

Frequent Flyer

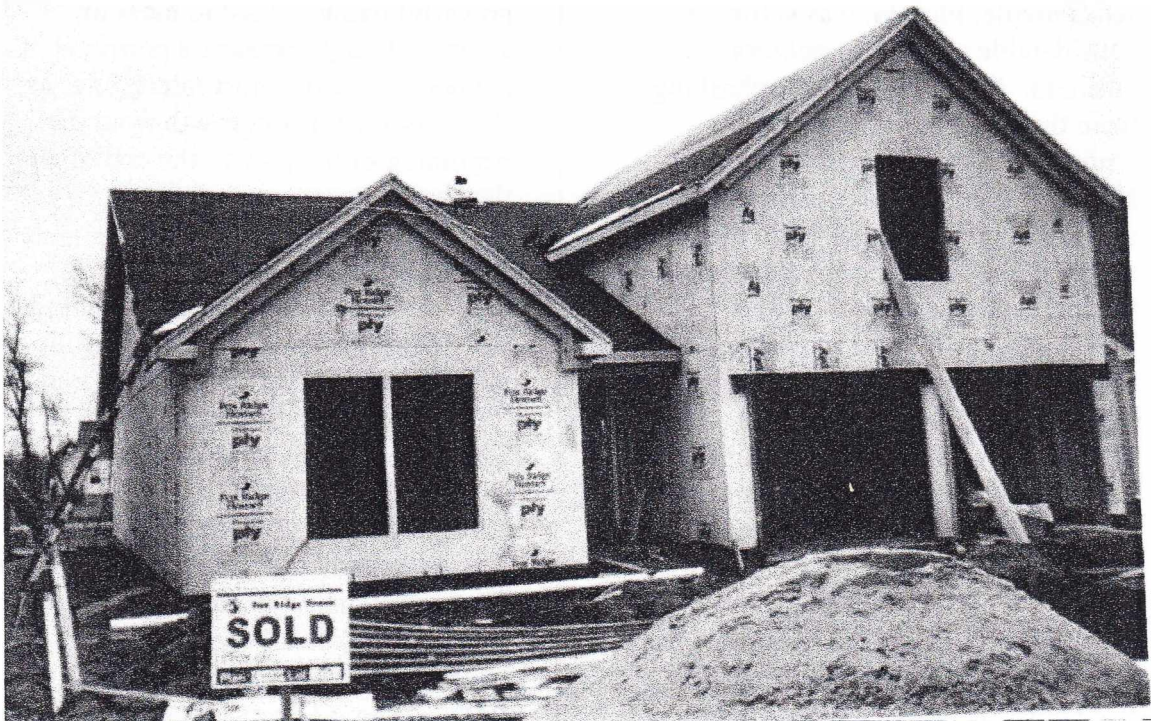
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March 17, 2003



Our news is that our new house is supposed to be ready on April 15, which is earlier than the target date of April 30. The picture on page 1 is out of date, but our later pictures are still in the camera.

Work—

According to the February 2 issue of Hotel and Motel Management, our Cabot Lodge chain ranks number 60 in size within the limited-service market segment. The Cabot Lodge-Millsaps was the site of the 1997 DSC. Days Inn is number one.

A PricewaterhouseCoopers study says that U.S. lodging demand has fallen by about 5% since 9/11, which translates into 130,000 room nights per night, and there is no indication that demand will increase in the foreseeable future.

Our sales from December through February are below the previous year's, but March is running a little ahead of last year. One of our few bright spots, the Holiday Inn-Airport in Jacksonville, Florida, was getting a considerable amount of military business. Many troops are embarking from the naval base there.

Unfortunately, one night a man with Middle Eastern features asked some soldiers some questions while they were sitting in the bar. The soldiers reported the incident, and there was an investigation. A cocktail waitress told me about her unnerving experience of being questioned by an FBI agent. The investigation found nothing, but the army pulled its people out of our Holiday Inn and put them in another.

Aida--

This was not the famous opera, but rather the recent Elton John-Tim Rice musical. I was a little dubious

when we got our programs and discovered an insert saying that Radames would be played not by the regular actor but by Ryan Link, a singer whose previous experience was fronting a rock and roll band. Our fears were ill-founded, as we found that not only could he sing, but he was muscular enough to not be embarrassed by the fact that he is bare-chested for most of the play.

If you're not familiar with the story, Aida (Saycon Sengbloh) is a Nubian princess who is captured by Radames and his troops and brought to Egypt, where she becomes the slave of Amneris, Pharaoh's daughter (Lisa Brescia). The three main characters form a love triangle. As Bugs Bunny tells us, the opera has an unhappy ending. The musical uses a frame story in the Egyptian of a modern museum to imply that Radames and Aida will be united in a future life.

While the musical did not produce any memorable songs, the music is very pleasant and the story is so powerful that it is hard to mess up. I actually thought Brescia's portrayal of Amneris to be the most interesting, as she shows the most growth from the beginning of the play to the end of all the characters.

Rite of Passage—

I missed the previous ballet in which Anita's book discussion group attended as a group. This time I joined them in viewing this performance of the Nashville Ballet.

It consisted of two very different plays. The first, *Awaiting Redemption*, was an original one-act ballet with music by country music singer/songwriter Hal Ketchum ("Small Town Saturday Night") and choreography by Nashville Ballet Artistic Director Paul Vasterling,

and the second was *Giselle*, originally performed in 1842.

The first ballet was also unusual in that the music consisted of a guitar player and the singing of Ketchum. It also used minimal costuming and no scenery. The music for *Giselle*, on the other hand, was played by the Nashville Symphony, there were lavish costumes, and extensive scenery.

If you're not familiar with *Giselle*, the second act has fantasy elements as the title character rises from the grave to dance with Albrecht, her beloved, and the Wilis, the ghosts of young girls who have been jilted before the wedding days, take their revenge by dancing to death any man they find.

Three hours of ballet is a bit much for me, as much as I enjoy classical music, but it was enjoyable.

Air Supply and the Nashville Symphony—

In keeping with its tradition, the Nashville Symphony conducted a pops concert on St. Valentine's Day, which makes a good date for Anita and me. After dinner at the Gersthaus, the city's leading German restaurant, we proceed to the Tennessee Performing Arts Center for the third consecutive weekend.

The first half consisted of the symphony under the direction of Jeffrey Steinberg playing romantic music, beginning and ending with the theme to the film *Love is a Many Splendored Thing* by Sammy Fain and Paul Francis. There was one piece of classical music, however, *Solveig's Song* from *Peer Gynt*, Suite 2 by Edvard Grieg. They also played songs such as "Unchained Melody" by Alex North, "True Love" by Cole Porter, and "How are Things in Glocca Morra" by E.Y. "Yip" Harburg.

Air Supply came on for the second half accompanied by the symphony. The two principals, Graham Russell (frontman) and Russell Hitchcock (guitar) are still with the group, and their voices are still in good condition. (They formed the band in 1975.) I had forgotten how many hit songs they are responsible for. They sang "All Out of Love", "Lost in Love", "Here I am, the One that you Love", "Making Love out of Nothing at All", "Sweet Dreams", and other romantic ballads.

The evening made for an excellent St. Valentine's Day date.

Concave—

The weekend began Thursday night when I flew home from Jacksonville, Florida, just in time for Anita to pick me up to go to one of her reading groups. The Nashville Public Library sponsors the "Introduction to Great Books" and provides the reading materials. This week's selection was an excerpt from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. It involved the formation of an aristocracy based on the ability to make money.

The following morning we met some Sherlock Holmes fans for breakfast at the Third Avenue Kitchen. The Fresh Rashers, as we call ourselves, meet each Friday morning, except for holidays. The cancellation of the Sherlock Holmes conference for 2004 was discussed extensively.

After stops at the post office, drug store, and laundromat, we came home where I went through the mail before finally leaving for Horse Cave, Kentucky for the convention. We stopped off at the house for a few minutes to take some photos and arrived in the Hampton Inn less than 2 hours

later. After registering, we hung around the lobby which doubled as the con suite until the first parties began. We were still tired from our frantic day, so we turned in after Naomi Fisher's party in the art show.

We slept late the following morning and I brought Anita breakfast in bed from the one the hotel furnished. After resting some more, I put in 20 minutes on the stationary bike in the exercise room to control my blood sugar. After I cleaned up, we went back down the lobby and talked to people.

Bob Emler and friends grilled hamburgers and hot dogs outside the hotel so that took care of lunch. Then we went back up the room to take a nap before we went to the Libertycon-DeepSouthCon party where they furnished chili, which took care of dinner. Then after another rest period in the room, we started another round of party attendance. My count was six.

The Cirque de Luna party featured Bill Zielke making hairy fuzzy navels and Long Island Iced Tea and where you could find SFPAn Randy Cleary and Toni Weisskopf. Many of you who have been to Worldcons will recall Xerps in 2010, which maintained their usual high standards of food, drink, and decorations. Their specialty drink is called "Skip and Go Naked", which consists of vodka, lemonade, and light beer. The last party of note was Key West in 2010, which is actually a hoax bid. They also had excellent food, including shrimp and chicken. Anita and I kept going until we were about to drop.

We slept late again Sunday before we had breakfast, cleaned up, packed, and checked out. We hung around the lobby for a while before getting on the road a little earlier than

usual, because we had tickets to the opera.

Porgy and Bess—

Although this performance was held under the auspices of the Nashville Opera, all the performers were part of a touring company, because Nashville's opera company does not have enough black singers to put on the George Gerschwin classic.

Unfortunately, they were caught in icy weather and did not make the Thursday night performance which was rescheduled for Sunday night. This meant that for the Sunday matinee, we had to be satisfied with substitutes. They all seemed adequate singers, except that the one who played Sportin' Life was weak on one song.

Based on a novel and play by DuBose Heyward, the score includes three songs that have become standards: "Summertime", "It Ain't Necessarily So", and "I Got Plenty of Nuttin'". There is also another song that you rarely heard performed with the lyrics, because they don't make sense outside the context of the show: "Bess, You Is My Woman Now". The music, however, is performed quite often, and we recognized it immediately.

The show was "close captioned" with the lyrics projected on a screen over the stage. I found it very distracting, and the story drags in the first part of the second act. Otherwise, we enjoyed the show very much.

Star Trek—

The March 1-7 issue of *TV Guide* contained an article entitled *Star Trek: Lost in Space?* that discussed the decline in the franchise's popularity. The latest movie *Star Trek: Nemesis* only grossed \$40 million, the lowest of

any Trek movie, without even adjusting for inflation. It sold 8 million tickets, compared to 21 million for *First Contact* (1996) and 15 million for *Insurrection* (1998). The official explanation at Paramount was that the competition was too much for it, especially *The Lord of the Rings*. Yet previous *Star Trek* movies more than held their own against the competition.

Year	Star Trek Movie	Competition
1979	<i>The Motion Picture</i>	<i>Alien</i>
1982	<i>The Wrath of Khan</i>	<i>Bladerunner</i> , <i>E.T.</i> , <i>Poltergeist</i> , <i>The Road Warrior</i>
1984	<i>The Search for Spock</i>	<i>Ghostbusters</i>
1986	<i>The Voyage Home</i>	<i>Aliens</i>
1991	<i>The Undiscovered Country</i>	<i>Terminator 2</i> , <i>Beauty and the Beast</i>
1994	<i>Generations</i>	<i>Independence Day</i> , <i>Mars Attacks</i>

I didn't list *The Final Frontier* (1989), because it had the lowest receipts of any movie with the original cast. It had competition, too, such as *Batman* and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, but was also one of the worst, if not the worst, of all the *Star Trek* movies. It just shows that for a Trek movie to be competitive, Paramount has to put out a quality product.

In fact, I would say that the best movie in the series, *The Wrath of Khan*, had even stiffer competition than *Nemesis*. Yet the former was financially successful. The latter was a mediocre effort, and audiences knew it.

On TV, *Enterprise* is averaging 4.3 million viewers down 24% from last year and down from *The Next Generation's* peak of 17.7 million viewers in its fifth season. There is no danger of *Enterprise* going off the air anytime soon, however. It is still the highest rated show on the United Paramount Network.

According to an article in the March 12 issue of *The Atlanta Constitution*, William Shatner blames the people responsible for producing the movies and the current series, because they have become more interested in money than in telling a good story. Of course, this is rather hypocritical, because he made a lot of money off the show and when he had his chance to direct and co-write *The Final Frontier*, he did not show that he understood *Star Trek* any better than the current producers.

Academy Award Nominations

Here are my opinions of the films that we have seen with at least two Oscar nominations:

- *Chicago* (13 nominations): Anita and I had already seen the stage version, so we knew what to expect. There is one original song "I Move On". Catherine Zeta-Jones had started out in the chorus line so she could handle the singing and dancing, and Richard Gere and Renee Zellweger show that can sing and dance, too. Zellweger, who was best known for girl-next-door roles, is cast against that type. However, I thought John C. Reilly had the best performance as the only character in the film who is not obsessed with sex, fame, and/or money. This film is being

given credit for reviving the musical genre. I find it curious that contemporary audiences will accept flying saucers, aliens, ghosts, wizards, elves, and other elements of the fantastic but will reject a man walking down the street "Singing in the Rain". Director-choreographer Rob Marshall solved the problem by staging the musical numbers as fantasies most of which take place in the imagination of Roxie Hart (Zellweger). My favorite number was "Cell Block Tango" in which six women in jail for killing their significant others explain why "he had it comin'" and dance with their deceased lovers. Example: one of the men walked into his wife's knife so it was really his fault for dying.

- *Gangs of New York* (10): Daniel Day-Lewis is nominated for his role as the principal villain, but I liked Brendan Gleason as Monk McGinn, a former mercenary who runs for sheriff. It also features another strong performance by Reilly as a former gang member turned corrupt police officer.
- *The Hours* (9): I've never read a book by Virginia Woolf nor the novel upon which this film is based. Like everyone else, I was impressed that Nicole Kidman was willing to make herself look plain with a prosthetic nose and unglamorous to play the part. According to the February 15th electronic issue of the New York Times, Virginia Woolf fans and scholars believe she went too far. The article shows a picture of the real Woolf, and I have to agree that her nose wasn't as big as the movie shows. The article points out that "her photograph appeared in Vogue London and the British

photographer Cecil Beaton included her portrait in his 1930 *Book of Beauty*." On the other hand, the movie only shows Woolf at her home, not dolled up for a society function or a photo shoot. The Woolf fans also object that the real Woolf was funnier and wittier than is indicated by Kidman's performance. By the way, Reilly is in this movie, too, as Julianna Moore's husband. She plays a 1950s housewife who is a closet lesbian.

- *The Pianist* (7): This movie about a Polish-Jewish pianist in Warsaw during World War II is very powerful. By the way, don't expect to see Roman Polanski at the award ceremony. His arrest warrant for statutory rape for having sex with a 13 year old girl in 1977 is still outstanding. Statutes of Limitations don't apply when someone flees the country to avoid serving a prison term.
- *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (6): This was the best fantasy film of the year. The character of Gollum alone is deserving of an Academy Award.
- *Road to Perdition* (6): Although it is not a fantasy, this film was based on a graphic novel so I am excited that this art form becoming more respectable. It is a beautifully designed and photographed movie.
- *About Schmidt* (2): As a native of the Midwest and businessman, I found this film very authentic. The characters seemed very real to me, even Kathy Bates's ex-hippie. It was also nice to see a film in which fat, middle-aged people are interested in sex, too.
- *Catch Me If You Can* (2): This film really captures the Sixties as I

remember them. Leonardo DiCaprio's performance here is better than the one in *Gangs of New York*.

- *Spider-Man (2)* This was the biggest commercial success of 2002 and is one of the better adaptations of a comic book character to the big screen.

Three science fiction films had one nomination each. The best SF film of the year, *Minority Report*, was nominated for sound editing, *Star Wars, Episode Two: The Attack of the Clones* for visual effects, and *The Time Machine* for makeup.

I saw a TV interview with a film critic who lamented the fact that the studios try to release the movies they consider Oscar-worthy in the last six weeks of the year. "Do they think we're stupid the rest of the year?" I remember him saying.

Comments to #231

SFPA sightings—

I saw Gary Robe, Toni Weisskopf, and Randy Cleary at ConCave.

Corporate scandals—

The February 9 issue of the electronic version of The New York Times had an article about Kenneth Lay, former CEO of Enron. One of the more serious charges against Lay is that he was selling Enron stock while encouraging his employees to buy more stock. The article argues that the criminal charges against Lay are weaker than previously thought, because although he was selling stock, there is evidence that he still believed in the company.

Lay apparently believed that Enron would not only survive, but even prosper. He bought Enron shares on margin and only sold them as a last resort, because margin calls required it as the stock went down. Lay sold other investments first and as late as the summer of 2001 exercised his option to buy more than 200,000 shares of Enron stock which he was not able to sell. Before you feel sorry for him, however, he still owns \$3.8 million in marketable investments (down from \$336 million in early 2001), has \$2 million in retirement benefits (down from \$68 million), and over \$10 million in real estate.

The February 13 issue also had an article on Enron's tax shelters involving 881 offshore subsidiaries of which 692 were in the Cayman Islands. In 1998, for instance, the company reported \$155 billion more in profits to shareholders than they showed on the tax return. The problem, according to the article, is that the shelters tied up cash that Enron eventually needed.

Gary Robe—

I'm sorry to read that the Bookstore Café shut down the restaurant half. Our meals there were fun.

As usual, you and the rest of the Concave committee did a great job.

In Nashville this winter, we've had the most snow since I've been living there.

Hank Reinhardt c/o Toni Weisskopf—

I am hardly "filthy rich", but as a frequent flyer I earn more upgrade credits than I can use. I don't have the exact figures, but many of the passengers in first class pay regular coach fares but fly so frequently that they get upgrades.

Eve Ackerman—

It is interesting that you loved the recent Masterpiece Theater version of *The Hound of Baskervilles*. It was universally panned in Sherlock Holmes fandom.

I can understand why homebuilding puts stress on a marriage. Picking out the site, the extras, and the colors was very stressful. Now we have to move, and we nervously waited to lock up the interest rate.

Janice Gelb—

I never heard the term “band geek” until I saw the movie *American Pie*. In my high school, some of the most popular kids were in the band.

Re Mary Wells Lawrence and Braniff Airlines: The paint on the jets and the designer uniforms on the stewardesses still did not correct the single biggest consumer complaint against the airline, which was that they had one of the worst on-time performances in the industry. The airline also had the disadvantage of being based in Dallas and therefore was the single most direct competitor of American. Braniff was one of the first casualties of airline deregulation.

The music at Constellation was mostly 1970s top forty.

Although I only spend 3-4 days a month at our corporate office in Jackson, Mississippi, they still have a little cubicle permanently set aside for me.

Guy Lillian—

Anita really sympathized with your car story. Her Probe was totaled by a huge red pickup truck.

The recitation of “Song of Hiawatha” that I always remember is Katharine Hepburn’s in *Desk Set*.

Richard Dengrove—

One of the first alternative histories I ever read postulated that the Confederates won at Gettysburg.

Re your comment to Sheila about Crescent City Con: It has been in existence since the Eighties, although for the early years it was a one-day convention, so it is definitely a tradition. Unfortunately, the practice of subcontracting the operation of the consuite to local clubs is part of their tradition.

I’ve always felt that *Star Trek* was at its best during the first half of the second season, and “The Trouble With Tribbles” was first broadcast at almost precisely the mid-point.

David Schlosser—

Fortunately, the problem of discovering hypodermic needles in hotel rooms is not so great that each maid’s cart has to be equipped with a sharps container. Most of our hotels have just one for the entire property.

The Hispanic man who was pulled out of the line at security in Nashville’s airport was the only one at the time.

I also have a medical reimbursement fund at work that is funded from pre-tax dollars.

Don Markstein—

I don’t even remember The Rawhide Kid, so I don’t care if Marvel makes him homosexual.

Ned Brooks—

The only example of Hispanic terrorists that I know about were the Puerto Rican separatists who bombed U.S. government offices in the Seventies and early Eighties.