

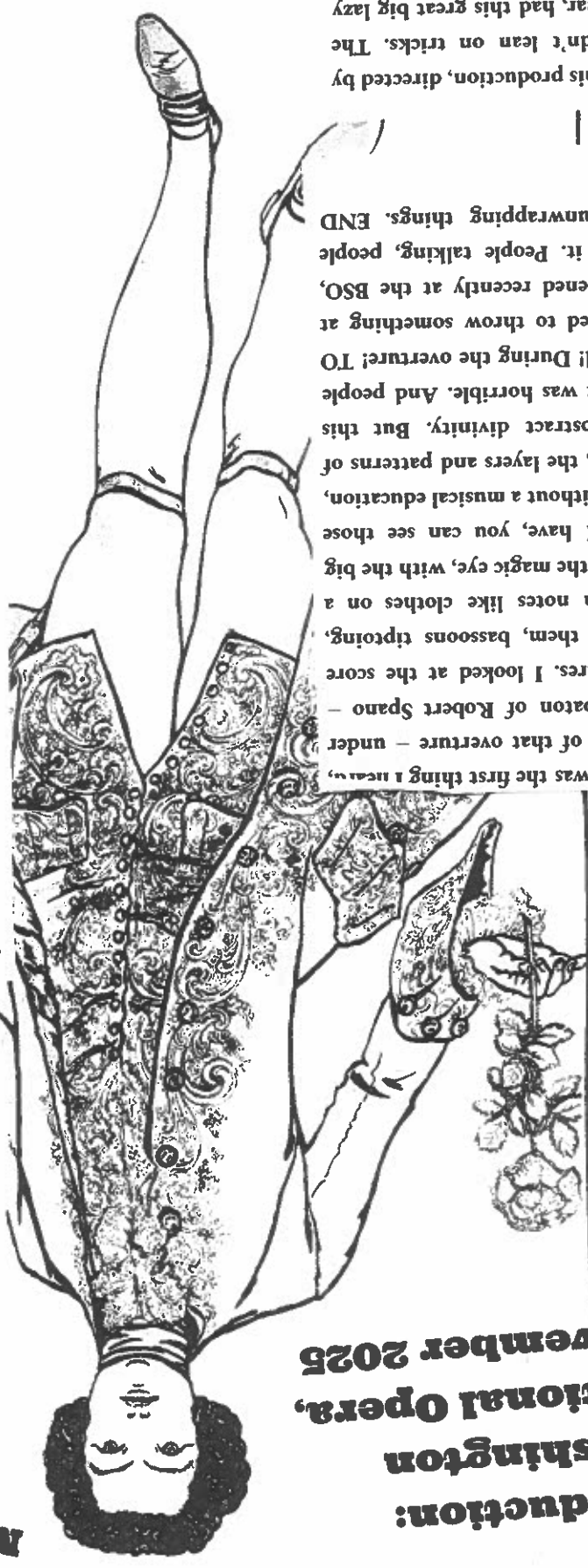
Sat  
 Orch  
 The Nov 22 2025  
 H 7:15  
 The Marriage of Figaro  
 OPERA HOUSE  
 presents of Figaro  
 Washington National Opera  
 Center for the Performing Arts  
 The John F. Kennedy  
 UBSJOK  
 Presenting Sponsors  
 Performance Lecture 6:15

The countess is the moral center of the piece. Burdened with the infidelity of her husband, she musters an aristocratic dignity that just barely conceals her hurt, plotting with Susanna, her servant - but they are not equal, could never be; she even laments that it's "come to this" - "To what humiliation am I reduced / By a cruel husband, who after having / First loved me, then neglected and finally / Deceived me, in a strange mixture / Of infidelity, jealousy and disdain, / Now forces me to seek help from my servant! I get goosebumps from this aria - "Dove sono i bei momenti" / "Where are those happy moments." Amidst a turgid plot rife with, in the words of John Funke of WNBC's "Backwoods", "madcap escapades," the countess here plunges to the abyssal zone of the heart. It's no coincidence that the most profound music emanates from, or revolves around, the countess. After "Dove sono," for example, comes "sull'aria" ... -

characters. It was awful. WNO did it right. No lazy susans. The production was simple. We started in the servant's chambers and ended in the garden, with rolling topiary used to comic effect. Rosa Feola stole the show. She is a goddess. With her flowing tresses and aquiline silhouette and coppery voice, she was as convincing a countess as one could get. I fell for her, and I think the audience did too.

Mozart  
 Marriage of Figaro,

CORNER



Production:  
 Washington  
 National Opera,  
 November 2025

Stream of  
 Consciousness  
 Review:

I was happy that this production, directed by Peter Kazaras, didn't lean on tricks. The Met, earlier this year, had this great big lazy Susan of a set, rotating during the overture, showing scenes from the lives of the

crinkling was the first thing I heard, - under - side the tumble of that overture - under the enthusiastic baton of Robert Spano - with all its textures. I looked at the score tonight and saw them, bassoons tipping, strings on eighth notes like clothes on a hanger. If you do the magic eye, with the big folio score like I have, you can see those textures - even without a musical education, you can see them, the layers and patterns of the notes, an abstract divinity. But this crinkling, God, it was horrible. And people talking all around! During the overture! TO FIGARO. I wanted to throw something at them. This happened recently at the BSO, too. I don't get it. People talking, people texting, people unwrapping things. END RANT.

CRITIC'S

*molto espress.*

...sull'aria. I can almost see Feola biting her lip – the way she almost bites Cherubino's (played, with admirable joie de vivre by the countertenor John Holiday). The Countess and Susanna – Feola and a light, feathery Joelle Harvey – circle one another, sensually, knowingly, savoring their plan for payback. Later, in the forgiveness scene that concludes the opera, the Countess is again in control, the shot of moral clarity that runs through the music, the plot, our consciousness, then, and for days after.

In a way, for me, it doesn't matter whether any production was good or not; uninspired, like that which the Met staged earlier this year, or good solid fun, like this one at WNO. Sex and pizza, etc. Wherever and whenever Mozart is playing, I'm there. The costuming both triggered my wife's Beauty and the Beast senses – an observation that clings to my impression of the whole production – and our mutual enjoyment of **JEWEL TONES** (costume design by Myung Hee Cho). Wow. Blue, green – the count's green frock shimmered in the footlights, bathing his boots in a miraculous emerald shower. Purple, red, fuschia; the lavish palette, liberally brushed, could easily become too rich, and there were points at which I questioned whether certain costuming was supposed to be commentary on the characters. The set design (Benoit Dugardyn) leaned into the Disney-adjacent frivolity, and it worked. Huge columns on rollers; stripped-down palace paneling. It looked inexpensive without being cheap, if that's possible (although one of those giant columns nearly tipped over).



"And then," Terfel later said with a rueful grin, "he broke out the Verdi, and that was it." Reflecting on his competition-winning choice of aria, Hvorostovsky was reverent. "Everything Verdi wrote for the baritone voice is beautiful, comfortable and perfect," Hvorostovsky said, "Verdi's cantilena is the best in the world." (According to the Grove Musical Dictionary, a "cantilena" is "a vocal melody or instrumental passage in a smooth, lyrical style." – fittingly, it means "lullaby" in Italian; in Latin, an "old, familiar song.")

Hvorostovsky returned home a hero. "Minister Yeltsin shook my hand personally and gave me a huge apartment in the center of Moscow," he said. "I was probably the last one given that opportunity in the Soviet regime."

In the summer of 2015, after over two decades of international stardom, Hvorostovsky announced that he had brain cancer. In May 2017, visibly ill, he gave a surprise performance at the Met's 50th Anniversary Gala. That November he was dead. He was 55.

In a 2012 interview on *Classic Talk with Bing and Dennis*, Hvorostovsky rhapsodized on the feeling of singing Verdi. "It's a feast of vocalism," he said, "The voice blossoms. It sounds like [you're flying]."

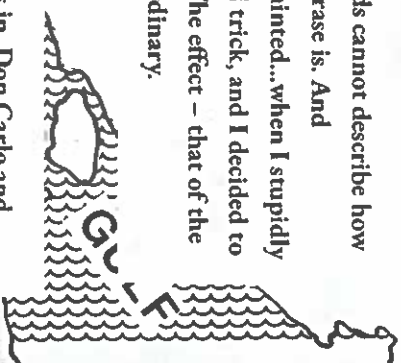
On this desert island, I fly with Dmitri, as long as I have ears to listen.

Stage 2: Ensenada to Laguna San Ignacio. Stage 3: Bahía de los Angeles to Cabo San Lucas. Stage 4: Laguna San Ignacio to Cabo San Lucas.)

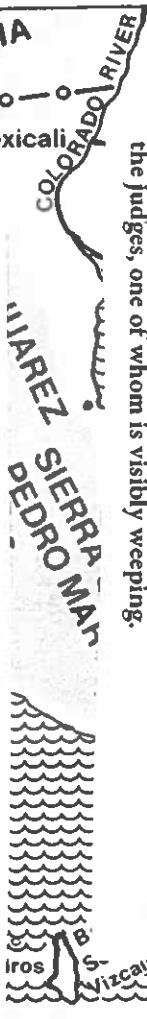
# U.S.A.

"Ah, la terra!" / "Ah, the earth!" Hvorostovsky roars. "Mi manca" // "Your hand..." he sings softly, his arm hanging limp at his side. Then, accompanied by swelling trumpets and fluttering flutes, Hvorostovsky launches into one long, arching phrase: "To morir, ma lieto in core" / "I die, I die with a happy soul, since you are alive, and I have saved you." Words cannot describe how exquisitely beautiful, how sun-dappled this phrase is. And Hvorostovsky put his heart into it. "I almost fainted... when I stupidly took those phrases in one full breath. My usual trick, and I decided to do it again. Suddenly I had stars in my eyes." The effect - that of the last, gasping words of a dying man - is extraordinary.

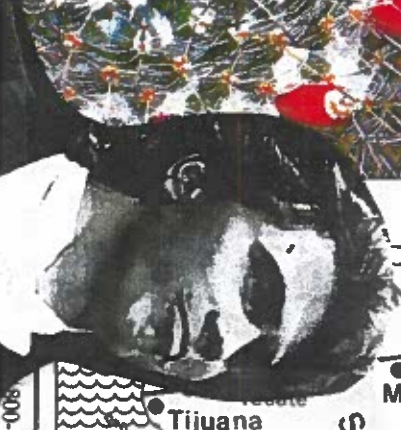
NA



As the aria comes to a close, the camera zooms in. Don Carlo and Rodrigo's theme of friendship, played with breathtaking dramatic irony in cheerful woodwinds. His last note, sung with a sigh instead of a full-fleshed note, is one of musical intelligence - a choice made by not just a singer, but an artist. The audience explodes in applause. Like a soccer announcer, the commentator calls play-by-play: "But has he done enough?" In the background, members of the orchestra are smiling and clapping, the conductor is beaming. The camera pans to the judges, one of whom is visibly weeping.



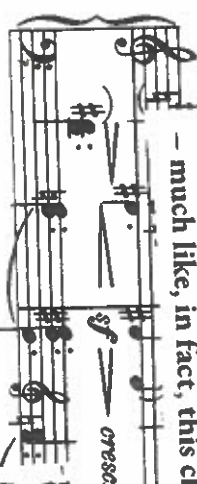
In the middle of it all, Hvorostovsky stands, radiant and triumphant. Saddled with the hopes of a crumbling Soviet Union, performing at the highest level of his art, and competing against Bryn Terfel, Cardiff's favorite son, Hvorostovsky's victory deserves its place in the Pantheon of opera's greatest moments - an Achilles at the gates of Troy.



800-mile long Mexican peninsula of Baja California around which the author

The count, played by Will Liverman, is my runner-up performer of the night. Next to Feola, he was the best singing actor of the night. This character can easily become a caricature - a boor, a predator, etc. etc. but Liverman played him with restraint, a noble roguishness embodied in the buttery timbre of his voice. Figaro was a bit of a letdown. I enjoyed Le Bu's vocal quality - a handsome, masculine bass-bartone - but he was unconvincing in the titular role. He wasn't helped by some bizarre blocking that included jumping over a couch during the famous "non piu andrai." He could take a cue from Bryn Terfel, who, while occasionally over-acts, could never be accused of being boring

much like, in fact, this charming production at WNO.



a tempo



(EDITOR'S NOTE: This was the closest either of us had ever sat (stage right, second row) - we could almost shake hands with the harpsichordist. It reinforced my belief that you should sit as close as possible in any performance - I know, earth-shattering revelation. But really, nosblecks, for me, aren't worth it. We felt as though we were part of the production. Scrip and save. Go to small-scale productions. It's always worth it.)

## STOLEN TYPE SHOW

ROSA FEOIA

SOPRANO | COUNTESS ALMAVIVA

## HOW OR NOT TO MEASTON

WILL LIVERMAN

BARITONE | COUNT ALMAVIVA

# The Kennedy Center

# BOOK

Book	Reviews (" " = sourced from texts to friends)
<i>The New York Game</i> , Kevin Baker	"This book I'm reading (the New York Game, by Kevin Baker) is spectacularly good. It's funny at times and the paragraphs positively churn along. Strong recommendation."
<i>The Autobiography of Malcolm X</i> , as Told to Alex Haley	Read this on a beach in Miami - became completely swept up in Malcolm's story. His voice is charismatic and raw; the text is eminently readable. He paints a vivid portrait of his dancing and drug-dealing days; how the structures of racism bent Harlem towards a self-hating obeisance to whites. In the end I was convinced more than ever by his prophetic vision, and eager to read the Manning Marable biography.
<i>The Civil War: A Narrative</i> , Volume 1: <i>Fort Sumter to Perryville</i> , Shelby Foote	"I'm ready to declare that Shelby Foote's <i>THE CIVIL WAR: A NARRATIVE</i> is the best history writing anyone has ever produced, in the English language at least. This description of the battle of the ironclads is the best nonfiction writing I've ever read. I'm in awe of a master" - "I feel a certain way about my journey through Shelby Foote's <i>Civil War</i> that's hard to describe. I feel exhilaration (at the story and prose), a certain intimacy (from spending so much time with an author and the material); also, loss (at the opportunity cost of investing so much time in one thing)."
<i>Train Dreams</i> , Denis Johnson	"Reading a novella called <i>Train Dreams</i> . It's devastating. Highly recommend. Think you'd like it a lot. Takes place in the Pacific Northwest in the early 1920s" - "I just encountered a piece of art that I know is great because it deeply upset me. I finished <i>Train Dreams</i> . Its main theme is the universal and immutable human experience of loneliness"
<i>Story of a Murder</i> , Hallie Rubenhold	Immersive history at its best. Reads like horror, thriller, mystery, and literary fiction. Gruesome. Profoundly heart-breaking and shocking. Unironically strengthened my resolve to tell the stories of forgotten and vulnerable people - to salvage and appreciate humanity from the maw of biased history.

# ISLAND DISC

Then, in the final round, it came down to Hovorostovsky and Bryn Terfel, a big, Welsh bass-baritone with a luxurious, dark, chocolaty voice (a legendary singer who remains my favorite Falstaff). Hovorostovsky was vocalizing in his dressing room when he heard Terfel, the local boy, singing his last piece. "I had goosebumps," he told Beverly Bergen on *Aria and Pasta* in 2000. "And for the first time in my life I had a doubt that I [wasn't]

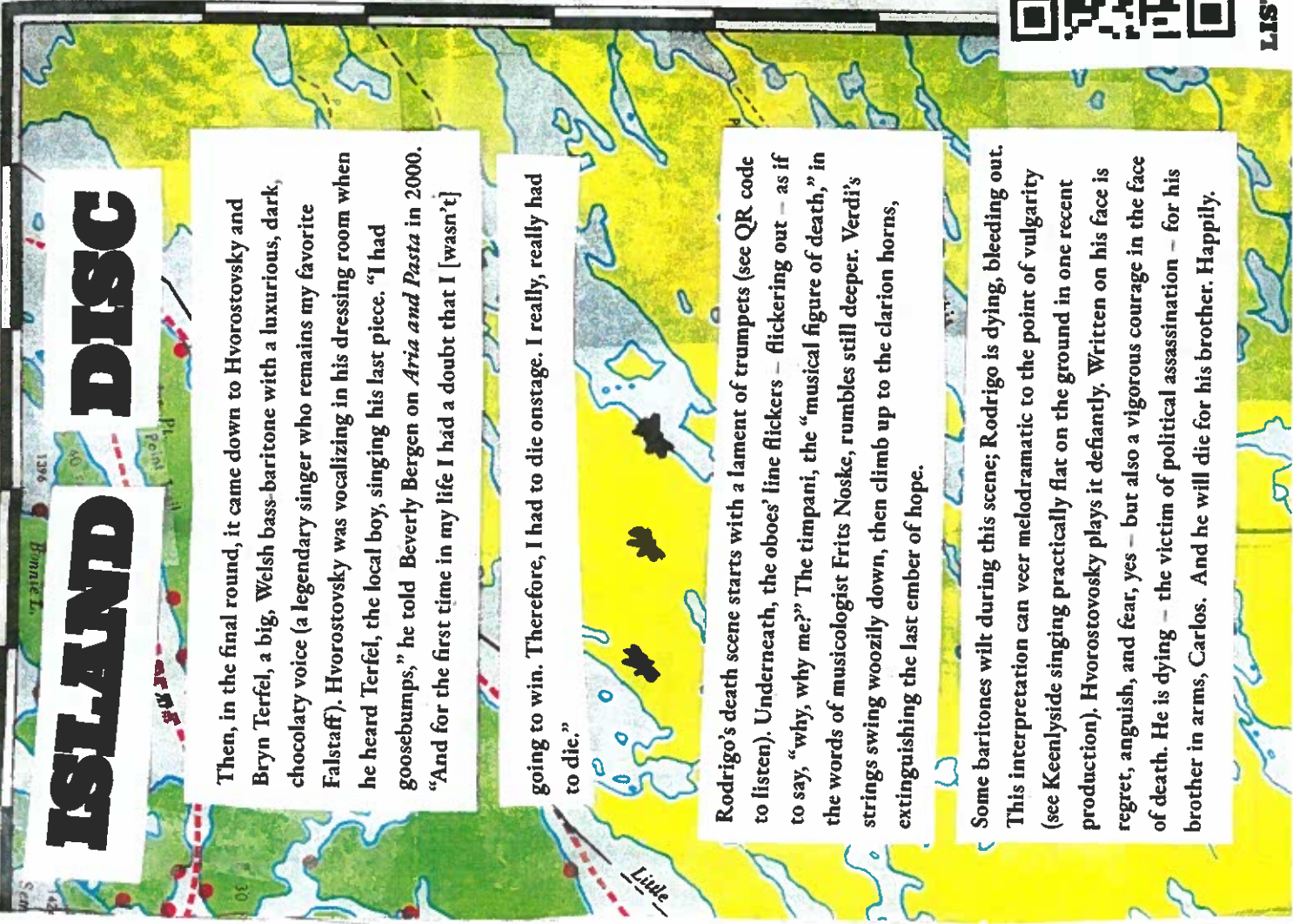
going to win. Therefore, I had to die onstage. I really, really had to die."

Rodrigo's death scene starts with a lament of trumpets (see QR code to listen). Underneath, the oboes' line flickers - flickering out - as if to say, "why, why me?" The timpani, the "musical figure of death," in the words of musicologist Frits Noske, rumbles still deeper. Verdi's strings swing woozily down, then climb up to the clarion horns, extinguishing the last ember of hope.

Some baritones wilt during this scene; Rodrigo is dying, bleeding out. This interpretation can veer melodramatic to the point of vulgarity (see Keenlyside singing practically flat on the ground in one recent production). Hovorostovsky plays it defiantly. Written on his face is regret, anguish, and fear, yes - but also a vigorous courage in the face of death. He is dying - the victim of political assassination - for his brother in arms, Carlos. And he will die for his brother. Happily.



LISTEN WITH ME!



# DESERT

## Dmitri Hvorostovsky - Cardiff Singer of the World, 1989

Flanked by two KGB agents, Dmitri Hvorostovsky – a 27-year-old former Moscow street tough, sporting a thick, wavy coil of salt and pepper hair, handsome, with chiseled features and a smirk of youthful confidence – arrived in at the 1989 Cardiff Singer of the World competition with, as one breathless commentator later described, total self-belief. It wasn't simply the looks, or the voice. It was everything. Already, at 27, he was the total package. And he knew it. "I felt like a king onstage," he later remembered. "Always."

Unlike aircraft carrier-voiced predecessors like Robert Merrill and Cornell Macneil, Hvorostovsky's instrument was burnished, youthful, and dashing – sort of a Russian Simon Keenlyside. His was a lyric baritone with a light, russet sound – warm and spicy, like cinnamon. He had come off several outstanding performances, his voice at turns ravishing – singing Yeltsky's Aria, from Tchaikovsky's *Queen of Spades* with melting tenderness – and saintly, rendering "Ombra mai fu" from Handel's *Xerxes* with elegant ease.

# NOOK

## FULL LIST

1. Regeneration, Pat Barker
2. The New York Game, Kevin Baker
3. Native Son, Richard Wright
4. Beloved, Toni Morrison
5. The Soul of Baseball, Joe Posnanski
6. The Autobiography of Malcolm X
7. The Last Manager, John W. Miller
8. The Wager, David Gramm
9. The Civil War (Pt. 1), Shelby Foote
10. American Aria, Sherrill Milnes
11. Running in the Family, Michael Ondaatje
12. Fenway 1912, Glenn Stout
13. When We Cease to Understand the World, Benjamin Labatut
14. Train Dreams, Denis Johnson (novella)
15. Story of a Murder, Hallie Rubenhold
16. Better Living Through Criticism, A. O. Scott
17. As I Lay Dying, William Faulkner
18. Illness as Metaphor, Susan Sontag
19. The Queen's Throat, Wayne Koestenbaum
20. Richard II, William Shakespeare
21. Henry IV (pt. 1), William Shakespeare
22. Henry IV (pt. 2), William Shakespeare
23. Encounters with Verdi, Marcello Conati (Ed.)
24. A New Philosophy of Opera, Yuval Sharon

### Currently Reading:

Pale Horse, Pale Rider,  
Katherine Anne Porter



Free PDF of Porter's  
Collected Short Stories

# UPCOMING SHOWS

## MARYLAND OPERA

- Sounds of the Season (La Boheme excerpts, other "seasonal favorites.") (December 12)

## WASHINGTON NATIONAL OPERA

- The Little Prince, Portman (Dec. 12-14)

## IN SERIES

- The Delta King's Blues, Geter
- Pop-Up Theater 340 Maple Drive SW, DC
  - December 6 at 7:30pm
  - December 7 at 2:30pm
  - December 12\* at 7:30pm
  - December 13\* at 7:30pm
  - December 14\* at 2:30pm

## 2640 Space - 2640 St Paul St, Baltimore MD

- December 19\* at 7:30pm
- December 20\* at 7:30pm
- December 21 at 2:30pm

## METROPOLITAN OPERA (Live in HD @ the Charles Theater)

- Andrea Chenier, Giordano
- The Charles, December 13th



# OPERA MAILBOX

"HATRED AND A THIRST  
FOR REVENGE HAVE  
POINTED ME THE WAY  
TO THE MONASTERY"  
WHERE YOU ARE HIDING

Turner on pg. 18)



# Random but

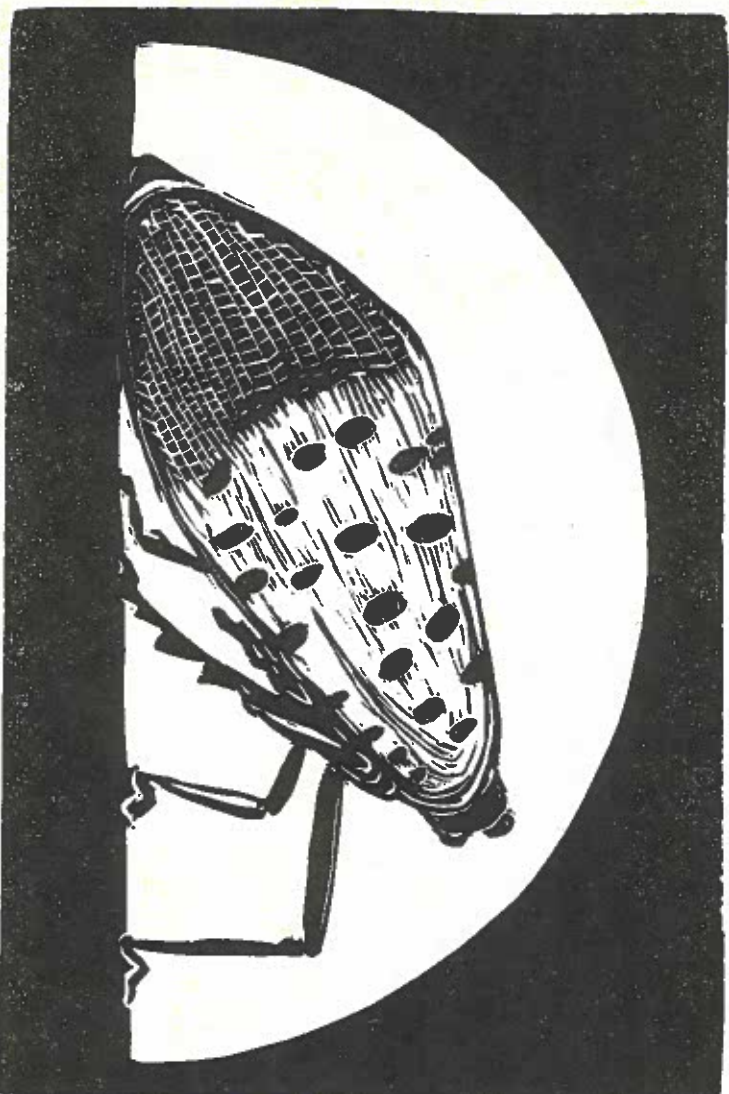
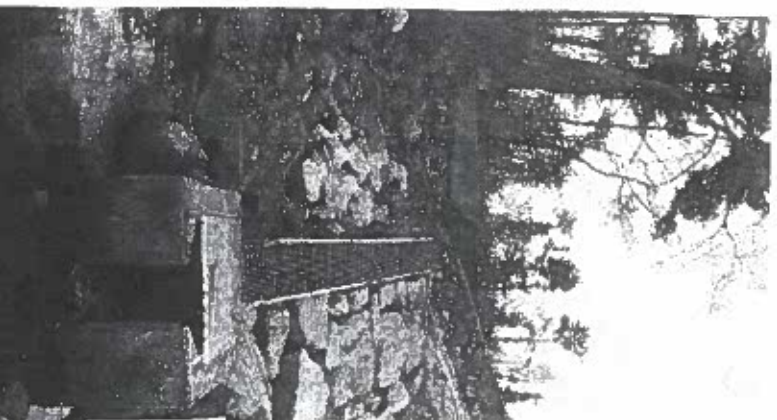
## Interesting

A fish ladder, sometimes called a fishway, is exactly what it sounds like: a ladder used to lift fish over obstacles in rivers such as dams. Scott Hines, a superintendent at Schumack, explained the ladders have openings at the bottom

that create turbulence to attract the fish. The opening leads to a concrete corridor that has more machines to create turbulence so fish are able to swim up the corridor as they would a river with rapids. At the top there is another opening that the fish swim out of and into the upper part of the river.

Hines said the fish ladder will lift the fish six feet up over the dam within a span of 30 feet...

"These are very successful, and the public likes seeing them because you can see how the fish are surviving," Lally said.



- Eric O'Connell, from "Ladder Hopes to Restore Fish to Indian River," *The Harbor News*, November 19th, 2025

# THE

# EDITOR

In this issue, you'll find a "Desert Island Disc" feature on Hovorostovsky at Cardiff, "Critic's Corner" on Washington National Opera's *Figaro*, and a "Book Nook" on the best books I read this year. You'll also find art by Sophie Ziner (page 3) and Dylan Stratton (pg. 17) and a "Random but Interesting" article written by Eric O'Connell (pg. 16).

Lastly, this zine is dedicated to the memory of Joe Ziner (1951-2025): artist, husband, father, friend.

I hope you enjoy this little slice of art, wherever you find it, whoever you are.

Yours Truly,

Dylan Stratton



UNTITLED, DYLAN STRATTON, 2025  
@ DR - STRAT





ON A PIECE OF MUSIC

How all's to one thing wrought!  
The members, how they sit!  
O what a tune the thought  
Must be that fancied it.

Nor angel insight can  
Learn how the heart is hence:  
Since all the make of man  
Is law's indifference.

[Who shaped these walls has shewn  
The music of his mind,  
Made known, though thick through stone,  
What beauty beat behind.]

Not free in this because  
His powers seemed free to play:  
He swept what scope he was  
To sweep and must obey.

Though down his being's bent  
Like air he changed in choice,  
That was an instrument  
Which overvaulted voice.

What makes the man and what  
The man within that makes:  
Ask whom he serves or not  
Serves and what side he takes.

For good grows wild and wide,  
Has shades, is nowhere none;  
But right must seek a side  
And choose for chieftain one.

Therefore this masterhood,  
This piece of perfect song,  
This fault-not-found-with good  
Is neither right nor wrong,

No more than red and blue,  
No more than Re and Mi,  
Or sweet the golden gluc  
That's built for by the bee.

[Who built these walls made known  
The music of his mind,  
Yet here he has but shewn  
His ruder-rounded rind,  
His brightest blooms lie there unblown,  
His sweetest nectar hides behind.]

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

0 P E R A S  
N O I S E S

BREWER LATHES  
WRITER, PUBLISHER

FREE

A POETICS KITCHEN PUBLICATION

IF YOU CAN'T HEAR IT...  
IT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH!



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