

# Variations on a Theme #13

from Rich Lynch • for SFPA 227 • written in late-March 2002

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## “Do Zobaczenia” Doesn’t Mean “Good-Bye” (An Eighth Postcard Diary of Central and Eastern Europe)

### A Note of Explanation:

This is the eighth and quite possibly the last in a continuing series of my (very unofficial) trip reports about my travels in Central and Eastern Europe. Those of you who have read the other seven Postcard Diaries know that I work as an International Trade Specialist for an Agency of the U.S. Government. My area of specialty is Central/Eastern Europe, and about once or twice a year my travels take me there. But when I first started writing these Diaries back in 1997, before the easy availability of public-access Internet access over there, it was both costly and difficult to stay in touch with the outside world. So instead of expensive telephone calls, I sent 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 Central and 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.

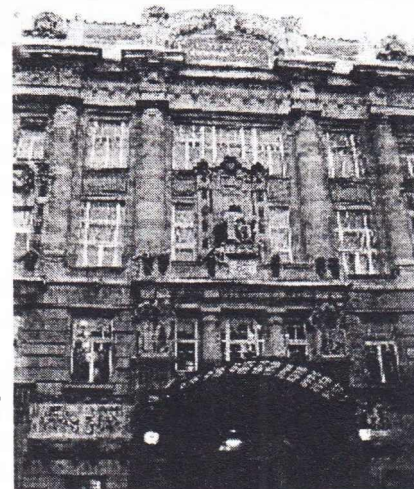
Anyway, after reading through this new assembled collection of cards, I’ve once again added some comments between the postcards for continuity and transition, and to expand on some things where just wasn’t enough room in a postcard. As always, I hope you enjoy reading these short essays.

### Sunday, April 14, 2002 (Budapest, Hungary)

Well, once again, the first day of a business trip has created some problems for me – Lufthansa or United (I’m not sure which one yet) managed to lose my one checked suitcase, which contained all of my clothes (except what I’m wearing) and my toiletries kit. There are several important meetings tomorrow, and I don’t have even a single white shirt to wear, or worse, clean underwear. Even my suit coat was in there. I’m beginning to wonder if I should have learned a lesson from the Apollo 13 astronauts 22 years ago – don’t travel on April 13<sup>th</sup>!

While this wasn’t quite as bad as having all my credit cards stolen on the first day of a three-week trip back in the summer of 2000, it was still enough to cast a pall on things and put me in kind of a rotten mood. What saved the day was an evening of Chopin at the Liszt Academy of Music. It was a wonderful piano recital to a very appreciative audience by a very skilled pianist (Endre Hegedűs), and he played just about all of Chopin’s “Greatest Hits” – the “Tristesse” Etude (Opus 10 No. 3, but who’s counting?), the “Minute” Waltz (which actually took about a minute-forty to play), the “Raindrop” Prelude (appropriate, due to the rainstorm that blew through the city on my way to the concert hall), and many others. His first encore was the “Heroic” Polonaise, which brought the house down – pretty good for Polish music, considering we were in Hungary!

Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest



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**Monday, April 15, 2002 (Budapest)**

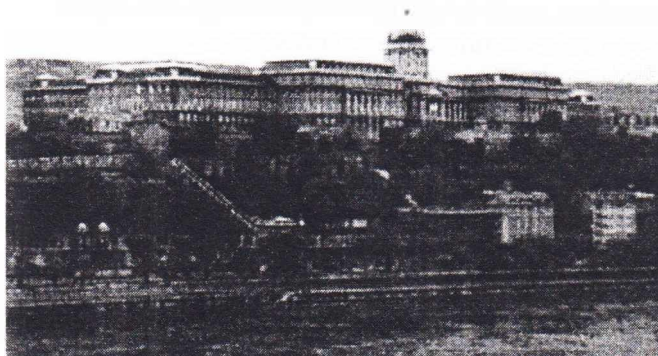
Some good news! Lufthansa found my luggage – it was waiting for me at the hotel when I got back there from the day's meetings. At the beginning of the day I thought I'd have to try to bluff people into believing that a brown flannel shirt was the latest thing in dress-down business casual. My American Embassy contact, though, was able to get me out to the open-24-hours Tesco department store before the first meeting, and I was able to find a white long-sleeve shirt that exactly fit me for the princely sum of 1,200 forints (about US\$4.35). Maybe I should buy *all* of my clothes here!?

There would have been no way for me to get to the store on my own, even assuming I'd known it existed, because it wasn't on or even near any of Budapest's three subway lines, and I didn't have the street address. It's those three subway lines that make Budapest easily accessible even to foreigners like me: the subways go to all the places of interest in the city, from the railway stations to the concert halls, and a three-day pass cost only about US\$6.25. Of the three lines, the Yellow Line (the one that goes straight out Andrassy Street) is both the oldest and the classiest – the trains are small and a bit clunky, but the stations are finished in very nice hardwood oak cabinetry paneling and ceramic tile. A lot of work and care went into those stations, and as a result, they're treated with respect – there's not even a hint of graffiti. It made me almost embarrassed to be down there the times I wasn't wearing a coat and tie!



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Royal Palace in Budapest (view from my hotel window)



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**Tuesday night, April 16, 2002 (Budapest)**

It's my last night in Budapest, but I decided not to look for any evening events to attend. The business meetings ended a bit late and by the time I changed clothes, having dinner seemed a better bet on how to spend my time. Or maybe it was just that I didn't see anything listed in the guidebook for tonight that looked better than, or even as good as the Chopin recital from Sunday night. But I'm sure there will be some more good events next time I'm here.

Turns out that April isn't the best month for this kind of trip; the people I meet with at the American Embassies set up some great meetings for me (they attended them too), but the spring is a very busy time for them – there were several small business delegations that came through while I was there, and more the following weeks. I don't think I was quite underfoot, but it did affect the amount of time they had available to spend with me. So next time I go over there, it will likely be in chilly November. I'll remember to bring a coat.

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**Wednesday night, April 17, 2002 (Bratislava, Slovakia)**

It was travel day today, and after two intense days of meetings in Budapest, the leisurely three-hour train ride to Bratislava was quite pleasant. Tomorrow the meetings will begin again, but this evening was reserved for a walk around the Old Town of the city as dusk was falling. There are a few sights that are quite stunningly beautiful that time of day – turning a street corner and seeing the "blue church" or the wonderful old Michael's Tower lit against the darkening sky is something I look forward to, and one of the things that makes me always want to come back here again.

Bratislava's appeal isn't limited only to its eye-pleasing sights – it was also the least expensive, by far, of the places I visited this trip. A full-course meal with half a liter of beer at a decent restaurant in the Old Town cost me about 250 Slovak koruna, or just about US\$5. Part of the reason for this is that unlike Budapest, Prague, and Warsaw, Bratislava is still pretty much undiscovered by tourists, so the in-town prices are aimed at the locals instead of the foreigners. It's too bad I don't know the Slovak language, because this would be a great place to retire with a U.S. pension – your money would be, in effect, tripled or quadrupled, with some of the more popular European cities only a relatively short distance away. I think I could probably get used to that!



the Blue Church in Bratislava

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**Thursday, April 18, 2002 (Bratislava)**

The four business meetings today filled the day so full that even lunch was squeezed out of the schedule. On the other hand, it didn't seem all that long a day – a two-hour meeting at the beginning of the day seemed to fly by, and when we had to leave I kind of felt that I still hadn't gathered enough information. The only real surprise in any of the meetings came in the last one, at the new Slovak Energy Regulatory Office, where my host there described me to the Chairman of the organization as "the most well-known American energy expert in Slovakia"! After I cranked my jaw back shut, I had to concede that, actually, there may be a grain of truth in that – I've certainly visited many, many different companies, agencies, organizations, etc. in all my times here. Either that or else my picture is on a "Wanted" poster in some Rogue's Gallery there!

That comment got me to wondering exactly how many times I've been to Slovakia. My first trip there was in March 1995, and including this most recent visit I've now been there eleven times (and Poland the same, for that matter, though nobody in Poland has ever had so nice a thing to say about me). Anyway, during many of these eleven trips to Slovakia there have been some pleasant evening music events; the one I went to this trip was a chamber orchestra concert that featured music mostly by baroque composers, including a concerto grosso by Handel. Several of my friends in Bratislava came to the concert too, including one of the engineers (and his wife) from the organization that was hosting me. My friend's wife commented that she liked classical music concerts, but usually only went to one a year – the same ones my friend brought her to when I was in town. I guess I'm not only a renown energy expert there, I must also be a cultural magnet!

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**Friday night, April 19, 2002**



the musician

It's finally the end of the work week, and for practical purposes this trip is half over. Tonight it was time for our traditional pub crawl, but this year was different. The event has evolved into a dinner, and we spent the entire evening in just one place – a very nice but out-of-the way restaurant across the Danube River in the Petržalka part of the city. The food was great, the beer excellent, and the conversation engaging. We all agreed it would be a good idea to do this again next year.

That dinner was actually another musical event, because there was a Hungarian musician named Zoltan Kozak at the restaurant who played gypsy-style music on a stringed instrument that sounded a bit like a hammered dulcimer. Or, I should say, popular music played gypsy-style, as his repertoire in-

cluded things like “The Third Man Theme,” “Edelweiss,” “Never on Sunday,” and even the Beatles’ “Yesterday.” Some of the tunes came across better than others, of course, but overall I’d rate him as a pretty good musician. One of the pieces he played, Beethoven’s “Für Elise,” was even better than pretty good. I didn’t think that transcription from solo piano to any other arrangement would make that piece very listenable, but either the composition is a lot more robust than it would seem to be, or else it was a case of the performance of such a delicate work transcending the limitations of both the musician and the instrument he was playing.

**Saturday, April 20, 2002 (Bratislava)**

Today is my last day in Bratislava; tomorrow it’s on to Prague. Only I didn’t spend all that much time here today – I took a day trip to Vienna instead (about an hour’s bus ride away). The highlight of the day was a guided tour of Schönbrunn Palace, the summer home of the Austro-Hungarian Emperor Franz-Joseph, and before that, Maria-Teresa of the Hapsburgs. The place is huge, with hundreds of rooms. The tour took me through 40 of them, where we could admire the rococo-style design, the wonderfully crafted wood-inlay floors,



at Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna

and all the artifacts and furniture that’s been preserved from those eras. It was so impressive that it kind of overshadowed the rest of the day, actually. Or maybe it was because the day was so cold and windy, it kind of blew away my enthusiasm for seeing many of the sights of the city.



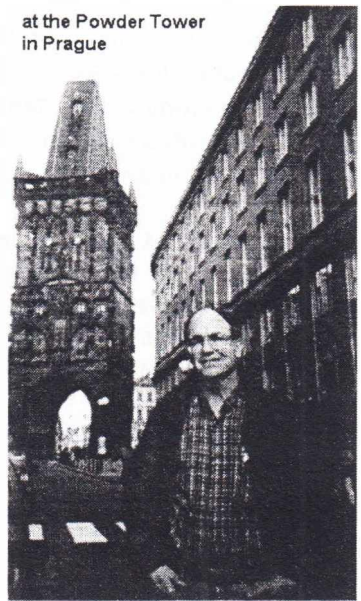
the Mozart Monument in Vienna

Vienna came across to me as maybe a bit of a disappointment, perhaps due to the cold weather but maybe also because that many of the fine old buildings in the city weren’t at their best – many had scaffolding up and were undergoing some kind of rehab to their facades, while street festivals were going on in front of others. About the only things that were as nice as I remembered them in my previous visit to Vienna in 1995 were some of the city’s many statues, like those in honor of Mozart and Strauss. And yet, even some of these were impeded from the public, such as the one in honor of E. Schindler, which was protected by a wire cage enclosure. It must be a sign of the times that such measures are necessary. I only hope it’s not a personal sign of the times that this fine city did not really live up to my expectations.

**Sunday night, April 21, 2002 (Prague, Czech Republic)**

Five hours by train and Bratislava magically turns into Prague. I don’t know if Prague really is a magical city, but it sure seems that way. At night, in the middle of the old Charles Bridge over the Moldau River, you’re surrounded by all the old buildings in various parts of the city, all lit up and glowing golden and green – St. Vitus Cathedral and the rest of Prague Castle up on the hill to the west, the National Theatre to the south, the Rudolfinum concert hall to the north, and various other cathedrals, churches, towers, domes, and the like here and there around you. It was like being in the middle of a fantasy movie, but one that doesn’t end after a mere two hours!

There was a music event (which I attended) at the Rudolfinium that night: the Philharmonic Orchestra from the Czech city of Hradec Kralové was in Prague and it played a program of Smetana ("The Moldau" tone poem), Mozart (the "Prague" symphony, of course) and Dvořák (the famous 9<sup>th</sup> symphony "From the New World"). The Dvořák symphony is one of my favorites, and that was only the second time I'd heard a live performance of it; in the hands of a really competent orchestra like that one, it lived up to my expectations. Surprisingly, the concert hall was less than half-filled; perhaps the cost had something to do with it, but most concerts in Prague are marketed toward the thousands of tourists there instead of the locals. But there are so many nightly concerts in Prague – more than 20 each evening, not even counting the jazz clubs and piano bars – that maybe it's finally gotten to the point where there aren't enough musically-inclined foreigners like me to go around. In another concert hall a kilometer or so away from the Rudolfinium, another (lesser) orchestra was giving a performance that same evening that also featured the same Dvořák symphony, except that this one was being much more heavily promoted out on the streets. A sign of the times that success in the classical music concert scene goes to the orchestra that has the best business plan?



at the Powder Tower  
in Prague

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**Monday night, April 22, 2002 (Prague)**

Already it's my last night in Prague, and I'll be sad to leave here tomorrow. It's well past the halfway point in this trip, though, and from past experience, the days seem to start moving faster when you reach that point. Much of the day was spent in five business meetings, which left me too worn down to want to do more than just do some walking in the Old Town. Near the Astronomical Clock, one of the people who advertise upcoming concerts wanted to know where I was from. After I told her, she said she was from Ukraine; she and her husband had come to Prague seeking a better life, and even though she was working 14-hour days for 50 koruna (about US\$1.50) per hour, she was convinced she had found it. It was a sobering reminder that even though the Czechs, Slovaks, and Hungarians are at an economic disadvantage compared to westerners like me, there are other places that are worse off yet.

The most interesting of the day's meetings was actually none of the five that were on my schedule. The American Embassy had assigned a university student as my translator, and it turned out that her father had once been the Czech Republic's Ambassador to Norway. Partly because of that, she was preparing for a hoped-for career in the diplomatic service herself. She was pleasant company, and going to and from meetings, we had quite a bit to talk about, even including a common interest in classical music. It made a long day seem a lot shorter.

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**Tuesday afternoon, April 23, 2002 (Prague)**

The Prague portion of the trip ended this afternoon, and the taxi to the train station will arrive soon. I've promised to keep expenses for this trip as low as possible, and that means taking the overnight train to Warsaw instead of flying there. I was a bit surprised that for about \$US50, I can get a first-class sleeper couchette, and for double that I can get the whole compartment to myself, which I'm going to do. I'm rationalizing the extra expense because the total cost is no more than a hotel room for the night here – it's like getting the train ride for free!

Some of my friends consider me a bit of a cheapskate when I travel because of the drastic measures I sometimes take to keep travel costs down. Fact of the matter is that it's never easy to get travel funds – they all come from an overhead account and any money I use is that much less for everybody else in our organization. I have a pretty good idea how much money I can get approved for a trip, and it's up to me

to stretch it as far as I can. If taking a night train instead of spending money for an airplane flight and then a hotel room allows me to extend the trip for an extra day, then I'll do it. On the other hand, there's something fascinating about train travel for me – it's kind of mesmerizing to watch the countryside roll by, and every so often you can see something unexpected, like an ornate church or the ruins of an old castle on a hill. You don't get that from 25,000 feet in the air.

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**Wednesday, April 24, 2002 (Warsaw, Poland)**

I'm back in Poland for the conclusion of this trip. The ten-hour overnighiter from Prague and the two afternoon meetings were enough to wear me down rather quickly today, so no evening events tonight. Maybe it's also that directly after Prague, Warsaw seems a bit of a letdown; instead of a wondrous castle on a hill, there's the rather forbidding Stalinist-era Palace of Culture and Science that dominates Warsaw's skyline. But Warsaw's Old Town area is quite nice and there are certainly a lot of tourists. And, like Prague, the costs here are steadily rising each year. Both of these cities will be part of the European Union in a few years, but EU prices will be here sooner yet!

The city actually hadn't changed too much in the year since I'd last been there. Accession to the EU is now scheduled for the beginning of 2004, and that anticipation is one of the driving forces that's affecting the economy there. My personal contribution to the Polish economy this trip included about US\$120 spent on amber jewelry at my favorite amber shop (and as usual, the owner recognized me on sight and gave me my usual 10% discount), about US\$15 on Polish chocolates (it's some of the best in the world), and, as usual, about a bazillion dollars for Internet access at various public-access Internet cafes. Well, okay, not nearly that much, but still quite a bit – I spent a lot of time online, and Internet access is becoming so readily available wherever I go that postcard diaries like this one are not needed anymore. This one will be my last, most likely.

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**Thursday, April 25, 2002 (Warsaw)**

The business part of this trip drew to a close today, with my last three meetings. Two of them were with the people from the American Embassy here, and I'm happy to say that the chill I'd perceived in my relations with the Embassy now seems a thing of the past. One of my main Embassy contacts said to me, at the end of the meeting, "See you next year." I hope he's right!

My problems with the Embassy date back five or six years, and actually weren't my doing at all. The Agency I work for had sponsored a project in Poland back then that went spectacularly bad in almost every way conceivable (I hasten to add that I was not involved in that fiasco), so as a result, none of us were very warmly greeted after that. It's taken this long for most of the suspicion and bad feelings to finally subside. But there were fewer meetings in the Poland part of the trip than the others because I really had to coordinate what I was doing to a much greater degree than the other places. But hey, it's nice to be wanted!.

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**Friday, April 26, 2002 (Warsaw)**

The final day of this trip was unscheduled, so I took a day trip by train to a place I hadn't been to since 1993 – the city of Kraków. I really don't think it's changed too much in the nine years since my previous time there – the town square is as nice as it was before (though more crowded with tourists), there are at least as many street musicians as before, of all sorts (most of them pretty good), and they're *still* at work rehabbing parts of Wawel Castle. I got



Street musicians at the statue in Krakow's Old Town Square

back to Warsaw about dinnertime, and found a nice place to eat on Nowy Świat street that had once been a hangout of the famous Polish pianist Artur Rubinstein. I didn't manage to get to any musical events while I was in Poland this time, but having dinner beneath a signed photograph of Rubinstein was almost as good!

### Epilogue

And so the trip came to an end. The trip home was mostly uneventful, except that I dropped and broke the little teapot I'd bought in Poland as a gift for a friend. (It happened as I was waiting for the ground shuttle home from the airport.) That wasn't a very memorable moment, but the disappointment was far outshone by two weeks of memorable moments prior to that. One of them was at the Chopin concert my very first night in Budapest: I thought my work could be intense at times, but the pianist redefined "intensity." When he began his first encore, the grand "Heroic" Polonaise, you could see that he was in his own little world – it was just him, the piano on the stage, and the concert hall surrounding him. By the time he was midway through the piece, his intensity had increased to the point where it was just him and the instrument on the stage, all else had ceased to exist. And as his intensity increased as he neared the end, you could sense that his own personal universe continued to shrink – there was only the piano... and then there was only the keyboard... and then there was only the music. It was all quite remarkable to witness.

And there was more besides that – in one of my meetings in Prague I was given a classical music CD as a gift, and when I remarked how grateful I was because I very much liked classical music, the man gave me two more. I sometimes hand out gifts at meetings where I want to be remembered, but this time the roles were reversed; if he was trying the same thing, it worked! And near the very end of the trip, when I was at my favorite amber shop in Warsaw, as usual I practiced my fractured Polish on the lady who owned the shop, and as usual she politely pretended that I wasn't mangling the language. It had been nearly a year since I'd last been there, and both she and I knew that it might be at least that long before I was back there again. So when it was time to leave I reluctantly bid her *do widzenia* ("good-bye"), but she didn't seem ready to accept that. "No," she replied, "not *do widzenia*. *Do zobaczenia*." ("Until later") "'*Do zobaczenia*' doesn't mean good-bye."

She's right, you know...



(This trip report is dedicated to the memory of Bruce Pelz, friend and fellow world traveler.)

## Bruce

Today (May 10<sup>th</sup>) I was saddened to see the following message (from Matthew Tepper) in the **rec.arts.sf.fandom** news group: "I have just returned from tonight's LASFS meeting. Larry Niven announced that Bruce Pelz died this afternoon." Here was my response:

I am truly at a loss for words, and I don't want to be because Bruce's friendship has been one of the constants in the nearly three decades I've been actively a science fiction fan; he was someone I looked forward to seeing, more than anybody else, at worldcons. Living a continent-width away, our paths crossed only too infrequently.

Bruce's presence over the past two decades has been a huge influence on my interest in the history of SF fandom – in 1989, Bruce convinced me to take on editorship of the "A Wealth of Fable" project (the book was eventually published in time for the 1992 Worldcon). Even before that, Nicki and I decided to publish *Mimosa*, a fanzine dedicated to fan history, in large part because of Bruce and other fans interested in preservation of our past enthralled us with entertaining and interesting stories about fandom's past eras: many of these stories were then only fragilely preserved in the memories of those who were telling the stories (and many of them still are). We regret we didn't try harder to get Bruce himself to write more about his decades in fandom – Bruce only preserved one of his stories in print for us; it's in our most recent issue: <http://www.jophan.org/mimosa/m27/m27p48.htm>

It's getting so that every time that I meet up with an old friend I haven't seen in a long time, I feel I need to treasure the moment because there's a chance there might not be another time. I never thought this about Bruce, though – he was a rock, a constant, someone whose presence I always took for granted. I cannot for sure even remember the very last time I spoke to him in person, though it was sometime during the Philadelphia worldcon. It was probably when we went to dinner on the Saturday night of the convention. I remember that we shared about an hour's worth of conversation, on topics ranging from places in the world we wanted to go back to (he was a world traveler in his final years) to what we thought would make good fan history projects in the future (including my still incomplete 1960s fan history). It was there that he told me the story that he later put into print for *Mimosa*.

Bruce's passing is truly the end of an era. I think he will be remembered as one of the most important and most influential fans of all time, and certainly as one of the most active. The list of his activities and accomplishments is enormous, covering almost every activity imaginable from convention running to costuming to fanzine collecting to organizing. He was active in fandom in six different decades. He was truly a fan for the ages, and now he belongs to the ages.

I already miss him very much.



Bruce, Harry Warner, and Peggy Rae Pavlat (1994)



## **Mailing Comments – SFPA 226**

### **Ned Brooks**

On arbitrary rules: “I wonder how the Red Cross came up with the ‘more than 6 months in Europe since 1980’ rule?” No doubt it was the work of some committee. The rule went into effect in mid October, and apparently there was even some advance notice. So what that tells me is that on October 14<sup>th</sup>, my blood was valuable to them and could be provided to some hospital, but on October 16<sup>th</sup>, it was considered a possible vector for disease transmission.

### **Richard Dengrove**

On classical music: “People can shoot off cannons seriously as part of the ‘1812 Overture’ . There are parts that seem almost to call for a cannon.” Absolutely there are; the composer (Tchaikovsky) wrote in fourteen cannon shots at specific places in the score, in fact.

More on classical music: “A lot of pop songs are classical melodies set to un-classical words.” Well, some anyway. One that I can think of is Eric Carmen’s “All By Myself” (which was covered a few years ago by Celine Dion). Carmen wrote the lyrics, but the music was a direct swipe of the melody from the second movement of Sergei Rachmaninoff’s second piano concerto. Rachmaninoff was long dead by the time Carmen recorded the song, but the music was still under copyright and the Rachmaninoff estate made enough noise where there was some kind of monetary agreement. I think any recordings of the song now list ‘S. Rachmaninoff’ as one of the song writers.

### **Guy Lillian**

On worldcons of the future: “I can imagine the Tokyo worldcon [of 2007]. A hundred thousand attendees. Hugos awarded to sixty Japanese guys and Dave Langford.” Probably not sixty; there aren’t that many Hugo Award categories. But yeah, Langford might well win there, assuming he gets nominated (that’s the route how his string will get broken, I think – not getting nominated; he’s usually fourth or fifth of the five nominees in number of nominations). As for a hundred thousand attendees? This would be Japan, not China. I’d guess maybe five or six hundred Japanese fans, but not more than that.

### **David Schlosser**

On temperature scales: “The determinant points for the Fahrenheit scale were weather-related. Zero was set at the coldest that it got where he was doing the measurement and 100 at the hottest.” This sounds dubious to me, because I don’t know of anyplace in Europe that has those extremes in temperature, and even if there is, it would be kind of coincidental that Dr. F would have his laboratory located right in that exact spot. The version I heard is that the ‘100’ was based on the temperature of the human body (he didn’t get it quite right, though) and the ‘0’ based on the lowest temperature he could achieve in the laboratory (which he got by mixing water, ice, and ammonium chloride).

On greenhouse gas remediation: “If you want to try to fix te excess CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, one could try seeding the atmosphere with microscopic plants and let them do their thing of converting the stuff to O<sub>2</sub> and C.” Except that this is Earth, not Venus – the CO<sub>2</sub> content of our atmosphere is only about a third of one percent, not enough to support airborne plant life. (And

carbon isn't one of the products of photosynthesis; it's sugar or starch or cellulose, depending on the plant.) If it were really possible to cleanse the atmosphere that way, somebody would be trying it by now, no matter what the economics were.

On blood donation restrictions: "More than 6 months in Europe since 1980. Boy, that will cut down a bit on the donor pool." I've been told, semi-seriously, that if I want to continue donating blood, I should do so when I'm in Europe, as that restriction obviously wouldn't apply over there.

### **Sheila Strickland**

On Christmas the carol "Once in Royal David's City": "The program ['Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols', broadcast on Public Radio] always begins with a boy [treble] singing it solo *a cappella* for the first verse, and then he's joined by the rest of the choir." Yes, that's how it's also done on the recording I have. A very nice arrangement of a nice chorale piece.

### **Irv Koch**

On highrise building construction: "There are even some taller towers in Malaysia that use mostly concrete, rather than steel, for structure." But the Petronas Towers are actually based on structural steel, just like every other highrise. You cannot build a building higher than about 15-20 stories without using a steel armature of some kind to hold the building up. The tallest building without structural steel is somewhere in the USA (either Chicago or NYC, I think), and the lowest floors have walls several feet thick to hold up the rest of the building.

### **Gary Brown**

On embarrassing mistakes in newspapers: Amusing bloopers in your "Department of Corrections" feature. Reminded me of something that had appeared in the **rec.arts.sf.fandom** newsgroup, so I went to Google and found it – a post from Patrick Nielsen Hayden from December 1999: The top story on CNN.com currently reads, in its entirety: "While U.S. officials seek to lower expectations for the reopening of peace talks Wednesday between Israel and Syria, many observers are optimistic the two sides are on the verge of a 'historic opportunity for peace'. The deal followed daylong negotiations Tuesday between transit workers and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in a midtown Manhattan hotel – talks that stretched more than two hours past a 12:01 a.m. Wednesday deadline when the contract expired. The deal was confirmed at 2 a.m. inside the Grand Hyatt Hotel." That's almost as good as the time the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* ran the US weather map with the caption "Shaded areas have been occupied by Israel since 1967."

On possible baseball franchise realignment: "I thought it would be amazing if they kill Minnesota and then put a team in Washington, DC. The Twins are the old Senators, right?" Right. The Senators relocated to Minnesota in the early 1960s, and Washington got another team, also named the Senators, that relocated to Texas in the 1970s. I don't think your scenario is very likely, though – the owner of the Baltimore Orioles is the biggest obstacle against Washington getting another team, especially another American League team.

### **Janice Gelb**

Congratulations on your 100<sup>th</sup> issue!

On the Hugo Awards ceremony: "I would like to get the [Japanese] Seiun Awards out of the Hugo ceremony myself, but they are an Institution by now so it's unlikely." I have to respectfully

disagree, though; I think they are one of the things that makes the Worldcon a "World"con, and they most properly belong in the venue where they get the highest visibility. Besides, they don't take \*that\* long to present – maybe five minutes or so.

### **Eve Ackerman**

On donating blood: "I'm very sorry to hear you might not be able to donate blood again. But why would it be permanent?" Hopefully it won't, but I don't expect any changes for at least several years until they get a better idea on what the transmissability of Mad Cow Disease is. (I should mention that I avoid beef when I'm in Europe.) You're right that this new rule will exclude anybody who does a year of foreign exchange while in college. As well as many athletes, almost all diplomats, etc. Here in Washington area, it's going to seriously deplete the donor pool.

### **Gary Robe**

On keeping track of travel receipts: "Thanks to the wonders of electronic ticketing, I no longer have printed tickets to keep straight." We're not that advanced yet, and actually, I don't mind that we still use paper tickets. I'm not yet entirely confident that the same thing wouldn't happen to my e-reservation that happened to my luggage on my most recent business trip, and if a flight is canceled for any reason (or if your schedule changes), a paper ticket makes it easier to cope.

### **mike weber**

On animated movies: "Obviously you and I have rather different opinions as to how good *Iron Giant* is. By me it's one of the better animated features ever made." No disagreement. My choice of words in describing *Shrek* being "not even as good as" *Iron Giant* was a bit sloppy.

### **Jeff Copeland**

On the perils of travel: "I picked up some intestinal bug in India." I am not surprised; almost all infrequent visitors to India do. Mine lasted about three days until I started feeling better (I got it from eating some contaminated food) but it was mostly limited to making things pass through me a bit faster than they ordinarily do.

On my 'Markstein is Acting Like an Obnoxious Jerk...' zine: "I'm not sure why you two are so upset about it." Let me be sure at this point that you understand my motives – I am not annoyed at Markstein because of his complaint about the *Mimosa* website (he got what he wanted the same day he complained). The reason I did that zine is because Markstein was acting like a fugghead in his SFPazine, in my opinion, and he pointed himself in my direction.

On Indian highways (in your trip report): "Traffic ... is huge lorries, bicycles, motor scooters, motor cycle cabs, and regular cars. And lane markers are suggestions." You forgot to mention animal-drawn vehicles, but I think those aren't common inside the cities. All of these are what I found in the four-hour trip from Delhi to Agra, back in 1995, when I took a hired car trip to see the Taj Mahal. And when the driver decided to pass another vehicle, anything coming in the other direction had to fend for themselves to get out of the way. It was even scarier on the way back, when some of the trip was after dark – not every vehicle on the road used headlamps.

## About Classical Music

There's a little room left here, so I'll try one more time on Antonio Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" suite of concertos for violin and string orchestra. As I mentioned last time, these date from the Baroque era of classical music, back when the harpsichord was routinely included in the score. Vivaldi's biography is fascinating to read; he was a Venetian (the son of a musician) who was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1703, but instead of a career in the priesthood, became a music instructor at a school in Venice for girls who were orphans, indigent, or illegitimate. He is often referred to as the 'red priest' from his red hair, but was only was a practicing priest for about a year; there is a story that he often left the altar before the end of a mass so he could write down some musical idea that had just come to him.

His "Four Seasons" was actually part of an even larger extended work of twelve concertos, including at least one other ("Storm at Sea") that is part of modern-day orchestra repertoire. These were some of his earliest published works (they're designated as Opus 8), but they date from 1725, which seems to indicate that much of his earlier compositions have been lost. The "Four Seasons" are by far his most recognizable work, and they have been recorded many, many times; almost all concert violinist soloists include these as part of their repertoire. The four concertos are actually fairly descriptive of their names – in "Spring," for instance, you can imagine birds singing, in "Summer" insects buzzing and an afternoon thunderstorm, in "Autumn" a harvest celebration, and "Winter" the stamping of feet and chattering of teeth. Each of these concertos are short; the entire suite (twelve movements total) lasts only about 40 minutes. I recently found another inexpensive disk (Naxos 8.550056, recorded in Bratislava!) which also includes another short but pleasant violin concerto not related to the "Four Seasons."

These short violin concertos are timeless – the music is as fresh and pleasing to listen to today as it was more than 300 years ago. A recording of the "Four Seasons" is an essential part of any classical music collection.

## The Next *Mimosa*

Still a bit of room left, so I'll mention that the next *Mimosa* (#28) will be a 'Fanthology' issue, with some of Nicki's and my favorite articles from issues #1-16. It will also be, by far, our largest issue – my estimate of the page count is somewhere between 110 and 120. We're going to reprint about 30 articles (we're still not entirely set on the contents yet, but it will definitely include writing by Bob Shaw, Vincent Clarke, Terry Jeeves, Sharon Farber, Richard Brandt, Mike Resnick, Roger Sims, Lon Atkins, Harry Warner, Andy Hooper, and Jeff Duntemann). I'm not sure if we'll have it ready to mail by mid-June and the DSC, but we're hoping to be able to bring copies to the Midwestcon at the end of June. The issue after this one (#29) will also be a 'Fanthology', from issues #17-27, and should be ready by the end of this year. Our final issue (#30) will be published probably by June of next year; that one will be original material, and we'll be soliciting contributions in the next few months.

Regards to All... See you at DSC and Midwestcon!

