tax cut as possible.

On classical music: "Hank & I went to see a production of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* as a ballet." I did the same a couple of years ago in Slovakia (it was a very modernistic production, for mature audiences!), but it was done on the cheap using only prerecorded orchestra and chorale. So far, it's my only time at the ballet. Should I have held out for *Swan Lake*? Anyway, how's your exploration of classical music progressing?

On the Oscars: "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon should have won the Oscar [for Best Picture], not just Foreign Film!" Agreed. The fact that it was likely to win Foreign Film probably hurt its chances for Best Picture, I'm guessing.

OK, that's it for this time. Before I end this I'll recommend a good new show on the Showtime cable network – *The Chris Isaak Show*, the adventures of a somewhat fictionalized version of the real Chris Isaak band, Silvertone. The music is good and the show is entertaining. Meanwhile, I might be going back to Eastern Europe in June; if so, there will be another Postcard Diary. See you then!

Rich