

Variations on a Theme #5

from Rich Lynch • for SFPA 220 • February-March 2001

All That Jazz

Well, it's *finally* the new millennium, but it sure seems a lot like the old one to me. The Washington traffic seems as bad as ever, the tourists still seem pretty clueless, and we've got the same crappy February weather, with all the mist and rain, as last year. The one thing we *didn't* have was all the hoopla and fireworks celebrations at the end of the year, like there was at the end of 1999. The beginning of the actual first year of the new millennium, like Rodney Dangerfield, just 'don't get no respect'.

One thing that *was* different for this past January from the previous year was a new television miniseries on PBS from Ken Burns. This one, about the history of Jazz, was one a pretty good production – not quite as good as *The Civil War* but much better than his disappointing *Baseball*. There was much to like about *Jazz*, and I came away with a better understanding how American music evolved throughout the 20th Century, from syncopated ragtime to swing music to bebop and beyond. And there were many interesting personal histories told in the series – the stories of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington were the threads that held the series together, but many somewhat less prominent musicians, like Charlie Parker, Bix Biderbeck, and Miles Davis, also were featured in various episodes.

Most of the critics seemed to like the series, too, from what I've read, though many of them with some reservations. The one complaint that I think is probably justified against the series is of its limited view, mostly onto what was considered the 'mainstream' of Jazz, if there was such a thing. Or more specifically, the 'mainstream' as perceived by Wynton Marsalis and some of the other musicians and music critics who appeared in the series to provide modern-day perspectives. There was no mention, for instance, of the Latino influences, or Latino musicians and bandleaders, or the types of jazz that evolved from non-American origins. There was also zero mention of many of the variants of jazz, such as New Orleans dixieland, for instance – Al Hirt and Pete Fountain might as well have not existed, because their names weren't mentioned even once. And other musicians (such as Glenn Miller) were given lip service, or appeared briefly, and for others (such as Benny Goodman and Tommy Dorsey) there was no real closure on how their careers progressed or ended.

Still, for what it was, I think the series was mostly a success, and I'm sure Burns believes he hit the mark he was shooting for. There were many entertaining anecdotal stories, and also some tragic ones. I've always thought that one of the purposes of a history, whether written or a media production like *Jazz*, is for preservation – don't let the memories fade away. If you look at it from that viewpoint, *Jazz* was a success. It will be about three more years until Ken Burns' next production, the life and times of Mark Twain. I'll be looking forward to it.

About Classical Music

I'm not sure my classical music essays are 'obligatory' any more, so I'll be looking for a different title for this section. This time, because of the *Jazz* miniseries, I think it might be inter-

esting to explore a bit of the border between jazz and classical music. Even though you can't usually tell by listening, jazz musicians fall into two categories – those that can read music and had some musical education in their backgrounds, and those that play by 'feel' or by 'ear' and who couldn't play (or compose) a musical score to save their lives. I think there are probably more of the former than the latter, even given that jazz is very improvisational by its very nature, and often doesn't use or require written music. And there are jazz musicians who would have been famous (or more famous, at least) as classical music artists if their careers hadn't been so overshadowed by their fame in swing music or other types of jazz.

One of these is the great Benny Goodman, who toward the end of his prime had largely abandoned swing for classical. There are several Benny Goodman classical CDs available that would make good additions to a classical music collection, perhaps the best one being his "Mozart at Tanglewood" album (BMG Classics 09026-68804-2), recorded at the 1956 Berkshire Music Festival. Goodman apparently had a liking for classical music even when he was in his prime as a big band swing musician in the 1930s – during one of his radio broadcasts in 1937 included one of the movements of Mozart's Clarinet Quintet (i.e., a string quartet plus clarinet). That same composition is on this disk, featuring Goodman and members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The other piece on this disk is Mozart's Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra, one of the most wonderful classical music compositions of all time. It's been often said that Mozart could write music that would make angels weep; this concerto is proof of that.

Wynton Marsalis is another jazz-classical crossover musician. Nowadays he mostly performs with the Lincoln Center Jazz Band, but he has such awesome talent that he might be the greatest classical music trumpet player of all time – he's *that* good. I'm actually kind of embarrassed that I have only one 'Classic Wynton' album, which *is* in fact titled "Classic Wynton" (Sony Classical SK 60804). This is one of those 'Best of' albums (we got it as a premium for our yearly membership to WETA); normally I steer away from that kind of compilation because it usually includes bits & pieces and isolated movements, rather than complete compositions. There's some of that here, too, but the upside is that instead of only two or three compositions on the disk, there are twenty, and they are all quite good. Some of these are very recognizable, like the "Rondeau" by Jean-Joseph Mouret that was used as intro music by the PBS series *Masterpiece Theater*, while others impress you by their complexity and the degree of technical competence required to play them correctly. An example of the latter is a true variations-on-a-theme composition, Jean-Baptiste Arban's "Variations on 'Le Carnival de Venise'" for trumpet and orchestra, which gets my vote as the most difficult-to-play piece of written music ever composed – it starts out as a simple melody, "The Carnival of Venice" and by repetition evolves into ever more intricate variations. The final one is so amazing that you say to yourself after hearing it, "there's *no way* he could play that!" It's a rite-of-passage piece for the serious trumpet player; when you can master that, you're ready for the big time. This, I think, is the definitive recording of the piece, and Marsalis makes it seem easy.

The borderland between jazz and classical is more than just a few very talented musicians, though. There are some compositions that could rightfully be classified as either. I've mentioned some of these in previous essays – Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" and "An American in Paris," and the piano rags of Scott Joplin. None of those date later than the 1920s, though, when jazz was still fairly young. Since then there have been some deliberate efforts by classical music

composers to bridge the gap, though many of these, to tell the truth, are not very listenable. One exception is the Russian composer, Dmitri Shostakovich. I mentioned earlier that one of the deficiencies of Ken Burns' *Jazz* was that it mostly ignored anything that was going on outside the United States. By the 1930s, the 'swing music' form of jazz had become popular worldwide, and there were local variants that came into existence in even seemingly unlikely places such as Josef Stalin's Russia. In the mid 1930s, in the heart of the swing era, Shostakovich wrote two 'Jazz Suites' that were intended to "raise the level of Soviet jazz from popular 'café music' to music with a professional status." Of these, the second one, written in 1938, is the more interesting. It's not exactly classical music, and it's not exactly jazz, though it's much closer to classical than jazz. After a bit of searching, I found a CD titled "The Jazz Album" (London 433 702-2) with both of these suites, plus Shostakovich's first piano concerto; the reason I went out of my way to find it is one of the movements in the second Jazz Suite, a marvelous, surreal little waltz, which was used in the movie *Eyes Wide Shut* (at the beginning and over the end credits). There's also one other little throw-in on this CD that has a story behind it – it's a version of "Tea For Two" for orchestra, where the orchestration was done – on a bet – by Shostakovich. While still students in conservatory in 1928, Shostakovich's friend, Nikolai Malko, laid some money on the table and said that Shostakovich could not do a symphonic orchestration of "Tea For Two" in an hour. Malko turned out to be right, but Shostakovich still picked up the money. It actually took him just 40 minutes.

Life in the Nation's Capital

Only one live music event for me these past two months – a brass quintet of members from the Air Force Band played for an hour one afternoon at the National Building Museum (one of my two favorite buildings in the city), with music by Bach, Gershwin, some modern-day composers, and even some English madrigals. There was also a reception at the Russian Embassy in early February (the first time Nicki and I had ever been there) in honor of some business delegation that was in town. I didn't do much networking, but there was some great buffet food, and even a harpist who was playing music by some of the famous Russian composers arranged for solo harp. It's a really impressive building; no money was spared in construction, that's for sure! Hope I can go back there again some day.

Meanwhile, the Bush transition has not yet reached my level, and I'm guessing that it probably won't. There will be a new Assistant Secretary eventually, but most of the last ones we've had didn't really much more than try to look important – the real brains of the place is the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (who used to be the main House staffer of the Energy Subcommittee before the Republicans got control of Congress), who is not a political appointee. He's been pretty kind towards me, especially when I've needed travel money, so I hope he doesn't have retirement plans any time soon!

Mailing Comments on SFPA 219

Jeff/The Southerner

Your first mailing was a pretty good one. Between 300 and 400 pages is large enough to contain lots of substance, but still not so much as to be unmanageably large. But what happened to the disclaimer?

Ned Brooks

On schlock films: "I don't know if [*Essential Monster Movie Guide*] mentions [*Werewolf vs. the Vampire Women*]." I don't have it either, but the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) has quite a bit of information about the movie. For one thing, it was apparently released under no less than five different titles: *Blood Moon*, *Nacht der Vampire* (in West Germany), *Shadow of the Vampire*, *The Werewolf's Shadow*, and *The Werewolf vs. the Vampire Women*. All are listed as 1971 release except the last title, which is listed as 1972. It stars a bunch of no-names, as you'd expect; the lead is a Spanish actor named Jacinto Molina who went by the stage name of 'Paul Naschy'. And here's something you might not have known: this movie is part of a multi-film series – the character played by Naschy, 'Count Waldemar Daninsky', also appears in eleven other similar-theme movies, including *Frankenstein's Bloody Terror* (1968), *Nights of the Werewolf* (also 1968), *Assignment Terror* (1969), *Fury of the Wolfman* (1972), *Dr. Jekyll vs. the Werewolf* (also 1972), *The Black Harvest of Countess Dracula* (1973), *Horror of the Werewolf* (1975), *Return of the Wolfman* (1980), *Werewolf and the Magic Sword* (1983), *Howl of the Devil* (1987), and *Lycanthropus: the Moonlight Murders* (1996). (And each of these are also known by other titles besides the ones I've listed.) Makes you kind of wonder if there are other novelizations out there that we don't even know about!

On CJD: I didn't know [Joe] Mayhew had had open heart surgery – that is a likely source for the CJD, which has a long incubation period." You'd think for a disease this rare that the CDC in Atlanta or the NIH here in Washington would have an interest in tracking down how Joe acquired the disease. If either has shown even a passing interest, it's not been visible to anybody who knew Joe. The description I found on the web about CJD seems to indicate it's hereditary, at least in part, but I don't think we'll ever know just what caused Joe to contract the disease.

On weird science: "I'm glad to hear that somebody at least realized there was a problem with how the Invisible Man's eyes would work!" Yeah, the retinas would have to be able to absorb light if he's supposed to be able to see, but that would mean that part of him isn't invisible. Something that nobody seems to have considered yet is that there's a difference between transparency and invisibility. The books and movies would have you believe that the Invisible Man is invisible because his body is transparent. But if that's true, then you would be still able to see him indirectly from the lensing effect of his body, as there's no doubt he's more dense than the surrounding air. Whenever the Invisible Man passed in front of something – a lamp or a painting, for instance, that object would appear distorted to an observer the same way they would if you looked at them through a glass sphere. True invisibility would seem to involve some kind of fantasy theme such as a hypnotic mind control field, where you would be induced to temporarily forget all the high school science you ever learned.

Guy Lillian / *Rear Ender*

On recent movies: "The best movie I saw in 2000 was *Almost Famous*." It was No.1 on Roger Ebert's year-end list, too. I haven't seen it yet (I don't go to the movies all that much any more), but of the ones I did see, by far the best was *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which Nicki and I have seen twice now. It's better than any movie I've seen in the last several years, in fact. And it didn't lose anything for me second time around.

Arthur Hlavaty

On presidential politics: "I think Gore's para-Oedipal refusal to let Clinton campaign for him may have done even more harm than Nader." Quite likely. I think Gore should be blaming himself even more than the Supremes, or James Baker, or any of the distortions that were said about his record by any number of Republicans; he really should have easily won the election, but his campaign wasn't very well conceived or executed. He could have done much more with Bush's tax cut proposal, for instance, by parading around how many thousands of dollars it would save Dick Cheney in his megadollar severance package from Haliburton.

Guy Lillian / Challenger 13

Apologies for the brevity of this comment; this is a very fine fanzine, and it's interesting to see how you are continuing to evolve as a fan editor (even though you've been one for decades).

The more I read about it, the more I'm disappointed with myself for not going down to the SMOFcon in Florida. There were lots of people I knew there, and it would have been a fine relaxing weekend even if I didn't contribute to any of the discussions. And I would have seen a Space Shuttle launch, something I've resigned myself that I'll probably never do. I'm glad you had fun, and thanks for describing it all for the rest of us.

One thing I notice about *Chal* is that your articles seem to be all over the place – from Shakespeare and Phil Dick to esoteric computer-assisted ways of counting Hugo Awards votes to treks through Eastern Europe to even some historical fiction. All these are pretty good, but they could really use some introductory comments to improve the flow, and to make it more of a single seamless production. Which I'm sure is one of your goals. Good zine.

Tom Feller

On legacies: The Arkansas journalist has it right – Bill Clinton's legacy will pretty much be the Lewinsky affair, and he'll never be able to shake it. He could have been one of the greatest presidents ever, except that he couldn't keep his pants zipped up.

On the intricacies of HTML: "The HTML source code for an indented paragraph created by Word 2000 is {an incredibly bloated ten line mess}." Now you know why I never use the built-in conversions that MS Word and WordPerfect include. And you learn more about HTML coding by doing it yourself.

David Schlosser

On duty-free shopping: "Are you sure that Japanese high school girl was really buying the scotch for her dad?" Well, not entirely, I guess, but most likely so as her parents were waiting for her when she got off the plane at Narita airport. Also, she seemed a bit young to have such a sophisticated taste in liquor! (I should probably have mentioned that she also dropped several hundred dollars on other last-minute family gifts while she was in the duty-free. I could only look on with growing amazement.)

Richard Dengrove

On classical music: "How many times has WGMS played the 1812 Overture with the cannon climax?" Quite a few times, though not usually more than once per every week or two at the

most. And that's not too many times. One of the things that eventually burned me out on rock music was the repetition, the same two or three songs from any group at the expense of everything else they'd recorded. Classical music selections are long enough that it cuts down on the number of selections that get played each hour – even if these most popular compositions like the *1812* do get into what passes for repetitive play, you still don't hear them often enough to get tired of them.

On book signings: “[Robert B.] Parker seems much better at publicizing his books than Gary Larson.” Or at least his book company is. He goes on a book signing tour each autumn, and Washington is one of his stops (same for Lawrence Block). Because of this I've met Parker and Bloch any number of times, while I have never met Larson (or any comic strip artist, for that matter). I guess you could draw the conclusion from this that Larson's book company didn't care, but on the other hand, the presence of a well-respected mystery book store in Washington probably has more to do with it.

Guy Lillian / *Spiritus*

Congratulations once again on your engagement, and we're trying to make sure we'll have enough vacation time so we can come down to Cocoa, Florida, to your wedding. (And thanks for not scheduling it the same weekend as Midwestcon!) Think you can arrange a Shuttle launch for us while we're there?

On autobiographies: “Glad you [Ned] liked Julie Schwartz's autobiography, *Man of Two Worlds*. It's fandom's best chance to give the man a Hugo.” Agreed, and I liked it too, but I think it's a pale shadow of the book that should have been published. In person he's full of entertaining anecdotes; this book has only a very few of them. And there's not even an index!

On Bangkok: “I could have assured the condemnation of your soul by alerting Don Walsh ... and have him guide you through its fleshpots and sin-dens, a topic on which he claims expertise.” Not sure I'd be read for that! But I'd forgotten all about Walsh living in Bangkok, and I'm sure he has less-risque tours he can lead as well. It's a fascinating city, by the way, and if you can survive the heat and humidity, which takes a lot of getting used to, it's a place definitely worth a visit. I know I'd like to go back there again, but it won't be this year. The convention I attended in Bangkok moves to Kuala Lumpur this year, and I've already submitted the abstract of the paper I hope to present there.

On air travel: “After so much time in the air (13 hours!?) you deserve an excursion.” The 13 hours was just between Detroit and Tokyo. It was about an hour to get from Washington to Detroit, then six hours more from Tokyo to Bangkok (after a four hour layover in Tokyo). A bit shorter on the way back because of the wind direction, but it was still a long, long trip.

On the Kent State tragedy: “...you spotted details I missed...” I did? There was only the park and the four places in the car park. We almost missed the car park mini-memorials because we had naively assumed that the entire incident had taken place the park now occupies. But that's only the memorial. We walked right past one of the four mini-memorials on the way back to the car before we realized there was a sign next to it with a name. And then that there were three other spots in the car park with similar markers. But the thing that I noticed most about the memorial site was the reaction of the students we passed, or rather, their non-reaction. It must have been pretty obvious to anyone who saw us that Nicki and I didn't belong on that campus:

and yet the students who passed us by on the way to and back from the memorial didn't seem to think it was unusual about the outsiders who appeared to be on some kind of pilgrimage. I'm guessing visits by outsiders to the memorial must happen a lot.

On classical music: "You will have to write about classical music for *Challenger* some day." Perhaps. I don't think the type of review essay I'm doing here would work for you, though. But I do have something in mind for an article, if it will crystallize in my mind just a bit more. Tell me what you envision, if you will; maybe that will help.

On movies: "You must see *Traffic*, the current front-runner for Best Picture, and the most original film – in terms of cinematic artistry – of double-aught." Well, it made the final five, but it's not nearly the favorite any more (if it ever was). I've only managed to see one of the five nominees, and that one was *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which you must have also seen by now. Comments about it?

On Presidential elections: "Is the electoral college still relevant?" I think it is for a couple of reasons, one philosophical and one logistical. If there were no electoral college and the winning candidate was selected by plurality of all valid votes cast, what would happen if Florida occurred on a national scale? Any mandated recount would then involve hundreds of millions of ballots. And philosophically, I dislike the idea of disenfranchising smaller states to the benefit of the larger ones – there are relatively so few voters in, say, South Dakota compared to where the population centers of the country are located, they would (99 times out of 100) have exactly zero bearing on the outcome if the vote was decided by plurality. Compartmentalizing the vote into states, or even individual congressional districts, better represents the *regional* will of the people.

Irv Koch

On Atlanta's elevation: "The baseball field is high enough to cause problems for those players used to sea level – something about the balls traveling farther." Indeed, much farther. Lower air resistance because there's a significant difference in air pressure in the several hundred feet between Atlanta's altitude and sea level. The old Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium used to be referred to as 'The Launching Pad' from the number of home runs that were hit there; before major league baseball came to Denver, Atlanta was the highest-elevation city in the majors.

Gary Brown

On Dave Barry's Yearbook: "Barry's long-time collaborator artist, Jeff MacNelly, died last year, so two new artists took over his duties in a similar style." As those same two artists have taken over his daily comic strip, *Shoe*. I dunno... the humor seems as funny as when MacNelly was alive, but it's just not the same in appearance. It might have been better to just end it, though there's obviously financial incentive to keep it going for the new guys. Maybe I'll get used to it.

On comicbooks: "I started looking at *Scott Shaw's Oddball Comics* late in the summer..." This, by the way, is the same Scott Shaw who had the perhaps the most infamous costume ever at a Worldcon masquerade – 'The Turd' (at the 1972 L.A.Con). Mike Resnick described it, in passing, in a previous issue of *Mimosa*, and John Hertz has a better description in his letter in the most recent issue (#26, now online at the web site, <http://www.jophan.org/mimosa>).

On pre-season baseball: "I've got tickets for the Astros-Indians on March 24." That same day I'll be (or was, by the time you read this) in Clearwater (I think) for a different game. (My sister

is getting tickets for our Family Reunion 2001.) We'll be going to a Yankees-Phillies game on the 24th, and I think a Blue Jays game the next day. Gonna be another long drive down to Florida, but this time I'll be sharing it with one of my sisters, in her new car.

Janice Gelb / *Trivial Pursuits*

On the California power crisis: "I thoroughly don't understand it. (One puzzlement is why they keep doing the rolling blackouts during lunch, as that hits downtown restaurants hard.)" The problem lies in the way the power utility industry was deregulated in California. This is a bit oversimplified, but one of the things they did was to remove the price regulations (and thus the cap) on the cost that utilities pay for fuel, while keeping in place a maximum cost per kilowatt-hour that customers could pay. So when a relative shortage of natural gas finally happened, the price of gas naturally went up. California relies mainly on nuclear power, natural gas-fueled power plants, and hydropower for its electricity generation needs. Hydroelectric generation has been down this year due to lower reservoir levels (this is apparently endemic to the whole west coast), and electricity usage in California has been growing, to the point where the utilities themselves can no longer meet the demand. So they buy power on the spot market, from the so-called independent power producers (who operate gas turbine power plants, windpower facilities, etc.). These power producers can sell at whatever rate they can negotiate from the utilities (some of them have long term contracts at a fixed or defined-escalation price, but obviously not all). That's where the cost of buying electricity by the utilities went through the roof. As for why rolling blackouts hit during lunch time, that's when the demand was at peak, no doubt. Whenever the excess capacity in the grid drops below five percent, draconian action like rolling blackouts is mandated, to endure the grid doesn't completely collapse if there are demand spikes. Other states besides California have deregulated their power markets (it will happen here in the DC area soon), but in a more sensible way concerning price caps. Also, since quite a bit of the power in other states is coal-based, it's less likely there will be the generation shortage that you've seen in California.

On classic Disney: "There was a special on the Disney Channel showing two specials on space travel in 1955 featuring Werner von Braun and Willy Ley." I think there were actually three of them, the last one titled "Mars and Beyond." I saw them first run when I was five years old, and as you might expect, they made a big impression on me (the start of my interest in science fiction, maybe?). Anyway, I was looking forward to seeing them again, but on our cable system, the specials were *not* shown the nights they were advertised. I have yet to see them again. I was all prepared to tape them, too. Maybe they're on DVD by now?

On extinct baseball stadiums: "I forgot the Seattle Kingdome in my list of doomed stadiums I've visited." As of earlier this month, I can add another one too – Three Rivers Stadium in Pittsburgh. I only saw one game there, back in 1985 near the end of the season, and there were only a few thousand people in the place. Not exactly a positive memory of the place.

On appreciating classical music: "One of those 'when I win the lottery' things I want to do is take music appreciation courses and learn more about this stuff." Um, er, that's kind of the purpose of my essays, actually. Anyway, the best way to appreciate it is to listen to it and decide for yourself what you like and don't like. What I'm doing is offering a few suggestions. Why not take a chance on a CD or two and play them on your computer at work? That's what I do.

Toni Weisskopf

Yet more on the election: "Should the ['butterfly'] ballot be redesigned? Yeah, sure." At last something we can agree on, and I've just read where the entire State of Florida is going to optical scan ballots, which is somewhat better (but has its own set of problems, see below). As for if the 'butterfly' ballot was confusing, it obviously must have been, even though both you and I wouldn't have been bothered by it. I talked to my mom (age 82) about it (she lives in Florida, though not where that ballot was used) and she told me that she could have easily figured it out, too, but there was no doubt in her mind, from personal observation, that there were many older voters who would likely be baffled by it.

On so-called 'uncounted' ballots: "What Democrats insisted on calling 'uncounted' ballots were in fact filled-out ballots that did not indicate a vote for President." Not so; there were in fact many ballots filled out that were not allowed to be counted by the United States Supreme Court. There was a report in the *Washington Post* several weeks ago about Orange County, Florida, where the unofficial recount going on there had determined there were over 700 ballots that had marks for Bush or Gore that were not counted because the voters had filled out the ballot using their own pen rather than the one that was supposed to be used and that was available at the voting station. Of these 700+ ballots, about 200 or 250 were for Bush and the rest for Gore (i.e., somewhere around a 200 vote gain for Gore, if these had been hand recounted). These were optically scanned ballots, apparently, so I hope Florida educates its voters a little more thoroughly about what to do and what not to do before this system goes state-wide.

On partisanship: "...the Democratic party has in recent years .. demonstrated a contempt for the American people, a perfect willingness to bypass the electoral process to manipulate the courts and Federal bureaucracies to continue its own power, and a blatant disregard for national security." This seems more than a bit over the top, especially that last allegation (you're the only one I've heard claim that). As for who is manipulating the courts: pot, meet kettle. It may still be possible to learn, someday, who actually won Florida, but it won't be thanks to anything James Baker and the Bush campaign has done.

Eve Ackerman

On Thailand: "Was the food [on your trip to Thailand] similar to what you would find in an American Thai restaurant?" The food in the hotel restaurants, anyway. There were many, many street vendors selling hot food that smelled really good, but I didn't think it was all that good an idea to try any of it. What I needed was a local guide, I guess, but the last time I was in that situation (in India in 1995), I **did** get sick from the food!

Norm Metcalf

On the antics of H.L. Gold: "Phil [Dick's] objection was that Gold had rewritten his stories." I've heard stuff like this about Gold many times, but it might be interesting to learn just exactly how Gold re-wrote (i.e., before vs. after), and for exactly what reasons. Any info on that?

On the antics of Harlan Ellison and Forry Ackerman: "I heard that Ackerman has been 'spamming' Ellison's fax machine. Harlan asked him to stop and instead Ackerman intensified his abuse." Don't think I'll give this too much credibility until you tell us where you got that information, because it doesn't sound like something Ackerman would do. (I've heard some

things that Ellison has been alleged to have done toward Ackerman, and I'm not too inclined to believe those either, for that matter.)

Steve Hughes

On election fairness: "I think the deepest bellow laugh I got out of the whole thing was the oft-heard comment, 'Of course a manual count is more accurate than a machine count.' Oh, God it's still funny!" Not only that, it's true. See above comment on Orange County results to Toni. (Before this whole mess, I, too, was skeptical that recounts would produce any differences from the original count, but I've since had an epiphany.)

On economic health: "I watched Clinton's farewell speech and couldn't help chuckling at his comment on how well off he was leaving the country. Seems he didn't notice the net loss in the stock market last year not to mention the 39% loss the NASDAQ took." Well, I don't know about you, but I'd say that I'm better off than I was eight years ago, when the longest sustained economic growth in the country's history started. A 39% loss in the NASDAQ isn't a good thing, true, but it's still overall ahead from where it was four years ago. And the DOW is also way, way up from then. I think we're in pretty good shape, and Clinton's comments seemed dead on to me.

On foreign policy: "[Clinton] put permanent American military garrisons in two foreign countries neither one of which was in any way threatening America or American citizens." Yes, Clinton was very mistaken when he thought we'd only be in Bosnia for a short while. Not sure what the alternative was, though; there were no good choices, only less bad ones. Morally, it's hard to see how the world could just stand by and watch what was going on in Bosnia (and later in Kosovo). What would you have preferred to have been done? And by the same reasoning, do you think we should pull our troops out of Korea?

Gary Robe

On the history of ConCave: "We have used the Park Mammoth Resort for 19 years..." Wow, doesn't seem all that long ago! I've only been to a few of them there, but still have some vivid memories – Steve Francis and me, in 1986, walking the circuit of the small gauge railway there at the resort, past dozens of small caves leading to who-knows-where. And of the all-night consuite, one of the most lively centrexes of any southern SF convention I'd attended. It was a good place for some pleasant conversations. And so now the place passes into fan history.

On Thailand's climate: "[A former colleague of mine] said that the difference between [Thailand's] wet and dry seasons is that in the dry season the humidity averages 95% and it rains every other day. In the wet season the humidity is 100% and it rains constantly." Pretty close to correct, I'd say. It was pretty oppressive outside, and I had to make sure I carried a bottle of water with me because of all the water loss from perspiration. I guess it is something you can get used to, though, because most of the locals weren't perspiring at all.

On business travel: "Gee, your conferences are in such exotic locations! I'm stuck with Mexico City and Sao Paolo." To someone like me who's never been south of the U.S.-Mexico border, those sound exotic. The PowerGen Asia is usually my only conference of the year, though, so I'm happy it's at least in interesting places.

On high ticket costs: "I would have liked to see [Elton John in concert at ETSU] but tickets

started at \$50 and they were sold out before i could even give the concert a second thought.” It’s even worse here, at least for big name performers in concert. No point in even trying, unless you’re willing to spend several hundred dollars per ticket with one of the ticket resellers. On the other hand, there are performers like Gordon Lightfoot who come to the area almost every year, and it’s relatively easy to get tickets. Maybe the secret is to become fans of less popular or more obscure performers?

Jeff Copeland

On weird architecture: “At least [the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame] wasn’t designed by Frank Gehry, like the abortion of a museum we’re now saddled with here: the Experience Music Project.” Mr. Gehry has been active here in D.C., too; he’s the designer for the addition to the Corcoran Gallery of Art. They have a model of it on the first floor near the reception area – it looks a bit what you’d expect if you were using an electric mimeo, went away for a bit and came back to find that there had been some kind of mishap and sheets paper had been thrown all over the place, covering up the mimeo. One hundred and thirty million dollars it will cost.

On built-in HTML generators: “The HTML generated by Word is pretty abysmal.” WordPerfect too. See earlier comment to Tom Feller.

On travel: “Maybe I’ll get sent to India sometime in the next two months.” Been there, done that. Interesting place, the most different place I’ve ever been to. Not really looking forward to going back, though. If you’re there for any length of time, you’re going to get sick; it’s unavoidable. And, if you’re in trade promotion like I am (and I know you’ll be there for a different purpose entirely), it’s not possible to get much accomplished because of the terrible government bureaucracy there – much *much* worse than ours. But there’s much to see there, so I hope you’ll have a memorable trip. And make sure you get to Agra to see the Taj Mahal.

OK, that’s it for me. Baseball spring training has started, so all is right with the world again. Trip to Florida in about a month, so I’ll write about that next time.

Best wishes to all.....

