

Variations on a Theme #7

from Rich Lynch • for SFPA 222 • written in June 2001

It Really Is A Small World, and Other Insights (A 7th Postcard Diary of Eastern Europe)

A Note of Explanation:

This is the seventh in a continuing series of my (very unofficial) trip reports about my travels in Eastern Europe. Those of you who have read the other six Postcard Diaries know that I work as an International Trade Specialist for an agency of the U.S. Government. My area of specialty is Eastern Europe, and for the previous few Postcard Diaries my travels were related to an international trade promotion-related initiative (which I originated) in support of small business. That initiative is over now; it was not really successful enough in making things happen to continue, but it did get me involved in an equally interesting area, of market liberalizations in the energy-sector. Anyway, when I first started writing these Diaries back in 1997, it used to be hard to keep in touch with the outside world, but with the proliferation of public-access Internet cafés over there, that's not really true any more. Even a telephone calling car gives you, for about five dollars, about five minutes of telephone time to home. A Postcard Diary isn't necessary anymore to stay in contact with home, but it's still a good way of preserving memories. The way it works is that whenever I'm on extended travel, I send one postcard back home every day, trying to pack as much information on it as possible – I want each one to be not only a stand-alone essay, but also a chapter of an overall larger diary of that trip that would give any readers of the collection a vicarious experience of what it's like to work and travel in Eastern Europe. There was a challenge: be interesting, be entertaining, but above all, *be brief!* Often not easy, but most every day I was able to find one or two things interesting enough to build a short essay around, even if after a long day, composing that essay wasn't something that I always looked forward to.

Anyway, after reading through this new assembled collection of cards, I've once again added some comments between the postcards for continuity and transition, and to expand on some things where just wasn't enough room in a postcard. As always, I hope you enjoy reading these essays.

Wednesday, June 6, 2001 (Prague, Czech Republic)

It's nice to be back in Prague again. But I wish there was a more pleasant way to get here than the sardine-can trans-Atlantic overnight flights you have to endure. The new Airbus 340 airplane has a lot of features that older airplanes don't (such as personal video screens for each passenger) but it's still seven uncomfortable hours being folded into a seat while small children let out ear-splitting shrieks for much of the flight. Just another example than you can stand just about anything for seven hours!

I think the biggest problem I had with the A340 was that it got unpleasantly warm and stuffy because there weren't any little air-blower vents like the older airplanes have. The personal video screen was nice (when it worked), but I mostly just listened to music – the one movie I tried to watch, *Traffic*, cut out about two-thirds of the way through it. There were a few other annoyances to deal with even after I got to Prague – I'd switched to a slightly larger suitcase just before I left home, and in the rush I'd missed transferring over my neckties and spare socks. This led to a rather hurried look around for a mens clothing store late in the afternoon. It was much easier to find places that sold, for instance, fine

Bohemian crystal. But you can't wear that stuff on your feet!

Thursday, June 7, 2001 (Prague)

It was a day filled with business meetings today, and by 5:00pm I was a lot more knowledgeable about the Czech Republic's energy situation. The highlight of the day was the kamikaze taxi driver who got me all the way across town in just ten minutes to keep me on time to a meeting. All in all, it was an interesting bit of performance art and it earned him a good tip, but I'm glad I was sitting in the back seat!

Most of the taxi drivers in Prague know some English, apparently. When I asked him, "Can you get me there in a hurry?" his face lit up like I'd said the magic words. "No Problem!" he said, and the chase was on. Anyway, it turned out that all my business meetings during my time in Prague were on that one day. There was supposed to be a meeting the next day, but it was canceled when I couldn't find an affordable (read: 'free') translator. But I wasn't all that disappointed – my compressed work schedule (nine-hour work days) gives me every other Friday as a scheduled day off. And that's the way it worked out!

Friday, June 8, 2001 (Prague)

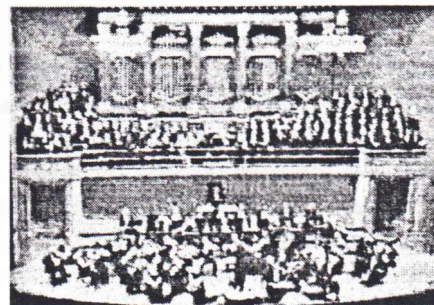
Business had wrapped up yesterday, so it was kind of a quiet day today, mostly spent doing some shopping and sightseeing. I found that my favorite Czech jazz band, the J.K. Novak Bridge Band, was performing dixieland jazz on the Charles Bridge, so I guess that qualifies as my first musical event of the trip. I was planning to go to an orchestra concert tonight but the rains moved in; I'll go to one tomorrow instead. I'd also planned on looking up a University professor friend, but it turned out that he was on his own business trip – he was in the United States!



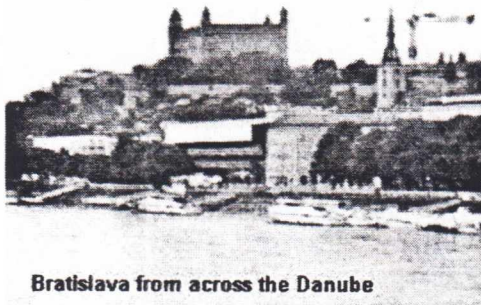
I thought it was kind of ironic that my university professor friend was in the U.S.A. while I was in Prague, but on the other hand, one of my friends from the U.S.A. was in Prague while I was there. (Talk about a small world!) Tim Perry, a.k.a. Xdot the poker-playing statistician, who was in town for a wedding. Events surrounding the wedding filled most of his available time, though, and there was only one evening where we were able to meet for a few beers. I asked him how he was enjoying his first trip to Prague, and he answered by saying it was his first visit, but wouldn't be his last. I think that, back in 1990 on my first visit there, I said the same thing. It's a great city.

Saturday, June 9, 2001 (Prague)

It's my last day in Prague and the highlight of the day was the evening concert, my first classical music event of the trip. There are a lot of nightly music events here – I counted more than 20 different flyers at one of the information kiosks (and that doesn't even include all the piano bars and jazz clubs). The concert I went to was the biggest one of the night – a full orchestra and chorale rendition of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*. It was stunning – full of sound and fury, at times a delicate thing and at other times a beast. I've decided that I like chorale works. Will opera be next?



I should mention that the concert also included a fine performance of Felix Mendelssohn's 4th ("Italian") Symphony, which made the evening well worth the 850 Czech crowns (about US\$22.50) it cost for admission. The event was very well attended; the concert hall (which seated maybe 2,000) looked to be about three-quarters filled. Almost all of these were foreigners like me, of course – from more affluent places like Western Europe, Japan, and the United States. The Czech crown, like other Eastern European currencies, has a low value vs. the U.S. dollar and other western currencies, and this makes Prague a real bargain for those of us from Western Europe, Japan, and the U.S.A. – there are now thousands and thousands of tourists in Prague and I was hearing English on the streets more often than I was hearing Czech. So all of those concerts each night are not intended for the locals; by Czech standards they are prohibitively expensive, as are most of the hotels in the city. Prague, for all its splendor, is not the real Czech Republic – it's become a cash cow that helps to drive the country's economy.



Bratislava from across the Danube

Sunday, June 10, 2001 (Bratislava, Slovakia)

It was a travel day today, and the train ride from Prague to Bratislava was both restful and uneventful. Before boarding the train in Prague, I met an older couple all the way from Australia who were also headed to Bratislava; they were on their very first trip through Eastern Europe, enjoying the cities, countryside, and the people here as I've done since my first visit here more than a decade ago. The day was so low key that its highlight was a leisurely walk along the Danube River with my business contact friends. This is a very pleasant place to spend a few days; the mobs that crowd Prague haven't

really discovered Bratislava yet. But my stay here in Bratislava this time will be so short that the traditional pub crawl my friends here plan for the end of my business trips here will be tomorrow night!

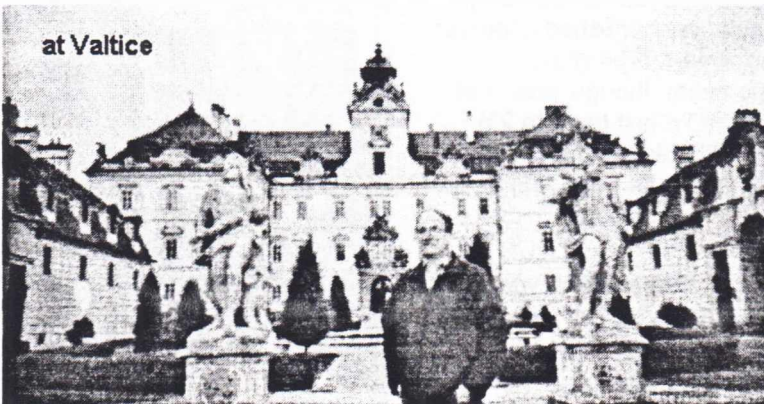
The pub crawl was also a bit low key this year. I was able to limit myself to about a liter-and-a-half of beer, and managed to get back to the Pension where I was staying by about 10:30pm. Still, it was a lot of fun – good food, good beer, good conversation with good friends. It's one of the things that I look forward to each time I come to Slovakia.



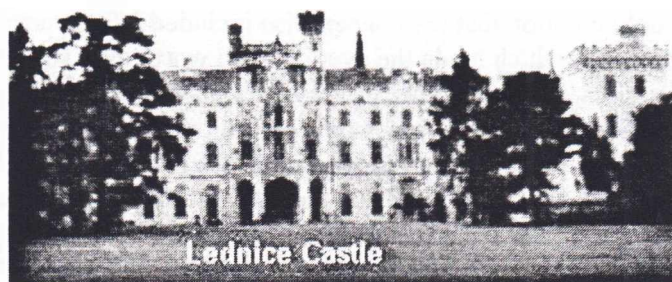
Monday, June 11, 2001 (Bratislava)

Turns out I wasn't quite finished with the Czech Republic this trip.

Due to some conflicts, my business contacts here rescheduled all my meetings for Tuesday, which left today a free day. So we went to the Czech Republic, about an hour-and-a-half drive from here, to see some nicely-preserved chateau-type of castles in the cities of Lednice and Valtice. Those, and another in the nearby city of Mikulov, have been included in the UNESCO World Heritage Listing, and for good reason. All the mobs of tourists that crowd Prague haven't yet discovered these places, but I'm guessing that won't last much longer!



The very photogenic castle at Lednice was home to a regional history/natural history museum that included everything from medieval weaponry to preserved specimens of practically every mammal, bird, reptile, fish, and insect that was native to the area. There was even an aquarium that had live specimens of many tropical salt water fish – hopefully not in anticipation that the Czech Republic would



someday have a global warming-induced coastline! The Valtice castle was even more picturesque, but unfortunately, it was closed on Mondays. Valtice was also the location of a Wine Academy, though not at the castle. The curriculum there probably wasn't the most difficult of the Czech Republic's colleges and universities, but I'll bet it was probably the most fun!

Tuesday, June 12, 2001 (Bratislava)

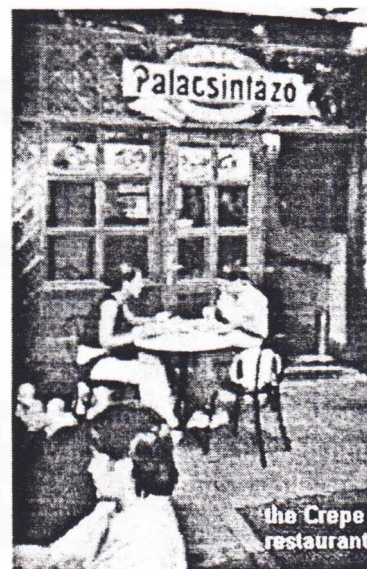
Hard to believe that my visit to Slovakia is already almost over. By late tomorrow afternoon I'll be in Budapest. Today was spent as a series of fairly intense meetings, learning about pending new energy legislation and upcoming privatizations of some of the energy companies here. Tonight, though, was spent in a very un-intense way – at the ballet enjoying a performance of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. There was great music, high melodrama, and a very colorful staging – come to think of it, a good thumbnail description of my too-short visit to Bratislava. I will miss this place.

I happened across a much more modern performance that evening in the Old Town Square – a laser light show that painted colorful, intricate, and very short-lived designs on the wall of the city museum. Apparently this had been going on nightly for several weeks – a brief performance each hour, sundown to midnight. It was fascinating, and also typical for Bratislava nowadays – the modern superimposed over the old.

Wednesday, June 13, 2001 (Budapest, Hungary)

I've only been here in Budapest for a few hours and already I've seen several different music events. In one of the nearby plazas there was a dance troupe in traditional costumes doing traditional Hungarian dances, as part of some kind of festival. There are also many open-air bars with blues/country bands (I listened to one of them do a couple of Roy Orbison songs). And yes, there is classical music, too. I went out to the Franz Liszt Academy of Music, even though my city guide showed nothing on the schedule there tonight. Even so, it turned out there was a 'diploma performance' by a young lady violist who played works by Bach, Brahms, and Mozart (the last a very nice, very polished chamber orchestra piece where she was featured performer). The most interesting thing about the Academy of Music event, though, was that when I stopped for dinner at a nearby restaurant I'd last been to 2½ years earlier, the owner still remembered me! I could see the look of recognition in his face the second I walked through the door. Gosh, I didn't think I was that memorable!

If you want to get technical about it, the Mozart composition was a *Simfonia Concertante* designated K364. The young violist's name was Anna Szász, who I was told was the daughter of one of Hungary's premiere violinists. Obviously, musical talent runs in the family! Even though the recital wasn't publicized very well, there were still a couple



hundred people there in the concert hall. And it was free! As for the restaurant, dinner, beverage, and dessert (a chocolate ice cream-filled crepe with vanilla sauce and whipped cream, yum!) came to just under US\$5 for the entire meal. Is it a great country, or what?

Thursday, June 14, 2001 (Budapest)

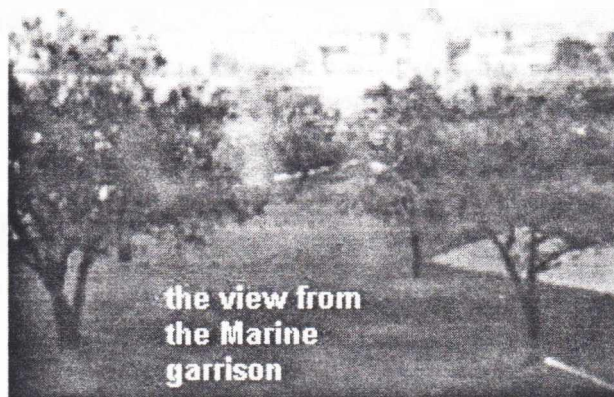
I had some interesting meetings today, but they were not as interesting as some of the people who participated. I got to meet Hungary's former Ambassador to NATO, who is now interested in geothermal energy. His accent is so lacking and his English so good that I thought he was an ex-pat American for a moment. And then there's Greg, the American Embassy's Economics Officer, who recently had a bit part in a movie filmed here in Budapest that starred Brad Pitt and Robert Redford. He was in a scene with Brad Pitt, and even had a line of dialog. I told him that this means he's Baconizable!

When I explained to Greg what it meant to be Baconizable*, he just laughed. He described Brad Pitt as mostly a regular guy, and the one scene he had with him took about ten takes and a half day to shoot (he was even given a trailer on the set for that half day). But you don't become rich by being a bit player; his half day of movie acting made him about US\$400, which he donated to a battered women's shelter in Budapest.

* OK, in case you're wondering, here's how the 'Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon Game' works: Greg is in *Spy Game* along with Brad Pitt; Brad Pitt was in *Sleepers* along with Kevin Bacon. So Greg's 'Bacon Number' is two.

Friday, June 15, 2001 (Budapest)

My time in Hungary is rapidly drawing to a close. The final two business meetings were good ones – I learned a lot and made a good impression both on my hosts from the American Embassy and also the people at the Hungarian Energy Office with whom I met. There was a party tonight up in the Buda hills, overlooking the Danube River, in celebration of promotions for two of the U.S. Marines assigned to the American Embassy; when I mentioned to Greg, the Embassy's Economics Officer, that I was originally from northern New York State, he asked if I'd ever heard of a small village up that way where he used to take his fishing vacations – a place named 'Chaumont'. I was croggled; it really is a small world!



I should mention that Chaumont, N.Y., with a population of maybe 500, is where I lived from early childhood until I graduated from high school (it's about 15 miles west of Watertown, N.Y., on the shore of Lake Ontario in Jefferson County, N.Y., in case you want to look it up on a road map). It was absolutely mind boggling that I should meet somebody who was so familiar with that little village and its region – even more so that it would be somebody I'd met in Budapest, Hungary. Anyway, the place where the party was held was the U.S. Marines garrison in Budapest (the Marines provide security at all U.S. Embassies around the world), a mini-compound with its own barracks and clubroom, as well as a nice view down to the Danube River, right across from the Hungarian parliament building. Part of the compound has some historical significance to Hungary – it's the 'Powder House', an old jail where, back in the mid 19th century, Lajos Kossuth, the father of Hungarian Revolution against the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was imprisoned. There's an open house each Halloween where they use the Powder House as a haunted house. Supposedly it's pretty eerie down in there.

Saturday, June 16, 2001 (Budapest)

My last day in Budapest, and it was low key compared to my previous two frenetic days here. I really wasn't sure what I wanted to do, and in the end I decided to explore one of the main thoroughfares of Budapest, Andrassy Street, from its beginning near Saint Stephen's Basilica to its opposite end at the communist-era Heroes Plaza. Along the way there's the Opera House with its dazzling and ornate interior, Embassy Row with some wonderfully restored old mansions, and the Franz Liszt Academy of Music. No music event for me tonight to end my stay here, but I did make a point of having my photo taken next to the statue of Franz Liszt in the park near the Academy of Music. I figured it was the next best thing.



I'd been up and down Andrassy Street many times previously, but never above ground. One of Budapest's three subway lines goes right up Andrassy, and all the times I'd ridden it, I'd had no idea what things were like just a few meters above my head. Just beyond the Heroes Plaza is the City Park, probably the largest green area in Budapest. It has a very large thermal bath, housed in an impressively large and ornate building, and a castle that's been turned into the National Agricultural Museum. Actually, there's more at the castle than just the museum – there's also a small cathedral that's apparently very popular for weddings. There was one going on when I passed through there that day; the bride and groom had just emerged and were being surrounded by all their invited well-wishers, and right across the street awaited their hired transportation to take them off somewhere. Nope, not a horse-drawn carriage – it was a cherry red 1959 Cadillac El Dorado convertible, big as a yacht and just as impressive. As in the U.S.A., size does matter, apparently!



Sunday, June 17, 2001 (Warsaw, Poland)

I arrived here in Warsaw on the morning flight from Budapest, and mostly spent the day getting re-acquainted with the city. I was last here about a year ago, and from what I can see, there haven't been too many changes. There are new city buses in use now, the subway that's gradually being constructed has been extended one more stop to the north, and, oh yeah, everything is more expensive than it was last year. Poland will soon be joining the European Union, which will lower import barriers. But I guess the first thing that's arriving from Western Europe is the prices!

Well, it's not actually all *that* bad – Poland is still a pretty good bargain, though the other three countries I visited, especially Slovakia, were less expensive yet. The things I most noticed higher prices for were watercolors and other art (I collect interesting buildings, or at least drawings, watercolors, and lithographs of them) and restaurant food; perhaps not coincidentally, both of these were in the Old Town Square, which was crawling with tourists. On a walk through the Square with a friend looking at the artwork, we had to run for cover when the biggest thunderstorm I've ever experienced in Poland blew

through. It was almost a relief to find that the prices weren't the only thing that's become larger since my last trip to Poland!

Monday, June 18, 2001 (Warsaw)

This was one of the busier days in the trip, with three business meetings and lots of time on the phone trying to arrange even more for tomorrow. But yet, I sense that the intensity level is dropping, probably because departure for home is now less than two days away. There was finally some time to do a little shopping for gifts and souvenirs, but I managed to embarrass myself in one of the shops by dropping a whole handful of coins on the floor. Maybe my intensity level has dropped a little too much??

I'm glad the coin-scattering didn't happen at my favorite amber jewelry shop. I usually spend a few hundred zloties there every time I'm in Warsaw. I hadn't been to that store since my last visit to Warsaw, a year earlier, but just as in Budapest I was recognized the second I walked in there. It was even more remarkable than Budapest, actually, because the store owners were in the middle of an amber-buying feeding frenzy by a small mob of Italian tourists. It was a good half hour before the crowd thinned enough where I could even begin looking for pieces to buy.

Tuesday, June 19, 2001 (Warsaw)

This last day of this business trip was also the busiest – five meetings, the final two of which were last-minute schedule additions. I didn't finish until late afternoon. However, the highlight of the day was the final music event of this trip, though 'music' might not be a totally accurate description. An amateur jazz group – a small promenade orchestra, complete with dancers – gave a very energetic and entertaining cabaret-style performance on an open-air stage not far from the Old Town. What they lacked in musical ability they made up for in exuberance; they certainly attracted an appreciative audience, myself included. It was all a lot of fun. And so was this trip!



(My previous six Postcard Diaries are on the World Wide Web; links are at the *Mimosa* web site, www.jophan.org/mimosa)

Meanwhile, Back in Washington

It's the last week of June as I'm writing this, and the annual Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife begins tomorrow on the National Mall down in Washington. It's a two-week festival that 'honors' selected regions or the world (the featured country this year, and never mind that it's not really a country, is Bermuda; the featured U.S. region is all the cultures that make up New York City). It's worth going to; there's much in the way of music, food, dance, food, demonstrations of various sorts, food, crafts, food, storytelling, food... and did I mention food? (I'll probably get my lunch there, as it's just a short walk from the building where I work.)

As for other happenings, I feel a little out of touch with what's going on with me being out of town for a couple of weeks. The new Slovak Embassy opened while I was away, so I missed their gala music/buffet event in celebration. Before I left on the trip, Nicki and I *did* go to a music event here in Washington, in a very spectacular setting, in fact. Like most major cities, Washington is host to several different orchestras and chorales; one of them, the Cathedral Choral Society, holds its events in the Washington National Cathedral.

It really is a full-sensory event to experience a concert in such a grand setting. Even more so if the music fits the setting. This time it did, with two chorale pieces and the great 'Organ' Symphony #3 by Camille Saint-Saëns – the 'Voice of God'. We had relatively cheap seats on the side, so some of the sightlines and acoustics were a bit blocked by some of the stone columns of the cathedral. Maybe it was because of that, or maybe the orchestra isn't as top-echelon as some of the ones I'd seen in Europe, but I came away maybe a little disappointed – it was an OK performance, but not nearly as good as the version I'd experienced in Sofia a year earlier. The two chorale pieces were also interesting, though not so memorable I can really describe them much. Still, I think I'm starting to like chorale music; it adds a whole new dimension to a symphony performance.

About Classical Music

A bit more about chorale music this time. I'm only now starting to explore chorale music, and I don't yet have very many recordings. When I was looking for some new CDs, the first thing I saw was that there are many, many recordings of chorale music to choose from, and of many different types – everything from Gregorian Chant to Beethoven's 9th ("Chorale") Symphony. Some of these are so popular, you may already have them in your CD library – George Frideric Handel's *Messiah*, for instance. One that you *ought* to have, if you have any classical music at all, is a recording of the music I recently heard in Prague, Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*. (There are many good recordings of this work; the one I have is by Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra with the Rutgers University Choir [Sony Essential Classics SBK47668].)

Carmina Burana is actually a collection of Latin secular songs of life and love, the texts dating back perhaps to the 1200s, that were set to music in the mid 1930s. Most of you have no doubt already heard and would recognize at least the first of these, "O Fortuna," which was used in several Hollywood movies, including *Glory* and *Conan the Barbarian*. As I mentioned in my Postcard Diary, it's a fascinating collection – at times a delicate thing, at other times a raging beast. Soothing it is not, but neither is it boring. The addition of vocals give the music a complexity, intensity, and intrigue that symphony alone cannot achieve.

It's probably fair to say that Orff's *Carmina Burana* chorale kept him from obscurity as a composer, but even the most famous composers wrote a significant amount of chorale compositions. Mozart, for instance, wrote many pieces for chorale and orchestra, including his very last composition, the *Requiem* (my recording is by the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus, Naxos 8.550235). In July 1791, Mozart received a commission to compose a Requiem Mass from a Viennese nobleman who wanted to

commemorate the recent death of his wife. He did not live to complete it, however; by November he had become very ill, and in early December he was dead. The work was later completed by one of Mozart's pupils, Franz Xaver Süssmayr.

One final chorale work I can recommend is the *Stabat Mater* by the great Czech composer, Antonin Dvořák (my recording is by the Chor & Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen, Deutsche Grammophon 453 025-2, but there are less expensive and equally good recordings available). This was composed in 1877 at an emotional and transitional time of Dvořák's life – he was still trying to achieve recognition as a composer, and had lost his first three children through accident and illness. Like Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Dvořák took an existing Latin text (in this case, written in the early 1300s by a Franciscan Monk) and set it to his own music. But where *Carmina Burana* is intense and boisterous, Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* is much more introverted. When listening to it, you can kind of sense Dvořák's feelings of great sadness, resignation, futility, and perhaps even acceptance and a return of inner peace. Greater things and prominence were in store for Dvořák not too long after that; in fact, it was the many performances of this chorale work, in Europe and America, that lifted him from his relative obscurity.

I'm not sure if I should continue to write these classical music reviews and recommendations, since it doesn't seem to generate much in the way of comments. Still, it does give me a chance to clarify my own thinking on why I like certain compositions, themes, types of music, and composers, so I might carry on for a few more distributions.

Mailing Comments on SFPA 221

Norm Metcalf

"Sam [Moskowitz] was one of the nicest people in science-fiction fandom." I agree. I was fortunate enough to be able to talk with him at a few worldcons a few years before he died, and he always had nice words for *Mimosa* and my ongoing 1960s project.

Ned Brooks

On fatal diseases: "I don't recall what Joe Mayhew's age was, but I would have guessed he was a bit young for the hereditary form of CJD." Joe was in his late 50s, I think. He'd been retired for several years from the Library of Congress, though, so either he planned his investments pretty well, or I'm wrong about his age.

Irvin Koch

On electoral reform: "Amen to awarding electoral votes by Congressional District, with two for the state at large. The bad thing about this is it would make redistricting fights even nastier." Both Maine and Nebraska use that system now, so it would not take a constitutional amendment to make that change. Each state would have to make such a change on its own.

Richard Dengrove

On the borderland of Jazz and Classical: "As for Shostakovich's Jazz Suites, I heard part of one recently and it didn't sound anything like Jazz even though there must have been jazz in there." Or what seemed like jazz in Russia in the 1930s, anyway. Don't forget, when Shostakovich's Jazz Suites were written, mainstream jazz was mostly Big Bands swing music, and you do get the feel of that in the Jazz Suites – saxophones and trombones frequently stand out. But I agree with you that it isn't really jazz at all; it's not really classical music either (at least from a purist viewpoint), but it's much closer to classical than it is to jazz.

Guy Lillian

This is the thinnest *Spiritus* I've ever seen from you. You do have a good excuse, though!

On Hugo campaigns: "My mini-campaign to get Julius Schwartz onto the Hugo ballot hit the wall and slid lax onto the floor." Yeah, I'm disappointed that he didn't make it, too, though even if he did, he's committed to be at DragonCon this year instead of the Worldcon.

Janice Gelb

On professional conferences: "In early April, I got an email message out of the blue from a woman ... looking for someone to cover cutting-edge editing topics at their upcoming conference in July in Washington, D.C." That's still about a week in the future as I write this, but I'm glad it gets you here for even a few days. Makes up for me missing you at Midwestcon this year.

On *Jazz*: "I ... agree with you that I'd rather have [Ken] Burns do a flawed series on this than not do it." Burns was reported to have said (and I paraphrase) that he decided he's rather tell fewer stories and tell them well than to try to comprehensively cover the entire musical genre rather more superficially. Most people I'm sure would agree with this, so the only points of contention seem to be which stories he decided to cover. He was obviously influenced in those choices by the advisors he hired, most notably Wynton Marsalis.

Steve Hughes

On reducing greenhouse gasses from fossil fuel power plants: "There are only two ways to reduce CO₂ output from conventional power plants: 1. Reducing power output ... 2. Major redesigns ... to implement newer technologies." To those I'll add: 3. Fuel switching, where possible, from coal to natural gas, and 4. Sequestering the CO₂ into places where it cannot get back into the atmosphere. (There's actually some studies in progress to determine how feasible this is – you could, for instance, inject CO₂ into depleted natural gas wells. But it costs money to capture and dispose of the gas.) Option 3 is happening a lot, right now, in Eastern Europe. Option 2 will become a bit more feasible some years down the road, when the existing generation of coal-fueled power plants start to be decommissioned, and newer coal-fueled power technologies, such as gasification combined cycle, become a bit more competitive in terms of capital costs.

David Schlosser

On alternatives to the Electoral College as it exists today: "Let each state's electoral votes be split by percentage of the popular votes in that state." This would make presidential elections much closer in concept to the way parliamentary democracies conduct their elections – it would encourage multiple parties and increase the chances that smaller parties would win electoral votes (and therefore increase the chances that a Presidential election would wind up in the House of Representatives to decide the outcome). The current 'winner take all' format now used discourages third parties.

Sheila Strickland

More on *Jazz*: "Is there a book out associated with it?" Oh, yeah... a big thick coffee-table one, filled with pictures and information. But it costs more than \$60 (I haven't bought it yet).

Gary Robe

On what to do on a free day in the middle of a trip: "I then had Saturday to myself, so I indulged in one of my favorite things to do in South America: a day of walking through Buenos Aires." Sounds very similar to what I do, too, except for me it was Budapest. Even though I've been there several times (Prague and Bratislava too, for that matter), I never get tired of going back.

Jeff Copeland

On donating blood: "Something about [my kid brother] being in Pakistan, the Philippines, *and* northern Africa within the past month twigg'd the blood people completely." They normally disqualify you if you've been in a place where malaria exists, and the ban lasts for a full year after you're back. Happened to me in 1995 when I went to India, even though I never was outside urban areas. And now they're getting even stricter, disqualifying people who have spent significant time in England, because of BSE. Turns out that BSE had gotten into the Czech Republic earlier this year, but I made a point not to eat any beef while I was there.

Gary Brown

Yet more on *Jazz*: "I've also read that some jazz fans criticized the series as ending too soon and not giving the last 30 years or so any coverage." That's perhaps a valid criticism, but it was deliberate, according to Ken Burns. The series essentially ends with the deaths of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. He apparently felt that covering what happened after the mid 1970s was like covering a work still in progress, and it would have required him to further dilute the material he already was planning to cover. I'd have rather seen one more episode that talked more about where jazz has evolved since the 1970s, but maybe he didn't have the budget.

Toni Weisskopf

On self-portraits: "I am a non-Christian, pro-choice, pro-gun, small-government, big-defense, low-tax, pro-Constitution sort of person." You forgot to mention if you're pro-Mets or Yankees. Anyway, as for me, I'm a pro-Mozart, non-Mahler, big-Dvořák, low-Elgar, pro-Chopin sort of person. And, yes, I still have an open mind about Dubya, though I think Gore would have been a better President.

mike weber

On classical music: "For silliness, sheer musicianship, and admiration of someone who must have been raving nuts to try it, Rampal's CD of Joplin's rags on flute ... is quite nice." No doubt; Rampal was an amazing musician. He's not nearly the only one to do unusual arrangements on classical music, though; I have a disk by the L.A. Guitar Quartet that has a very nice version of Bach's "Little Fugue" that's normally performed using a pipe organ. Maybe I should do a classical music essay that talks about some of these unusual arrangements, hmmmmmm...

OK, enough is enough. It's now July 9th, and since I began this SFPazine the Smithsonian Folklife Festival has come and gone. It was more fascinating than usual this year – I got to see a live Cricket match (an exhibition, though) with players from Bermuda, saw a small timber frame building being raised (the event was taped for the PBS series *The Woodwrights Shop*, and the show's host, Roy Underhill, with his trademark cloth cap and red suspenders, was one of the workers), spent a fascinating hour listening to a New York Stock Exchange trader describe the machinations on how floor trading works, enjoyed performances by the Bermuda costumed dance and rhythm brigade, the Gombeyes... and much more. The Festival is an event I always look forward to.

George Dubya Bush himself came over to my Agency for a speech a few weeks back. I had a ticket to the event, which would have put me front and center, about 30 feet from the podium, but I gave it to my contractor who seemed to be more interested (I had a deadline to meet that day, anyway). Had a bit more luck that same afternoon at an event at the Newseum, where I got to talk to (briefly) the Prime Minister of Mozambique and met the Ambassadors from Mozambique and South Africa. This is an interesting city...

Best Wishes to All!

