

My Back Pages 23

Rich Lynch



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articles and essays by Rich Lynch

Welcome back once again to my personal time capsule. This time it's a mixed bag of everything from Broadway musicals to scary movies, from rock music concerts to obscure songs, from a short vacation to a long business trip, from launching rockets to launching baseballs. All eight essays in this issue are recent – the oldest dates back only a bit more than a year – but keeping with the time capsule concept, one of them remembers a very fine rock concert from more than 35 years ago and three others look back at events in my life that happened more than a half century ago.

First up is an essay I wrote in the very last hours of 2018. A year ago December was notable for a couple of captivating space-related news stories, but 2018 was also the 50th anniversary of perhaps the greatest space exploration science fiction movie ever made. However, there were two prominent science fiction writers who thought otherwise.

*Rich Lynch
Gaithersburg, Maryland
December 2019*

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‘Hugo Award’ is a service mark of the World Science Fiction Society.

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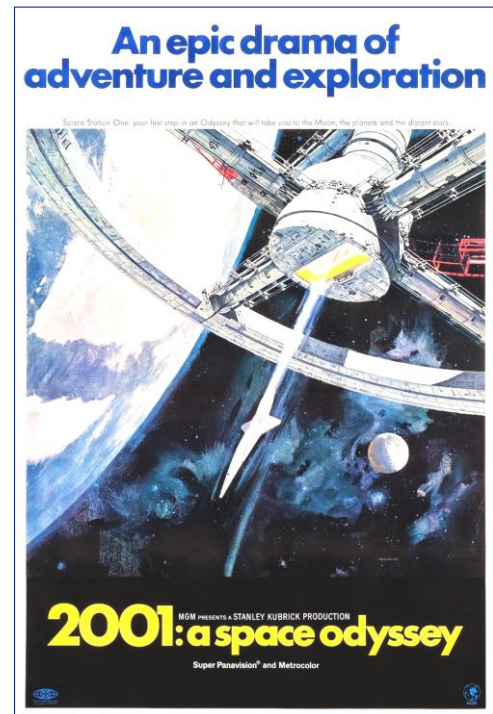
2018: A Space Essay

It's the final day of 2018 as I'm writing this, and the month of December has featured two news stories about space exploration. The one of immediate interest is about the New Horizons deep space probe, which is out at the edge of the solar system and will be whizzing past Kuiper Belt Object 2014 MU₆₉, otherwise known as "Ultima Thule", this very evening. But it's the other story, about the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 8 manned mission to the moon, which has captured people's imaginations. Or for me, 'recaptured', since I can recall very well all the news coverage about the event, including the memorable Christmas Eve television transmission when the three astronauts read from the Book of Genesis as they orbited the moon.

But 1968 was even more memorable for me as a science fiction enthusiast for a different reason – it was the year that Stanley Kubrick's epic film *2001: A Space Odyssey* first appeared in movie theaters. Kubrick, who had become intrigued by the possibility of extraterrestrial civilizations, had wanted to make "the proverbially good science fiction movie" and to do so he enlisted the collaboration of Arthur C. Clarke, who was then considered to be the preeminent writer of 'hard' (i.e., scientifically accurate) science fiction. And it was inspired, in part, by what I consider the finest science fiction story ever written: Clarke's "The Sentinel", which (like the movie) is centered around the discovery of an alien artifact on the moon and what happens afterwards.

I think it is still the best pure science fiction film ever made. So much so that fifty years after its release the science still holds up pretty well, even though the title of the movie was far too optimistic on how much progress in astronautics would be made in a third of a century. But something that the movie is noted for is what it *didn't* do – it made no attempt to depict the alien beings who created the artifact. This is probably due to the advice of astronomer Carl Sagan, who had consulted Clarke and Kubrick on this topic. Sagan had urged them to use imagery which only *suggested* the presence of extraterrestrial intelligence, otherwise there would likely be "an element of falseness" perceived by the viewers of the movie.

With all the painstaking care that was taken in making the movie, right down to the smallest details, one might expect that the reviews of the film would have been wildly enthusiastic. And some were. Roger Ebert, for example, wrote that the movie "succeeds magnificently on a cosmic scale". But others were much less impressed. Pauline Kael, for instance, described it as "a monumentally unimaginative movie" while Renata Adler wrote that it was "somewhere between hypnotic and immensely boring". There was even a mixed response in the science fiction community. The movie won the Hugo Award in 1969 for Best Dramatic Presentation so it's probably fair to say that most science fiction fans had the same reaction as I did when I first saw it – it was the best science fiction film I had ever seen and a great cinematic experience. But



there were two famous science fiction authors who thought otherwise. Lester del Rey found the movie less than inspiring, offering a dire prediction that it “would be a box office disaster” and would “set major science fiction movie-making back another ten years”. Harlan Ellison was even less kind, writing that: “*2001* is a visually-exciting self-indulgent directorial exercise by a man who has spent anywhere from ten to twenty-five million dollars pulling ciphers out of a cocked hat because he lost his rabbit somewhere.” And that: “It fails in the first order of story-telling: to tell a story.”

In the end, Del Rey was wrong. *2001* not only turned a profit, it was also a direct influence on the next generation of notable film-makers such as George Lucas, Christopher Nolan, and Stephen Spielberg. The American Film Institute has ranked *2001: A Space Odyssey* as #15 in its list of the 100 greatest American movies of all time and the film has achieved that gold-standard



Kubrick and Clarke during the making of
2001: A Space Odyssey

of cinematic immortality – even though it inspired a sequel, it has never been remade. And there’s a reason for that, as George Lucas described back in 1977: “Stanley Kubrick made the ultimate science fiction movie, and it is going to be very hard for someone to come along and make a better movie, as far as I’m concerned.”

And I, as a science fiction enthusiast, have my own take on why *2001* is as exalted as it is, at least for me. There are many good movies I’ve seen just once and it wouldn’t

bother me if I never see them again. And there are other good movies which I have enjoyed more than once. But there are very, very few movies which I don’t think I’d ever get tired of seeing, and *2001* is one of them. It is, really, a movie for the ages. ☀

Afterword:

Arthur C. Clarke was not only one of the greatest science fiction writers, he was also very much a futurist. Way back in 1945, in a letter to the technical magazine *Wireless World*, he described a novel means of future global communications that would be routed through artificial satellites in geostationary orbits. But it would be more than a decade later before the first ones were actually launched into orbit. Perhaps the most famous communications satellite was Telstar, which inspired a popular instrumental song of that name by The Tornados. It was back on March 19, 2008 that I heard “Telstar” for the first time in years – it was on one of those prerecorded music tracks that get played in lunch restaurants. And then, on the way back to work, there was a news story on the radio which reported the death of Sir Arthur. I remember that I thought the synchronicity more than a bit eerie. But also appropriate.

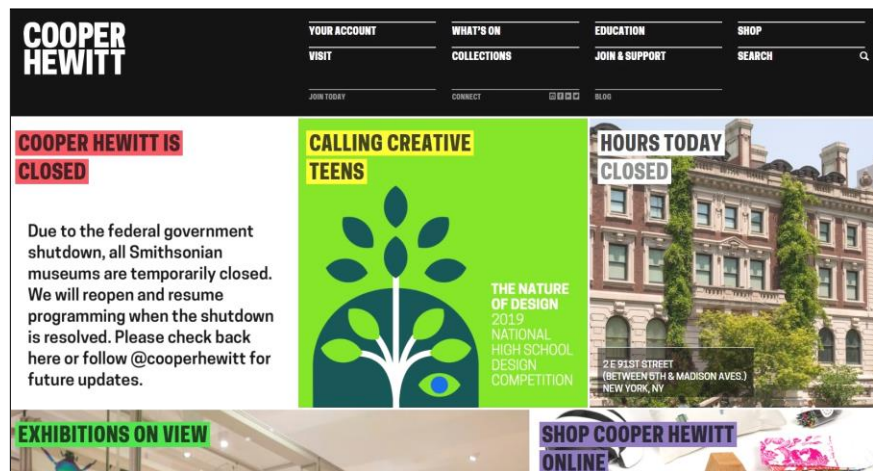
I regret that I never got to meet Arthur C. Clarke. By the time, in the 1970s, that my wife Nicki and I had started attending science fiction conventions he had become a recluse way off in Sri Lanka. The best that I could do, several years ago, was to visit the place where he wrote the screenplay of *2001* – the Chelsea Hotel in New York City. Nicki and I go to the Big Apple every January for a mini-vacation where, besides taking in historic sites like the Chelsea, we also attend Broadway shows. Lots of them. And this past January, as you will read next, we went to see a big Broadway musical whose roots are science fictional.

Four Days in the City

The Best-Laid Plans

It was back in November that Nicki and I started making plans for our annual early January vacation trip to New York City. We've been doing these for a decade so we had a plan already in place on what we wanted to do while we were there – five Broadway shows in four days, plus a couple of museum visits. We usually don't decide on what shows to see until we're in the city and can find out which ones have discounted day-of-show tickets available, but even by the end of November we had already singled out what one of the museum visits would be – the Cooper Hewitt. It's located on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, in the middle of the so-called Museum Mile section of 5th Avenue, and has collections and interesting exhibitions focused on decorative arts and design. Ah, the best-laid plans... As November turned into late December, we realized we weren't going to be able to visit the museum, because it wasn't going to be open.

The Cooper Hewitt is actually part of the Smithsonian Institute and, along with all the other Smithsonian museums back in D.C., was a victim of the Trump Shutdown of parts of the U.S. Government. It closed its doors on January 2nd, a bit more than a week before we would have gone there, and all we ended up seeing of it were photos and brief descriptions of current exhibitions at museum's website. All of which will be gone by the time we're back in the city.



[bad news at the Cooper Hewitt website](#)

But as it turned out, it was easy to come up with a Plan B as there were plenty of alternatives. Hey, this was New York!

I Become a MADman

One such option, and the one we decided on, was the Museum of Arts and Design, located at the south end of Columbus Circle. MAD, as it's known to its members, has been in existence since 1956 when it was known as the Museum of Contemporary Crafts. And even though the museum's focus has been broadened over the years to include other kinds of creative arts, crafts are still a central part of its interests. We found that out firsthand on our visit there.



[the Museum of Arts and Design](#)

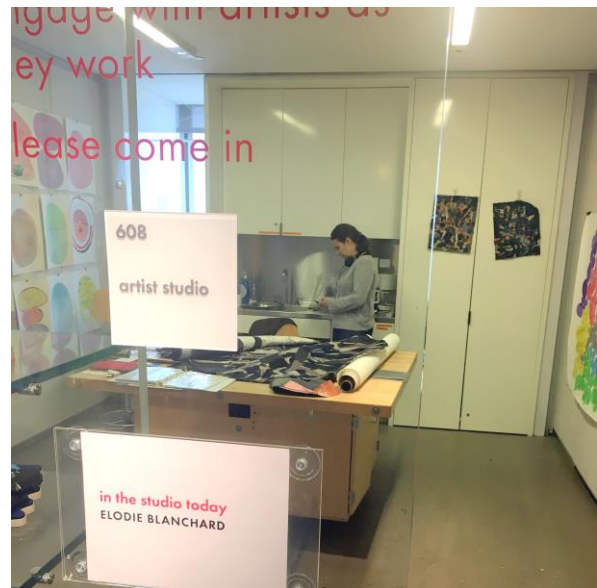
As an indication of how serious the museum is on showcasing American crafts, MAD has recently supported the creation of the Burke Prize, an annual juried award which recognizes the creativity of the American studio craft movement by celebrating “highly accomplished work, strong use of materials, innovative processes, and conceptual rigor and relevance”. There were sixteen finalists for the inaugural 2018 edition of the award, and MAD had transformed the entire fourth floor of its building into an exhibition that highlighted creations by the finalists. The winner was Cannupa Hanska Luger, a New Mexico multi-disciplinary artist of Native American descent whose work on display was his *MMIWQT Bead Project*, a social engagement project that “re-humanizes the data of missing and murdered indigenous women, girls, queer and trans community members”. It consists of more than 4000 clay beads, created by hundreds of communities across the United States and Canada, where each bead represents an individual who has been lost. The beads were then reassembled into a large portrait of one of those women. It’s a powerful work of craftsmanship and design.



Cannupa Hanska Luger's *MMIWQT Bead Project* and works by other finalists for the 2018 Burke Prize

But was it really the best? If I was one of the judges (and I’ll hasten to add that I do not have the qualifications for that) I might have chosen differently – there were some very fine crafts works on display from the other finalists. In the end I believe it was that potent social context which made Luger’s work stand apart from all the rest in the eyes of the judges. And as we all know, context matters.

But it wasn’t the Burke Prize exhibition that was the most memorable part of our trip into MADness. MAD really *does* walk-the-walk concerning crafts and design, and the sixth floor of the museum proves the point. It’s been set aside as shared studio space for artists and designers for the purpose of allowing museum visitors to meet and interact with them as they produce their work. The day we were there was fortuitous as the craftsperson-in-residence that day was Elodie Blanchard who, like Nicki, creates from cloth. She described herself as a ‘textile designer’, but it was clear that many of the works she creates are actually quilts. And, like Nicki, she often makes use of what would otherwise be scrap material in creating her works.



MAD craftsperson-in-residence Elodie Blanchard

What followed was a fascinating discussion between two craftspeople who were, in effect, dissecting the creative process. Ms. Blanchard described how her concepts for projects she was planning evolved into finished works. And also how her business plan was sustainable. It turns out that she does more than create textile art – she also designs upholstery fabrics. It appeared to me that the latter was actually where she made most of her money – she seems to have a client base and her fabric designs are very upscale, at least in price. But it also seemed like the creative crafts part of her business was where she derived the most enjoyment and fulfillment. And that I can relate to – while she creates with fabric, I try my best to create with words and images. It was enlightening to listen to her, and I wish we could stayed longer.

What's Old Is Neue Again

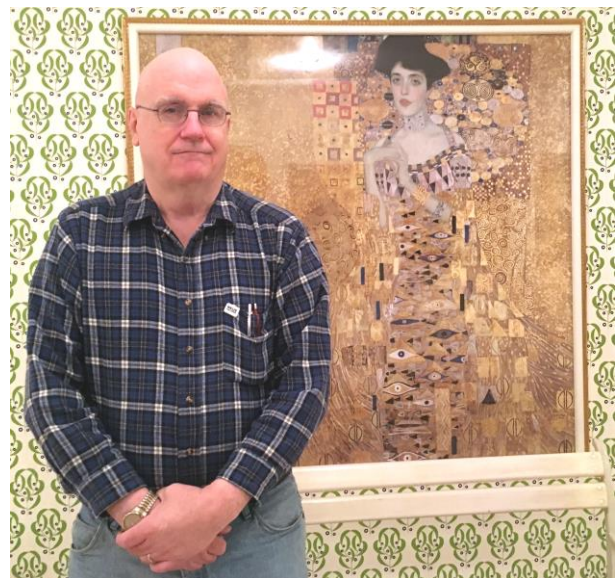
We were resting for a bit on a bench in MAD's lobby, before we went back out into the cold New York winter, and an older lady sat down next to us. She was a local, and she told us that in her retirement years she's been a semi-frequent visitor to just about all the art museums in the city. She commiserated with us about the Cooper Hewitt being closed and after we compared notes about other museums we've been to in the past few years, and then told her that we hadn't decided on what other places to visit during the current trip, she brightened and said, "Oh! You should go to the Neue Museum!"

"There's a new museum in New York?" I replied.

"Yes," she said. "It's on 5th Avenue near the Guggenheim." And then she laughed. "It's not a 'new' museum, it's the Neue Museum. N-E-U-E. You should see it!"

And so we did, the next day. Its actual name is the Neue Galerie New York, and it really *is* relatively new, having been established in 2001 and located in the former residence of socialite Grace Vanderbilt. The museum displays early 20th century German and Austrian art, and was in the news back in 2016 when it returned a painting by German artist Karl Schmidt-Rotluff that had been stolen by the Nazis during World War Two to the heirs of the original owner – and then, as part of the restitution settlement, bought it back at the fair market value which was estimated to have been in excess of \$1 million.

That painting was not in the museum the day we were there, but another more famous one with an equally checkered past was – Gustav Klimt's *The Lady in Gold*. It, too, had been seized by the Nazis and was reacquired by the niece of the original owners only after a lengthy legal battle that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court and was the subject of the 2007 documentary film *Stealing Klimpt* as well as the 2015 feature film *The Woman in Gold*. The painting was subsequently sold for a then-record \$135 million to Ronald S. Lauder, heir to the Estée Lauder Companies and founder of the Neue Galerie New York, and it has resided in the Neue ever since.



me and a reproduction of Klimpt's *The Lady in Gold*
(they didn't allow photos of the original)

There was one noteworthy exhibition that we took in during our visit to the Neue – the works of two German artists, Franz Marc and August Macke. They met in 1910 when they were both in their early twenties, developed a personal friendship, often visited each other's studios, critiqued each other's paintings, and on several occasions exhibited their work side by side. And then they both died in the trenches during World War One.



the entrance to the Franz Marc and August Macke Exhibition at the Neue Galerie

The Neue's description stated that: "[The] exhibition ... explores [their] life and work and the power of their friendship. ... They shared

Marc / Macke Exhibition title wall



FRANZ MARC AND AUGUST MACKE
1909-1914

ideas about art, and through their innovations helped create the movement known as Expressionism in early twentieth-century Germany." I am not an art historian so I don't think I could really tell the difference between Expressionism and other modernist movements, but I do know that Expressionism art can be described as the opposite of Realism and often presents scenes laden with emotion (as exemplified, say, by Edvard Munch's *The Scream*). I did get that impact from some of the paintings I saw and even in the relatively small timeframe of the exhibition (just five years) I could also see that both artists had evolved in terms of style, perhaps in part due to their mutual interest in their work. You have to wonder what they would have become, what heights they could have reached. If not for the war.

The Biggest Star on Broadway

This January, as has been the case for most Januarys we've visited New York, there were several big-name actors and actresses who were appearing in Broadway shows. Bryan Cranston and Tatiana Maslany were the leads in a new stage adaptation of the multiple-Oscar-winning film *Network*. Ethan Hawke and Paul Dano were getting great reviews in a revival of Sam Shepard's *True West*. Singer-songwriter Sara Bareilles and Tony Award-winning actor Gavin Creel had taken on leading roles in *Waitress*. And Jeff Daniels was starring in Aaron Sorkin's stage adaption of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. But, in spite of their prominence, none of these luminaries were actually the *biggest* star on Broadway. That would be Kong.

King Kong is a recent addition to the Great White Way. Even though it's very New York-centric, at least in its final act, it had originally been adapted for the stage back in 2013 in Melbourne, Australia. And it's a musical!



outside the Broadway Theatre on the evening of January 8th

To be frank, I was a bit skeptical going in that it would work very well. When you go to see a show about a literally larger-than-life stage character, you don't do it because of the music. And while that was true even for Nicki and me, we still found that the songs, though not memorable, were good compositions which did move the plotline along.



Kong's curtain call with his handlers

But in the end it was Kong that everybody came to see. And we weren't let down. He didn't make his initial appearance until about halfway through the first act of the show, and when he did he had his own talented assemblage of handlers – about a dozen people dressed all in black (listed in the show's *Playbill* as the 'King's Company') who were the manipulators. And they were so expert in their machinations of controlling a 20-foot-tall puppet that it was able to exhibit a broad range of nuanced facial expressions and body language. Truly sophisticated.

And there was also considerable talent in the rest of the cast – in particular, Christiani Pitts (who played soother-of-the-savage-beast Ann Darrow), appeared to be a future Broadway superstar. As a review on Yelp! put it, she “sang her butt off” and from our viewpoint she was the only one in the cast who succeeded in not being upstaged by Kong. The professional reviewers, however, were not nearly as charitable, the worst of the lot being *The New York Times*, which described the show as “the Mess that Roared”, and *The Observer*, which offered that “Broadway's disastrous *King Kong* is a \$35 million crime against puppets”. We, however, beg to disagree. When you go to see a Broadway musical, the one thing you don't want to happen is to come away with a disappointing experience of an unmemorable production. That was certainly not the case for *King Kong*. It was a good show.

Just This Regular Guy

Every time we go to New York we know there are some shows that, for one reason or another, we'll most likely not get to see. *Hamilton*, for instance, has been playing to sold out audiences for several years with no end in sight, and the only way to see it, at least for the foreseeable future, would be to pay an exorbitant price to a ticket reseller. Which we're not going to do – we go to the discount TKTS booth in Times Square where we can get really good seats for less than what they would cost to see the same shows in the D.C. area.

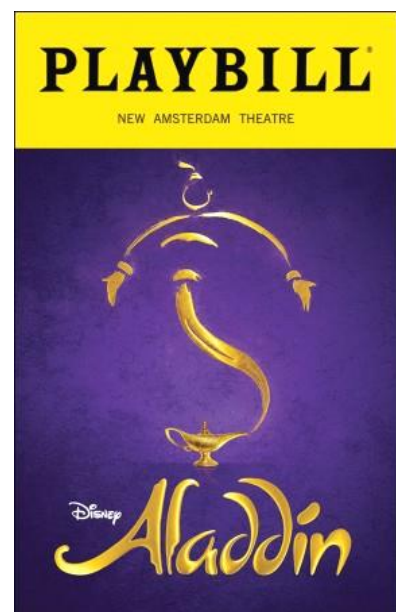
Aladdin was once also unattainable. Used to be that it, like its Disney sibling *The Lion King*, never had tickets available at TKTS – to see the show you'd have to pay whatever the going rate was at the theatre box office or through resellers. That's still the case for *The Lion King*, which after more than 20 years into its Broadway run is still having sold-out performances. But for

Aladdin, things are now different. One of the reasons that Nicki and I come to New York when we do is because January is the low season – crowds are down and theatre seats are much more available. And this year, nearly five years into its run, reasonably-priced tickets for *Aladdin* were finally available at TKTS. To our surprise!

Let me just say that it was a really entertaining musical, with lots of song and dance. There was even a tap dance sequence, which occurred almost immediately after I had whispered to Nicki that tap would be the one thing they couldn't *possibly* include in a show about a middle-eastern princess, upwardly-mobile street urchins, evil palace henchmen, and a magical genie. We had really, *really* good seats – first row center. So near to the stage that the stars of the show were not so much the actors and actresses as the brightly-colored costumes they wore. Being that close allowed us to appreciate all the marvelous detail that went into their creation. And also notice one unintended consequence.

Our view from the first row was slightly upward, as the floor of the stage is at about eye level from there. The actress who played Princess Jasmine at times wore a somewhat revealing harem woman outfit with silky-looking pants that had slits up the outside of the legs from ankle to hipbone. And when she was reclined or facing slightly away from us, from our unique angle she seemed a bit 'cheeky'. If it were any more so, they might have needed to include a parental warning in the show's *Playbill*.

We'd never before gotten such spectacularly-located seats to a Broadway show, and it was even more amazing to us that they were obtained via TKTS. Nicki was seated right behind the orchestra conductor, whose podium took him up to our level so he could see what was happening on the stage. After the performance ended, we had a chance to chat with him for a few minutes and I asked how long he'd been with the show. He replied, "About five years, with hopes for another five." He then asked where we were from, and when I told him the Maryland suburbs of D.C., he said that he had relatives in Annapolis and he liked the area a lot.



It was only after we returned to our hotel, when I checked the "Who's Who in the Cast" listing in the show's *Playbill*, that I found out that we'd been talking to Michael Kosarin, who's had more than 35 years of Broadway under his belt and for the past quarter of a century has been the music director for the famous composer Alan Menken. And, oh yeah, he's been nominated several times for Grammys and has *won* an Emmy Award! But for about five minutes or so, on the evening of January 9th, to us he was just this regular guy.

Better than Real Life

All of our Broadway shows this year were musicals. We hadn't planned it that way, but it turned out there were plenty of them to choose from. As for the plays, we gave some thought to the three which featured celebrities on stage. But we shied away from *True West* because we're not fans of Sam Shepard's angst-filled scripts, we took a pass on *Network* because we'd read negative reviews of the show before leaving home, and we skipped *To Kill a Mockingbird* because it was apparently doing so well that it was not one of the shows available through TKTS. But we *did* go to one musical which featured big-name talent. *Waitress*.

Sara Bareilles, who had composed all the songs for the show, had joined the cast just a few days before we attended a performance. She's a great singer in her own right and her presence had elevated *Waitress* to our short list of shows we wanted to see. And also having Tony Award-winner Gavin Creel in the cast just made it all the more so. But, as it turned out, the most memorable performances were from other cast members.

The show, based on the movie of the same name, is about a small restaurant in the American Deep South where a waitress / pie maker named Jenna (played by Bareilles) is trapped in a bad, abusive marriage made even more difficult when she discovers that she is pregnant. And then embraces her coming motherhood which eventually provides her the strength and resolve to regain control of her life. Bareilles gave a dominant performance which really showed off her strength as a singer, but it was Charity Angél Dawson, who played fellow waitress Becky, and Christopher Fitzgerald, who played eccentric nerd and Revolutionary War re-enactor Ogie, who stole the scenes they were in. In particular, Fitzgerald, who'd previously been nominated for a Tony Award for his role, was really entertaining. After this, he's become one of my favorite Broadway actors.



Outside the Brooks Atkinson Theatre on West 47th Street

Not all the musicals we saw were quote-unquote Broadway. One was classified as off-Broadway and it really was – it was staged in a small theatre on 43rd Street just to the west of 9th Avenue, well away from the heart of the Theatre District. On our final evening in the city we had been undecided on what performance to attend and in the end chose *The Other Josh Cohen*, mostly because of positive reviews and multiple Drama Desk Award nominations. It's very New York-centric in its humorous plot about a struggling temp worker who's mostly broke, down on his luck, single, and has just had his apartment robbed of every possession – except for a Neil Diamond CD. And then he gets a letter in the mail which changes everything.



We'd gone into the show with somewhat low expectations – after three days of top-notch and very entertaining Broadway musicals, we knew that this one had no real chance of being an equal. And yet, for me it came pretty close. There were some very good songs such as "Neil Life (It's Better than Real Life)" which were made even more interesting by the small but frenetic cast who were both the actors *and* the musicians, most of them performing multiple characters and instruments. And all of this imparted a lot of energy to the show – it certainly was

never in any way dull! *The Other Josh Cohen* originally opened back in 2012, though part of its existence has been not only Off-Broadway but entirely-out-of-the-city. But for this version the show's creators, David Rossmer and Steve Rosen, were back in the lead roles. And they were really good. So much so that I'll be on the lookout for them in other productions.

All of Us Are Dina

All the musicals we saw this year were so good that it isn't easy for me to single out which one I liked the best. But I do think it would be hard to find a better one than *The Band's Visit*. Last year it had won the Tony Award for Best Musical and also another nine including Best Performance by a Leading Actor in a Musical (which went to Tony Shalhoub). This late in its run the eminent Mr. Shalhoub was no longer in the show, but that didn't matter. It was the ensemble cast that was really the star.

"Once, not long ago, a group of musicians came to Israel, from Egypt. You probably didn't hear about it. It wasn't very important."

The musical is based on the 2007 movie of the same name about what happened when the Ceremonial Police Orchestra of Alexandria, Egypt, on its way to the Israeli city of Petah Tivkah for a concert, due to a language misunderstanding ends up instead in the small desert town of Bet Hatikva where every day is pretty much alike. And in their one night's stay, their presence and interactions with the residents causes the town to come to life.

One of the songs, "Omar Sharif", was performed at the Tonys by members of the cast. When I watched it on the Awards show I thought it was a pleasant song, but really not all that special. But context matters. The song takes place at a key moment in the musical, when Bet Hatikva's café owner, Dina, sings it to the Band's leader as she regrets she's missed out on seeing the world except, when she was growing up, through her imagination as she and her mother watched Omar Sharif movies on their grainy black-and-white television set. Which gives the song much more resonance. All of us have places we wish we could have visited, things we wish we could have done. We do. All of us, in our own individual ways, are Dina. And she is just one of several memorable characters in the show. I really liked *The Band's Visit*. A lot.

It was a busy four days in the city, and I'm hoping that we'll be as fortunate next time as we were this year. We ended up with really nice seats for five terrific musicals and saw two great museums. You can't ask for more than that. Or maybe you can....

I'm hopeful that next year the Cooper Hewitt will be open! ☀

Afterword:

Here's hoping the Cooper-Hewitt will be open when Nicki and I are back in New York next month. But another Government shutdown is always possible, so at this point we're just hopeful for the best. Anyway, a bit less than three months prior to that New York trip, I had spent four days in a much farther away city. And also long days in transit getting there and back!



the Ethel Barrymore Theatre

A Damn Fine Time Down Under

“That looks good on you!”

I heard that comment several times during my week-long business trip to Melbourne. I was there for one of those multilateral carbon sequestration conferences that have become the focus of my professional life for these past 15 years. The entirety of the week was so taken up with all the stuff that happens on this kind of trip that I had no opportunity to do things on my own, such as meeting up with friends who live in the city.



entrance to the Queen Victoria Market

But I did have time, along with two others who were there for the meeting, to go to the Queen Victoria Market. It's located on the northern edge of Melbourne's Central Business



one of the fresh fish shops at the Queen Victoria Market

District, an easy walk from our hotel, and even on a Sunday the place was awash with people, as there was no lack of shops that were open for business there. The place is huge – it's the largest (mostly) open air market in the Southern Hemisphere. There you can buy a wide variety of foodstuffs – meat and fish of all kinds, vegetables, fruit, and whatever else you might want or need in the way of fresh protein and produce. If I lived in Melbourne, that's where I'd certainly go for my grocery shopping. But there's a lot more you can get at the Queen Vic than just food.

Two of the larger halls at the market are reserved for general merchandise vendors, and that's where I found my hat. And not just *any* hat – this one was a genuine kangaroo leather Aussie Outback hat.

It took a while to make up my mind on what I wanted. Or even *if* I wanted – there were two vendors we came across and both had good selections of hats, and not only from kangaroo leather. Once I won my internal debate that yes, I really *would* wear it often enough to make it more than just a souvenir, it took a long time to figure out which one. I think I tried on more than a dozen of them before I found the one that looked to be calling out for me to buy it. And that's when I received, from one of my compatriots, the first of the “Hey, that looks good on you!” comments. As I mentioned, it happened several other times



me in my genuine kangaroo leather Aussie Outback hat

during the week and also once even more succinctly than that. When I texted a selfie of me wearing the hat to one of Australia's delegates to the meeting, he immediately texted me back a 'thumbs up' emoji. It was a good way to start the week.

"I'm going to have to card you, sir."

That's what the lady at the entrance desk for the Melbourne Museum at first told me as I was inquiring about the fee to go in. I had asked if there was a senior's rate and it turned out there was – it was free to oldsters like me! But I had neglected to have any ID readily available, and it took a couple of minutes for my charm offensive to convince her that I really *was* as old as her father. And most likely even older.

There are *a lot* of museums in Melbourne, ranging in focus from historical to art to ethnic to technology. There's even one housed in the Old Melbourne Gaol. But the Melbourne Museum is biggest and also one of the newest. It's described as being the largest museum in the Southern Hemisphere, and reportedly houses the world's largest IMAX screen.



at the First Peoples exhibit in the Melbourne Museum

We visited the museum on the walk back from the Queen Vic and it was immediately obvious that it had a lot more on display than what we could see in the hour before the place closed for the day. There were at least ten different exhibits, but we managed to see only two of them – the Dinosaur Walk, which included fossil skeletons of more than a dozen different prehistoric creatures, and the First Peoples gallery, which displayed the history and culture of southeastern Australia's Aboriginal people. That one was the more interesting of the two, but it still all seemed a bit distant and detached to me – there were lots of colorful items on display and there didn't seem to be any connecting story. But if we'd been there at a different time, there would have been. It turned out that the exhibit had been designed for docent tours and if we'd gotten there a bit earlier we could have hooked up with one. And that would have absolutely been worth doing.



part of the First Peoples exhibit
at the Melbourne Museum

It took until 1962 for Aboriginal people to gain the right to vote in Australian federal elections. But it wasn't for almost another four decades, in May 2000, that a reconciliation movement began which seven years later resulted in a successful constitutional referendum to recognize indigenous Australians. And a year after that, a formal apology by Australia's Prime Minister to the so-called 'stolen generations' of Aboriginal children who, during many decades in the 20th century, had been forcibly removed from their

families by government agencies so that they could be assimilated into modern Australian society. There has been an overall sea change in the way the collective national consciousness views its Aboriginal First Peoples and I imagine some of it would have been described in that docent tour. And it was also reflected in the way the first of the conference's individual meetings got underway on Tuesday. The Australian government representative who did the welcoming stated that:

"I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet. We pay our respects to the local people for allowing us to have our meeting on their land and to their Elders: past, present and future."

But we were nowhere near Melbourne for that first meeting. It was held in the function room of a hotel in Warrnambool, out at the western end of the Great Ocean Road.

"I never knew that!"

I've said that many, many times, to many, many people in the many, many years of my adulthood. And I actually look forward to saying it, when it's appropriate to do so, as it's an indication that I've just learned something.

The first meeting of the conference was about a four hour bus ride away from Melbourne, which took up much of Monday. Part of it was on the Great Ocean Road, which traverses the southeastern coast of Australia for more than 240 kilometers. When we reached that leg of the trip I was informed by one of the Aussies on the bus that the Great Ocean Road is actually the world's largest war memorial. It had been constructed during the 1920s and 30s by soldiers who had returned home from the First World War in dedication to those who didn't make it back. And, as I replied back, I never knew that.

Warrnambool was part of the overall conference agenda because it was the nearest city of any size to a project site visit we had scheduled after that first meeting on Tuesday. But it was also the nearest city of any size to one of Australia's most famous scenic wonders – the Twelve Apostles.



some of the Twelve Apostles

The Great Ocean Road goes right past them. They're a series of tall limestone islets, all of which are a very short distance offshore from the mainland. And they're quite striking in appearance, with unusual shapes that have been sculpted by the waves and the wind. One of my responsibilities in preparing for the conference was to develop the daily agendas in coordination with my Australian counterparts. So I had informed everyone

ahead of time there'd be a stop on the way to Warrnambool to see this scenic attraction. But that didn't make it any less dramatic. Some of the best views were from down on the beach, and it was there that I learned that many of the islets have names. The ones nearest the steps down the cliffside to the beach are known as 'Gog' and 'Magog' which are not exactly apostolic-sounding, but it turns out that *none* of the other islets have been named for any of the



the view of Gog and Magog from down on the beach

biblical Apostles either. In fact, the name 'Twelve Apostles' itself was only given to the archipelago at about the time the Great Ocean Road was being built, probably by some enterprising innkeeper who was foresighted enough to see the tourist potential of the place. I was told that before that, they were known as the Sow and Piglets. While all of this information wasn't exactly stunning, it was still interesting and enlightening enough that I replied back the only way I could: "I never knew that!"

"And so we meet again!"

That was my greeting to Peter Dumesny, the site operator of the Otway National Research Facility for CO₂ Storage. The previous time I had crossed paths with him had been a decade ago, which was the only other time I had visited the facility. But I wasn't really surprised to see him again, as that's where he lives.

Well, not exactly. He lives *near* there. Very near, actually, as the site occupies what had been part of his farmland. Which is located near the western end of the Great Ocean Road, just a few kilometers down the road and inland from the Twelve Apostles. The visit to the Otway site was the reason we'd scheduled the first meeting of the conference out in Warrnambool. It's not the closest community to the project, but it was the only place within a reasonable distance where the meeting hosts could find a hotel with a conference room that was big enough.

Peter was a natural to be the site operator because he has had previous experience in the petrochemical industry. He's been all around Australia and after seeing it all came



Peter gives a show-and-tell during the Otway Research Facility site visit

back to start a farm in the area where he'd grown up. He'd originally just been the caretaker of the project, but once activities started to ramp up his skillset made him essential. He didn't recognize me, of course. The facility gets hundreds of visitors every year and I had been there for only a few hours. And that was a full decade ago. But after I described how the afternoon back then had evolved into a picnic of sorts with sandwiches and beverages appearing as the day went on, I could see some recognition on his face. That visit must have been a bit more out of the ordinary than I'd thought!

There was also one other thing that was still there – a sign on one of the fences that border the property: NO SHOOTING. When I'd seen it on my previous visit to the project site I'd thought it was some kind of joke – after all, who does target practice where cattle are grazing? But I was told that the sign actually has a de facto function – it lets you know that there is a pipeline or some other kind of infrastructure buried just below the surface and thank you very much for respecting its presence by not disturbing it in any way. Have to admit, it does get your attention!



The “No Shooting” sign is still there!

“They must be *really* jet-lagged!”

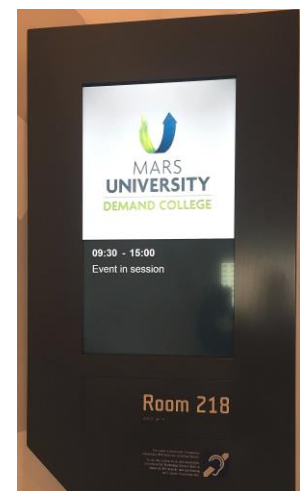
One of the people at the Wednesday meeting said that to me after I pointed out a sign showing that a group from Mars University was holding its own meeting next door to ours. The Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre is very large, and our carbon sequestration conference was just one of many events that were happening that day.

Besides being one of the organizers, I also had a more direct role in the meeting, as Secretariat to the Chairman. Or Chairlady, in this case. This was one of the more stress-free meetings that we've had and even



an attentive moment during the Wednesday meeting

the election of officers for the next three years went smoothly. But now I'll need to figure out a time that works for setting up teleconferences when the participants are located in Europe, North America, Australia, and Japan. It's not going to be easy.



meanwhile, next door to our meeting...

There was also one last meeting on Thursday, but someone else was Secretariat for that one. And frankly, it was relaxing, if that's the right word, to be just an observer for a change. But my mind was mostly on the long journey back home on Friday. I had arrived in Australia with two compatriots, but I knew I'd be going back alone because they were both staying over for an even bigger conference on carbon sequestration the following week. This late in my professional career I am no longer allowed to attend technical conferences, at least the ones that I don't have a direct hand in organizing. The official reason is that I'm just not high enough up on the pecking order for whatever arbitrary number of people they choose to approve. But I suspect that this is just more of what I've noticed about the way my management has been dealing with me this past year – I'm being nudged toward the exit door. In another year or so that'll happen on its own, and I'm hoping that they would realize that. But if not, as the saying goes, at my age I could be just one bad week away from retirement.

But enough about that. My final evening in Melbourne was a pleasant one, dinner at an outdoor riverfront restaurant with two of my friends from Norway's delegation to the conference. There was good food and conversation for about an hour. And then, at about two minutes after eight o'clock, all hell broke loose.

"We picked an interesting place to eat!"

That was my comment when the fireballs started going off. There are eight 10-meter-tall towers along the south bank of the Yarra River in Melbourne, adjacent to a casino complex where our restaurant was situated. At the top of every hour, starting at 8:00pm every evening, there is pyrotechnic performance art emanating from these towers which lasts about five minutes. It's gotten the whimsical name 'Melbourne Gas Brigade' and some of the fireballs looked as big in diameter as the towers were tall – a spectacle that's not to be missed.



the Melbourne Gas Brigade does its thing

This was not my first time to Melbourne so I had seen it all before, but it's not something you'd get tired of. Or maybe it is. The restaurant we were at was situated between two of the towers, and the waitress didn't even blink when it all started to happen. As for me, I came back later that evening for an encore performance. It was a good way to end the week.

And it was a good trip. I wish that I'd had more time to myself, but being fully committed every day and evening seems to have become the norm for me during these conferences. I never did get to meet up with friends who live in Melbourne, and there are many, but apart from that I had a damn fine time down under. ☀

Afterword:

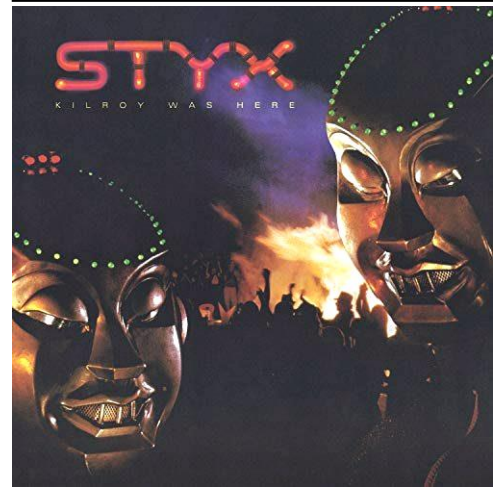
A few months ago I finally decided that I am going to retire sometime around the end of next year. I'm now entering my eighth decade and I just don't want to work 40 hour weeks anymore. But I'm committed to organizing two more meetings in 2020, so retirement will have to wait until after those have come and gone. And what will I do after that happens? Well, the fanac.org people want me to become more involved what they're doing to digitally preserve old fanzines. And maybe I'll also write more essays about 1980s rock bands.

Dōmo Arigatō

It was more than 36 years ago, back in February 1983, that a rock band from Chicago released a truly groundbreaking album.

It was Styx's *Kilroy Was Here*, the last (as it turned out) in a series of concept albums that had made the group famous and commercially successful. Whereas previous albums had focused on the themes of chasing one's dreams (*The Grand Illusion* in 1977 and *Pieces of Eight* in 1978) and a homage to one of Chicago's splendid old-time movie palaces (*Paradise Theatre* in 1981), *Kilroy* told a foreboding tale about a dystopian future where rock music had been outlawed by a fascist and fundamentalist totalitarian government which had embraced 'dehumanizing' technologies. The album had two hit singles which both reached the top ten of the *Billboard* Hot 100 Chart but it was the airplay of the first of them, "Mr. Roboto", as a music video on MTV which provided immense publicity for the band's "Kilroy Was Here" North American tour of 1983.

"The problem's plain to see:
Too much technology.
Machines to save our lives.
Machines de-humanize..."



And where the album *Kilroy* was innovative, the "Kilroy" tour was even more so. It opened with a 10-minute film which introduced and provided the background for Robert Orrin Charles Kilroy (portrayed by Styx lead singer Dennis DeYoung), who had once been the most famous rock musician in a dark alternate history version of America. He had been branded a rebel by the government and was framed and imprisoned for the murder of an anti-rock fanatic on the stage of his final concert, at the Paradise Theatre in Chicago. Kilroy manages to escape by sabotaging one of the automaton 'Mr. Roboto' prison guards and meets up with his greatest fan, a young insurgent named Jonathan Chance (portrayed by Styx guitarist and lead singer Tommy Shaw) who had hacked into a broadcast network to play some of Kilroy's music as an indication that the rebellion was still alive. Kilroy then starts to tell Chance the true version of the events during that terrible night at the Paradise. Fade to black...and the concert began.



Chance meets Kilroy at the beginning of the concert

It was a rock opera. Once the opening video ended, the band Styx became the band Kilroy and the concert became a flashback to the music and events of that night at the Paradise, complete with on-stage acting between DeYoung and Shaw in their characters' personas. The songs on the *Kilroy* album were the narrative line but intermixed were some of Styx's best songs, including "Lorelei", "Rockin' the Paradise", "Blue Collar Man", "Crystal Ball", "Too Much Time on My Hands", "The Best of Times", "Fooled Yourself", and "Come Sail Away".

During the song “Renegade”, near the end of the concert, roadies portraying the censorship police rushed onto the stage to arrest the band. And then the flashback ended. The concert came to a close with Kilroy passing the mantle to Chance while urging him to “Don’t Let It End”.

Back in 1983, my wife Nicki and I were big fans of the band. Styx had been (in my opinion) unfairly branded with the reputation, even then, of being overly middle-of-the-road but their best songs, just about all of which they played in the concert, made for an excellent evening of music. It was, at that time, the best concert I had ever attended, and it was so good that Nicki and I saw it twice – once in Chattanooga and again about a month later over in Murfreesboro where the venue acoustics were much better.

It’s still possible to re-live parts of the concert – the 10-minute prologue movie can be found on YouTube, as can a video of the concert that was released under the title *Caught in the Act*. But they are both relatively low quality digital transfers, and the concert looks like it was recorded and edited on the cheap with several songs omitted and jumpy transitions from one song to the next. Not a good viewing experience.

So, in the end, did it all work? It was an ambitious undertaking, entirely the idea of DeYoung who had wanted to make each new Styx project better and more grandiose than the previous one. But it later became known that the rest of the band was ambivalent and in some cases even hostile to the concept. Or more to the point, what Styx had become. Shaw and Styx’s lead guitarist James Young had wanted the group to be more of a straightforward rock and roll band, but many of its biggest hits were soft ballads written by DeYoung. This had created a growing divide in the years leading up to the Kilroy album and tour, and in the aftermath of the tour it was enough to break up the band. DeYoung was in effect fired and went his own way.

But you know, I think it actually *did* work. It was a grand, truly memorable multimedia experience. I remember that the audiences in the sold-out arenas were so supercharged that their energy transitioned over to the band, which gave very polished performances both of those evenings in spite of all the dissention amongst the band that was going on in the background.

There’s one other thing I want to mention before I end this essay – in addition to its talents for creating a long string of pop music hits, Styx could also have been a really good cover band. There was a short epilog video at the end of the concert which provided all the credits for the tour, and the audio track behind that was a cover by Styx of Chuck Berry’s “Rock and Roll Music”. *Really* good. But as far as I know it’s never been included in any Styx album and that epilog video, if it still exists, has never found its way to YouTube. I’d like to see it again, just to hear the song, and I’m still looking for it.

I’ve been to a lot of rock music concerts in my life, but those two in the early summer of 1983 were among the best. So thanks for the memories, Styx. *Dōmo arigatō!* ☀

(Excerpt from the song “Mr. Roboto” © 1983 by Dennis DeYoung and Wixen Music Publishing OBO Stygian Songs.)

Afterword:

My original version of this essay, as published in *Challenger*, had stated that in the aftermath of DeYoung leaving Styx, the band no longer played “Mr. Roboto” in its concerts. But that’s not accurate – an online search shows that the song is, to this day, part of Styx’s set lists. Color me embarrassed for not doing as much research as I should have. Anyway, in all the years since its release, “Mr. Roboto” has remained a pop music favorite. I know this because Shazam says so.

I Am the Nothing Man

It was late in the evening on a Friday in March, not long before bedtime, and I saw something on my mobile phone that caused me to let out a whoop.

“Got another one!” I called out to Nicki.

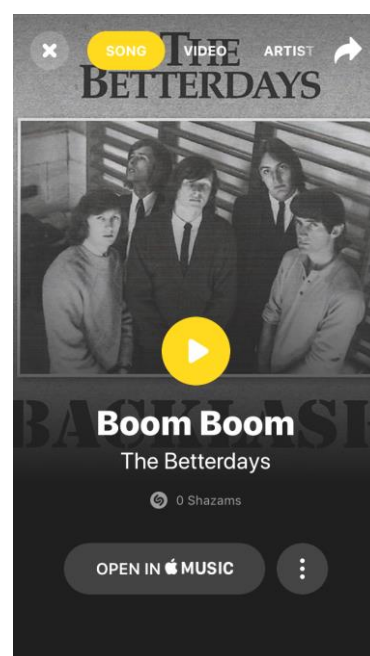
Back in the early 1960s, a British pop group named The Betterdays had what amounted to a cult following in England’s West Country. I’ve read that they often played sold-out shows in small music halls but even though their sound was similar to The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, they never were able to enjoy that kind of wide-spread fame. They did record some songs but it wasn’t until 2017, more than half a century after the band broke up, that an album of their music was finally released. It got good reviews from many international music critics, and some of the songs made it into the niche world of music podcasts.

And that’s how I happened to be listening to The Betterdays cover of John Lee Hooker’s “Boom Boom”. It was one of the songs on one of the several Blues music podcasts that Nicki had found and which we often listen to before bedtime. “Pretty good,” I had thought to myself, and just for the fun of it I checked my mobile phone app to see how it was doing in the social media. Just as I suspected: 0 Shazams.

Shazam, as we are probably all aware, is not only a comic book superhero, it’s also a smartphone and tablet computer app which can identify songs based on their audio characteristics. The app has been active for more than a decade, and in that time has grown so popular that it was acquired by Apple in 2018 and now even has its own television show. The most Shazamed song of all time, by a group I’d never heard of, has somewhere around 25 million Shazams. But there are a myriad number of songs and recorded music tracks which have far, far less – it’s not unusual to come across a song which has fewer than 100 Shazams. But it’s a bit rarer to find a song with less than 10 Shazams, and the Ultima Thule of Shazaming is to come across a song that’s had no Shazams at all.

I’ve now done that about a dozen times since I’ve been keeping track, and the variety of some of the ones I’ve staked my claim to is eclectic: “Hillbilly Hell” by the folk-country duo Robin & Linda Williams; “Neil Life” by the cast of the Off-Broadway musical *The Other Josh Cohen*; “Grant Slept Here” from singer/guitarist Stace England’s concept album about the history of Cairo, Illinois; “Twinkle Toes” by the Doo-Wop group Danny and the Rock-Ketts; “The Leaves of Life” by the English vocal trio Coope Boyes and Simpson; and “Glory to God” from a recording of the Mass of St. Ann. I’m still in search of my first 0 Shazam classical music recording, and I think it’s inevitable that I’ll eventually come across one.

Finding a 0 Shazam song is rare enough that each new discovery deserves a cry of triumph (well, in *my* opinion, anyway). And that’s what got me so revved up on that March evening. So thank you, The Betterdays. I’m happy that your music is now finally starting to get some attention. It sure got mine. ☀



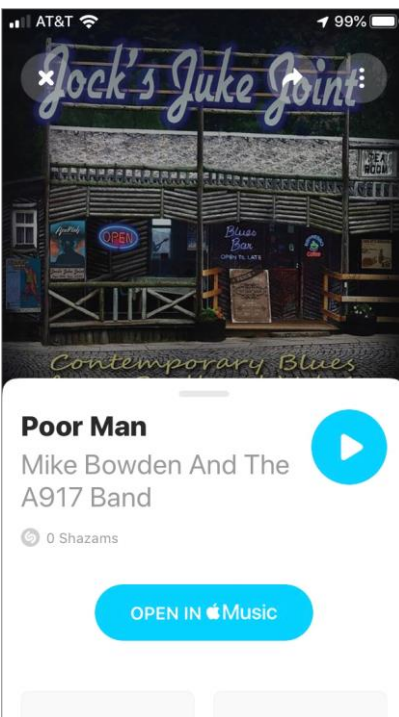
Afterword:

I eventually did come across a classical music recording which had 0 Shazams. And I didn't even have to try very hard to find it – it was part of a concerto that was being aired by the Baltimore classical music radio station. And since then my collection of 0 Shazam songs has continued to grow and has become even more eclectic. New additions include “Lil Bit Country” by folk-country singer Amberly Chalberg, “Ballin’ in Nawlins” by electric blues guitarist/singer Dave Duncan, “Poor Man” by the British contemporary blues band Mike Bowden and the A917, “Save Me a Place” by easy-listening balladeer Wes Hawkins, “My Babe She Loves Me All the Time” by blues singer/guitarist Bluesboy Jag, “Yagise Yagise” from the soundtrack of an Indian movie, the alt-Latino “Hombres de Arcilla” by Villalobos Brothers, “Crash Street Kidz R&R” by the Japanese punk rock band Laughin’Nose, and most recently, “The Janitor Song” from *Mystery Science Theater 3000*.

I was surprised by that last one – I hadn't realized that the *MST3K* gang had released any music from their TV episodes. Or maybe that haven't, and Shazam is just working in mysterious ways that remain unfathomable to me. Either way, the video clip that features the song is viewable (where else?) on YouTube. And, as you will read next, so is a pretty good digital transfer of a monster movie that scared the living daylights out me nearly 60 years ago.

* * * * *

Some of my recent 0 Shazam menagerie



My First Scary Movie

Sometime around 60 years ago I had the bejeezus scared out of me.

I recently read in the *File770.com* newsblog that November 29, 2019 was the 60th anniversary of the premiere of the Cold War-era sci-fi movie *The Atomic Submarine*. I didn't see it until probably a year or so later, when it was shown on one of those Saturday afternoon scary movie matinees that were popular on television stations back then. And *boy* was it scary! I was not yet a teenager and I remember that at the most intense point of the movie I had covered my face with my hands and squinted through the gap between my fingers.

Six decades later I'm trying to figure out why it seemed so frightening to me. The plot was fairly pedestrian as B-grade sci-fi movies go – a U.S. Navy atomic submarine (which was pretty new real-world technology back then) was sent on a mission, under the Arctic ice pack, to find out why ships had gone missing in that part of the world. It turns out that an undersea UFO was the cause, which is not much of a spoiler since the promotional poster for the movie shows a flying saucer. Why the UFO was hanging out and destroying ships that passed by its vicinity was never explained, but it all was just a MacGuffin to get the submarine and the UFO next to each other so we could get to see the alien monster.

And a nightmare-inducing monster it was! One-eyed, ugly, and truly evil – it killed off the redshirts of the boarding party in terrifying ways, and was planning to bring samples of humanity back to its own world to dissect in preparation for a large-scale invasion of Earth. How in the world (literally!) could the U.S. Navy prevent that from happening?

I expect that this movie is obscure enough that probably only the scary movie aficionados have ever seen it. But it turns out that if you want to view it, you can – it's apparently now in public domain, and there's a pretty good digital transfer available on YouTube. So you know what? I'm gonna watch it again. I know it's not going to be very much of a "Keep Watching the Skies!" sense-of-wonder experience, but I still want to see if I'm even remotely as scared as I was way back then. And I'm kind of hoping that I will be. Well, maybe just a *little* anyway. ☀



Afterword:

I'm guessing that I was eleven years old when I watched *The Atomic Submarine*. That would put it sometime in the middle of 1961. It was less than a year after that when I had another sense-of-wonder television experience. And *this* time it was for something real!

Where I Was

About a month ago, as I write this essay, was the 50th anniversary of the first manned landing on the moon. I was 19 years old, back in July 1969, and I remember precisely where I was when that happened – I was watching Walter Cronkite’s very enthusiastic news coverage of the event on a grainy black-and-white television at my parents’ house in Watertown, New York.

I don’t have quite as clear a memory where I was when other momentous events of the 1960s occurred. I know that I was at school when President Kennedy was shot but I don’t remember where in the building, or what I was doing when the word came down. And I can’t dredge up any memories at all on where I was when I learned of the shootings of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy. Or the terrible fire that claimed the lives of three astronauts in the early days of the Apollo program. But there *was* one other event from the 1960s that I remember exactly where I was and practically minute-by-minute what I was doing at the time.

It was the Project Mercury spaceflight of John Glenn.

That happened on February 20, 1962. It was supposed to have occurred more than a month earlier, but the launch had been postponed five different times due to various issues with the weather and the Atlas booster rocket. If the launch had occurred at any of those other times I probably wouldn’t have witnessed it (on an even grainier B&W television, as it happened). Because I wouldn’t have been home from school, sick.

More than 57 years later, I don’t remember very much about how ill I was that day, but it wasn’t a sham. Most likely it was a garden-variety winter cold, and my mom had taken pity on me (as well as all the other students) by letting me stay out of school. It was about nine o’clock in the morning when the rocket lifted off, and by then I was the only one at home – my mom and dad were both at work, and my brother and sisters were all at school (and probably all envious of me for being sick at just the right time). So it was just me and Walter Cronkite for five hours while Glenn’s Friendship 7 spacecraft orbited the earth. I was rapt.



Astronaut John Glenn
in 1962

But I don’t recall *everything* about that day. If I had anything to eat for lunch, I don’t remember it. If I took leave, briefly, to run upstairs and use the bathroom, I don’t remember it. But there was one thing that I do very much remember – the huge sense of wonder I experienced as it was all happening. It was an amazing, incredible feeling.

I never got to meet John Glenn, even though my career path took me to Washington, D.C. in the 1990s when he still was a United States Senator. But one of these years I’m going to visit his boyhood home. It’s in New Concord, Ohio, not far from the Interstate highway, and is now a small museum. It’ll be a pleasant stopover in the middle of a long trip.

And I fully expect there will be a sense of wonder. ☀

Afterword:

There’s room for one more short essay, so here’s one I wrote about a sense of wonder event of a different sort which encompassed much of this past October – instead of launching rockets, one of the local sports team was launching baseballs and it carried them to a championship.

And Now We Dance

*“You can have a great year and then run into a buzz saw. Maybe this year **we’re** the buzz saw.”*
– Washington Nationals pitcher Stephen Strasburg (midway through the 2019 Major League Baseball Playoffs)

Nineteen wins and thirty-one losses. That was the Washington Nationals record in late May. It was the low point of the baseball season, and the team was perhaps as little as one bad week from having its manager fired and several of its players traded away to contending teams. But then things started to improve. The pitching staff became better at getting opposing batters out and some of the best players broke out of hitting slumps. Several underperforming players were let go and better ones brought in by trades and free agent signings.

One of these replacements was outfielder Gerardo Parra. He, too, had been in a prolonged hitting slump but after about a month with the Nationals he decided to change his ‘walk up’ music (every player in Major League Baseball has one) to the popular (and viral) children’s song “Baby Shark”. It had an immediate effect – he hit a double and a home run in that same game. The entire Nationals team became a believer and adopted the tune as its theme song, and after that a formerly tension-filled dugout suddenly became much looser. So much so that whenever one of the Nats players hit a home run, as he returned into the dugout he would do an improvised dance. This was quickly picked up by the Nationals’ television play-by-play sportscaster, who after each Nats home run would announce: “And now we dance!”

Long story short, as we all know, the Nationals danced their way to the 2019 World Series championship, along the way beating four very good teams in the postseason and *finally* erasing the ignominy of being buzz sawn by lesser teams the four previous times they had been in the playoffs. This year *they* were the buzz saw. And three days after ‘sealing the deal’ with a Game 7 win over the heavily-favored Houston Astros, there was a victory celebration.

I couldn’t go. It happened on the day that I was heading out of town for a weeklong business trip and there was no way I could attend and still get to the airport in time. So I had to be satisfied with watching it all on television. And in some ways it was better – I didn’t have to contend with the couple hundred thousand people who had come into downtown Washington for the event and I got to see all the things I might have missed if I’d been there in person. And there were a lot of them, including a close-up view of the World Series championship trophy and many, many people dressed as sharks.



during the Nats championship rally

It was the first baseball championship for Washington since 1924 and it might very well be a long time until the next one. One of the best players has left the team via free-agency and a few others might not be offered contracts for 2020 because of salary cap reasons. And even the baby shark has swum away – next year Gerardo Parra will be playing for a professional baseball team in Japan. Catching lightning in a bottle, like what happened for the Nats during the 2019 season, is usually difficult if not impossible to repeat. Better to revel in the moment like all those fans down in D.C. did on that early November afternoon.

Now how in the heck am I going to get that “Baby Shark” earworm out of my head? ☀

