
Scratch Pad 9

Based on the non-Mailing Comments section of *brg* No. 11, a magazine written and published by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Victoria 3066, Australia (phone (03) 9419-4797; email: gandc@mira.net) for the August 1994 ANZAPA (Australian and New Zealand Amateur Publishing Association) mailing.

Contents

1 BEST FILMS OF ALL TIME by Bruce Gillespie

3 BEST RECENT CDs by Bruce Gillespie

I'M MAKING THIS UP AS I GO ALONG

This is the fabled membership-saving edition of my little magazine, the one that I churn out every few years when I have no time to write mailing comments and very little time to write anything else.

By tradition, the membership-saver:

- Apologises for not writing mailing comments or original material.
- Uses **big type** on a wide leading.
- Chatters for six pages, saying very little.
- Reprints or preprints material meant for other sources, or, very non-traditionally:
- Takes a wisp of theme out of the air, plays with it for six pages, and presents the lucky reader with a glorious and unexpected word sculpture that is remembered throughout fandom forever.

Today it is 1 August 1994. The hard-pressed OBE requires this issue by 5 August at the latest, and actually on 3 August, the night when I visit his home for a meeting of the Nova Mob. For this reason I will commit at least two of the sins mentioned above, and possibly a third. (I am not, however, going to print the issue in 14 point type, which is the easiest membership-saving sin of all.) It is very unlikely that I am going to produce a glorious word sculpture, although stranger things have happened when I've been pressed for time.

My actual apology is not directed at members of this apa (miffed that I have not written mailing comments for months and months), but at people who saw copies of *The Metaphysical Review* 19/20/21 on other persons' tables weeks and weeks ago, but who have still have received their copies. Three weeks ago I sent out about a third of the copies. The other two-thirds lie snugly in their boxes, waiting for me to put them in envelopes, write addresses on those envelopes, put many stamps on those envelopes, and post them.

Both the *TMR* mail-out and my apa contribution have been pole-axed by the usual problem: mundane work. In just over two months, I've taken a 446-page book from manuscript stage through typesetting to page stage to camera-ready copy. At the end, my head feels like a lump of wood and my writing style's not much better. Perhaps I would enjoy the experience more if these books dealt with a subject close to my heart. However, I've become the person at Macmillan Education who edits the Physical Education text-

books. Don't laugh so loudly. The process of putting together (simultaneous editing, typesetting, and page layout) a large book is quite interesting. I work with skilful authors, whereas most other textbooks are slung together by teachers whose knowledge of the English language stops at the chalk face. I can call on the help of two skilled blokes, Joe Szabo (illustrations) and Ian Gunn (cartoons; yes, *the* Ian Gunn) who can be relied on to produce the goodies in world record time.

But the subject matter is *so* boring that I always feel as if I'm sucking for air when I surface after editing/typesetting one of these books. After having recovered, I can start thinking about fannish projects. Just in time to be hit by the next Macmillan book as it hurtles through the door.

Desktop publishing is a life; it earns enough money (if only I could break the CD habit); but it does stop me meeting what I consider are minimum fannish responsibilities. Which is why, for instance, I've just quit FAPA after ten years.

Meaningless stuff from other sources?

For reasons that have little to do with this apa, I've updated my list of Top Ten Films of All Time. Those ANZAPAns who were here in 1987 when I ran my list last time will remember that my Top Ten List is actually a Top Fifty list. It fills up space, and might even lead to conversations in future ANZAPA mailings.

- 1 *It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra)
- 2 *This Sporting Life* (Lindsay Anderson)
- 3 *The Birds* (Alfred Hitchcock)
- 4 *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick)
- 5 *The Leopard* (Luchino Visconti)
- 6 *A Canterbury Tale* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger)
- 7 *Mon Oncle* (Jacques Tati)
- 8 *Singing in the Rain* (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly)
- 9 *The Trial* (Orson Welles)
- 10 *Wings of Desire* (Wim Wenders)
- 11 *I Know Where I'm Going* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger)
- 12 *Othello* (Orson Welles)
- 13 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Walt Disney)
- 14 *Seconds* (John Frankenheimer)
- 15 *Solaris* (Andrei Tarkovsky)

- 16 *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles)
- 17 *Charley Varrick* (Don Siegel)
- 18 *Casablanca* (Michael Curtiz)
- 19 *Les Enfants du Paradis* (Marcel Carné)
- 20 *Kwaidan* (Masaki Kobayashi)
- 21 *Lunch on the Grass* (Jean Renoir)
- 22 *Andrei Rublev* (Andrei Tarkovsky)
- 23 *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock)
- 24 *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (Robert Hamer)
- 25 *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell)
- 26 *The Long Goodbye* (Robert Altman)
- 27 *Dark Passage* (Delmer Daves)
- 28 *The Third Man* (Carol Reed)
- 29 *Five Million Years to Earth* (Roy Ward Baker)
- 30 *The Little Shop of Horrors* (Roger Corman)
- 31 *The Man Who Would Be King* (John Huston)
- 32 *Smiles of a Summer Night* (Ingmar Bergman)
- 33 *The Magic Flute* (Ingmar Bergman)
- 34 *Smog* (Francesco Rosi)
- 35 *Il Generale Della Rovere* (Roberto Rossellini)
- 36 *Keeper of the Flame* (George Cukor)
- 37 *My Favourite Year* (Richard Benjamin)
- 38 *North by Northwest* (Alfred Hitchcock)
- 39 *The Reckoning* (Jack Gold)
- 40 *Notorious* (Alfred Hitchcock)
- 41 *Three Strangers* (Jean Negulesco)
- 42 *Death in Venice* (Luchino Visconti)
- 43 *Woman in the Dunes* (Hiroshi Teshigahara)
- 44 *Belle de Jour* (Luis Bunuel)
- 45 *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (Luis Bunuel)
- 46 *L'eclisse* (Michelangelo Antonioni)
- 47 *Zabriskie Point* (Michelangelo Antonioni)
- 48 *The Last Picture Show* (Peter Bogdanovich)
- 49 *Cabaret* (Bob Fosse)
- 50 *The Arrangement* (Elia Kazan)

That list has quite a few minor changes from the 1987 list, plus one major change (*Wings of Desire* shooting straight to No. 10). And it has changed slightly even since four weeks ago (I had forgotten to include *Woman in the Dunes*, which meant letting Altman's *A Wedding Slip* to No. 51).

But this is really a Top Ten, remember. Nos. 1–4 are pretty much equal, but each has been my Favourite Film at some time or another. Nos. 5–10 are about equal No. 2. And Nos. 11–50 are so close that I could have called them Equal No. 3. Each of them I could have put in my Top Ten.

Some must-see directors, such as John Ford, don't rate any particular film in the list, although *How Green Is My Valley*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* and *The Searchers* must be hovering there just below No. 50. Some directors will always appear only with one entry (though, to be fair to Peter Bogdanovich, his *Targets* was on the 1987 version of this list).

I will fail conspicuously in any attempt to be sparkling when talking about these films. Each requires pages of discussion. If I were John Flaus, and had your ear instead of your eyes, I would talk about them for hours.

As a list, these films are a time machine. Many of them I have not seen since 1965 or 1966, when I was a member of the Melbourne University Film Society. Can *Lunch on the Grass* be as sparkling and colourful and funny as I remember it? Probably not. Any existing copies are probably pinked out. Also, there is probably no longer any existing copy of *The Birds* with Robert Burks's iridescent blues still imprinted in the celluloid. (The recent re-releases of the 1950s and 1960s Hitchcock films failed to recreate the glory of Burks's photography.)

What about *Il Generale Della Rovere*, which I last saw in 1965? It was on SBS a few weeks ago, and I felt too tired to stay up to watch it. Should I keep it on the list?

I had not seen Corman's *Little Shop of Horrors* since 1965. Could it possibly have been as funny as I remembered it? Thanks to the wonders of the videotape recorder, and the fact that a commercial channel revived it at 2 a.m. recently, I could test my memory. My memory was not mistaken. The script and acting were as funny as I remembered them. The only reminder of Corman's parsimony (a two-day shoot with a minimal budget) was rather odd chase over drainage pipes in near darkness that wastes a few minutes at the end of the film.

Wait long enough, and the dedicated film fan (and maker of lists) might even catch up with films long thought lost. Recently Elaine and I travelled to the mighty Astor Cinema in beautiful down-downtown Prahran to see newly struck prints of Orson Welles' two greatest films, *Othello* and *The Trial*. On the same night, too. We'd seen *Othello* at the Rivoli a few months before, but it seemed much better again that night at the Astor. I'm not sure that I've ever seen *The Trial* properly on the big, big screen. I missed it at the Dendy Brighton when it was first shown there in 1965 or 1966. I saw it first on ABC-TV in 1969. During that year it was one of the few movies of any sort to be shown on the ABC. The second time I saw it was also on TV. The third time was at the Carlton Moviehouse, which showed the most completely worn-out black-and-white print I have ever seen. Watching it then was like staring at the flickering images on a nigh-defunct TV screen.

The Trial is both a fine adaptation of Kafka's novel and, in its way, a considerable extension of it. Visually astonishing us, Welles takes as the centre of his own vision the ambiguous, twitchy figure that Perkins cuts as Joseph K. The Joseph K. of the novel is much funnier, more stolid, more accepting of his incomprehensible fate than is Perkins as K. Beginning as an apologetic bumbler who couldn't possibly have committed any wrongdoing, Perkins's Joseph K. rises to the expectations of those who describe him as guilty. Meanwhile, Welles' visual world becomes more and more ambiguous, complex and threatening. It's one of those films one must see over and over again.

I'm reluctant to make generalisations about my list of films. 'Black-and-white visual lushness' is probably a good shorthand way of describing the best of them.

There are great feats of colour photography among them, especially *The Birds* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, but the colour in such films lasts only a few years before fading. There are few occasions when a modern enthusiast takes the trouble to reconstruct the original colours of a 1940s film, as Martin Scorsese did with *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*. It takes enormous resources of money and ingenuity to do this.

But great black-and-white photography can be reconstructed. Go back to the original negative, and you find it much as it was when first struck. (Even the *negatives* of post-1950 colour films, it seems, have deteriorated badly.) Hence I had the extraordinary experience a few years ago of watching at the Astor fully restored copies of *Laura* and *Sunset Boulevard*. What a time machine!

In the 1960s, when I was at university, I preferred detached, ironic films, such as *The Birds* and *L'eclisse*, and I was a real snob about subtitled films. (I should have known better. In 1965, watching $8\frac{1}{2}$ while reading the subtitles gave me one of the worst headaches I've ever had. I enjoyed the film a lot better a few years later when I saw it in a dubbed

version.) European romanticism was okay, but not Hollywood romanticism. I didn't watch Westerns then, and had little knowledge of other genre movies. It was only because of the inspired ravings of John Flaus at the 1971 Easter Convention and the magnificent films seasons provided by National Film Theatre in 1973 that I began to appreciate what Hollywood directors had been up to during the 1940s. I saw some wonderful films during my two weeks in New York, and caught up with a few masterpieces during the 1970s. However, it was only when Elaine's sister and brother-in-law gave us a small black-and-white TV set in 1979 or 1980 that I began my real film education: not all of any particular director, but enough examples of most of the great directors to catch up on a film education that had barely begun by the time I left university in 1968.

Many of the masterpieces I saw during my first four years of film watching are still favourites on my list: *Woman of the Dunes* in 1966 (amazingly, it comes up very well on TV, although it was originally in black-and-white CinemaScope); *Mon Oncle*, the first Tati film I saw, still to me the greatest combination ever of whimsy and irony; *The Leopard*, whose dubbed cut version, seen in 1965, is not completely upstaged in my memory by the recent release of the subtitled, complete version; the masterpieces of Hitchcock, the only Hollywood director I followed during the 1970s . . .

'Visions of light.' That's the title of a recent film about the great photographers, a film I haven't seen yet. It's the phrase I would use to describe how I feel about films. A painter paints in single frames; multiply this frame by 24 per second and paint with a camera instead of a brush, and you have my ideal of the great film.

That's not what I was going to write about at all.

But it was fun anyway. I was going to write about music, since it's music, not films or sf or fandom or books, that I think about much of the time.

If it is the case, as it is, that I spend on CDs much of the money that I should devote to producing super-gigantic *regular* fanzines, I should account for my peculiarity. I should write about music much more than I do. Why don't I?

It's hard to write about music without having any technical words to explain what you know in your ear. The person who can read and play music has a much better sense than I do of what is going on in the ear and the brain when music is listened to. I see in my mind images that relate to the music, but it's very hard to describe, even in metaphor, the arrangement of sounds themselves. I try from time to time because I feel enormous and overwhelming musical enthusiasms that I would like to convey to other people.

It's hard to write about music if you know that most of your audience do not share your enthusiasms.

When travelling in America I found that few fans are interested in music at all. Almost nobody I visited had a decent sound equipment, let alone enjoyable records. As I travelled, I became increasingly hungry for music. I couldn't believe that I would find such a drought in households where otherwise I found similar interests.

In Australia, a larger number of fans seem to be interested in music, but it's hard to find many who share my interests. Marc Ortlieb likes many of the performers I like, but Alan Stewart doesn't listen to music. Justin Ackroyd and Julian Warner like popular music, but share very few enthusiasms with me. Almost nobody in fandom seems to listen to classical music, although classical music is supposed to appeal particularly to intelligent people who also appreciate science and game-playing.

I've found a few people among *TMR* readers who share my enthusiasms, which is why I run my Favourite CDs lists there rather than here. The person who seems to share my pop interests most closely is Skel, who lives in Cheshire, England. Philip Bird, of Essendon, shares many of my classical interests, but he declined my invitation to communicate by phone, so we stay in touch by letter. I wonder whether Robert Mapson, of Perth, would be any less shy if I actually tried to get in touch with him by phone?

George Turner cannot believe that anybody who likes classical music could possibly like popular music. I don't have the heart to tell George that there are people around who cannot believe that anybody who likes the Beastie Boys could possibly like the Rolling Stones.

The person who set this rickety train of thought in process is Justin Ackroyd, who is not even a member of the apa. Justin asked how he should get to know classical music. When I picked my jaw up off the floor, I found I had no easy (or even difficult) answer for him. It's not quite enough to say, 'Listen to classical music on the radio!' He might find nothing of interest on the radio, and give up the search.

A better answer would have been to try to describe the elements of music that are common to all forms of it. That's difficult, since for me what's most exciting in popular music is what's most conspicuously missing in Western classical music: the dominance of drums and percussion, or some other constant bass beat. When I discovered classical music in 1968, I did so only after I realised that the beat is there as well, even if it seems not to be there. While listening to any piece that seems exciting, or tense, or whatever (still this damn lack of vocabulary for what I'm trying to say!), although it has no drumbeat, put in the drumbeat when playing it in your head. Then the underlying structure of the piece becomes obvious.

But for people who listen mainly to popular music, it's the dominance of sweeping strings in classical music that is its major irritating feature. To the fan of popular music, it's the sense of disturbance, danger and conflict that makes music interesting. The strings in classical music seem designed to comfort the listener. The fan of pop music feels that such music merely induces sleep.

The answer is, I suppose, that one should analyse what is really going on in orchestral music. The place to start is with baroque (pre-1770s) music, which at least is polyphonic in the same way that modern blues or jazz is polyphonic. If you can hear how multiple strands of conflicting sound are used in baroque music to add up to one continuous musical thought, you begin to hear how a wide variety of sounds (sometimes as many as a hundred) are used in a large-scale nineteenth-century orchestra to give a monumental effect.

But here you have another obstacle. It's the monumental effect, the epic grandeur of great music that eventually draws one to it or repels one forever. The major change in popular music in the 1960s was toward the ironic and ambiguous. When rock returned to its epic quality in the early 1970s, the punk rockers upturned to a very wry, uncomfortable, nasty sound. People who on principle hate the idea of 'the beautiful' (because the beautiful is often the symbol of the complacent, corrupt and bourgeois) probably won't discover classical music — not even twentieth-century classical music, which itself was meant to be ironical, anti-bourgeois and anti-complacent. For such people, twentieth-century music can often seem like bebop jazz without a decent drummer.

Listeners to rock music and jazz often find classical music intimidating because it reeks of authoritarianism — the composer is king; the players merely attempt to play what's

on the page. This is still a problem for me. Post-eighteenth century Western classical music must be the only form of music that has ever been tied to a written text. All other forms, including most other classical forms and worthwhile rock, jazz, blues and country music are based on improvisation. It seems to be only in the last twenty or thirty years that musicologists have discovered the extent that pre-nineteenth century Western music was also improvised. Many of Bach's 'compositions', for instance, are now known to be written-down versions of pieces composed *ex tempore* at the keyboard.

Until a few years ago, ABC-FM had a program that exploded the notion of the 'authoritative text'. Perhaps that's why the program has disappeared. On the monthly program, four music critics played and discussed a wide variety of versions of a particular piece of music. As they compared different versions of various small sections of the piece, it became very clear that each version of even the hoariest old warhorse can be a completely new experience for the orchestra and listener, *even if each competing performer is equally dedicated to nothing more than rendering the text as it was written*. A written page of music leaves out much, and the further back you go, the more it leaves out. We now know that blank spots in many baroque compositions were merely the spaces left for the soloist to improvise on the main theme.

The similarity between popular music and classical music, though, is not merely that each form is equally open to improvisation and interpretation. For any form of music, the listener is looking for the same quality: that feeling of dedication, enthusiasm and excitement that happens when the performers have a real sympathy with the music and an ambition to convey that sympathy to the audience. The plodders and also-rans are just as boring to the listener to classical music as they are to listeners to every other sort of music. There must be a hundred versions of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in the catalogue at any one time, but only a few of them have that pizzazz, that greater-than-merely-competent quality that makes you want to buy and play over and over again *that* version rather than all the others.

None of this tells you about the CDs I've been buying, does it?

The question I'm fobbing off is: 'Why does that man spend small fortunes on music when he's supposed to be publishing umpteen issues of *SFC* and *TMR*?'

The best reason I can offer is that the dedicated collector — me — always feels that he has 'merely touched the catalogue' (a memorable phrase that Lee Harding used in 1968 when his collection of classical LPs seemed enormous to me). I always want to buy another pioneering version of a favourite piece. I'm always looking for unsuspected masterpieces. I'm always looking for that new record that recreates the spirit of rock and roll, produces the greatest ever guitar break, or carries song-writing to some new realm. Always looking for the sonic Land of Far Beyond.

Here are a few recommendations from classical CDs I've bought recently. Not that that's a guarantee that they will be around if *you* try to buy them. One of the main reasons for snapping up CDs when you see them is that they may never be available again anywhere.

- Sir John Barbirolli cond. Hallé Orchestra/Janet Baker (mezzo): **Brahms: Symphony No. 4/Nicolai: Overture to The Merry Wives of Windsor/Mahler: Songs of a Wayfarer** (EMI Classics)
Here's a good example of a persistent quest ending

happily after many years. One of the records that I acquired in 1969 (from Lee Harding, if I remember correctly) was an old, old Schmidt-Isserstedt recording of Brahms's Symphony No. 4. It's never appeared on CD. I've bought many different versions over the years in an attempt to match the qualities of that old version. Finally, here's Barbirolli's delectable version, recorded in 1965 near the end of his life. The slow movement is so deliciously well measured, so totally thought about and *rendered* (if that's not too inexact a word) that Barbirolli allows the listener to hear the symphony as if for the first time. Also, of course, the Hallé Orchestra, Barbirolli's own, was up to the task he set them. Barbirolli's 1968 version of *Songs of a Wayfarer*, with Janet Baker performing at a time when she was the best female classical singer in the world, is available as a filler on other CDs, but it's welcome here as well.

- Sir Yehudi Menuhin (violin) with the BBC Symphony Orchestra cond. Pierre Boulez/Philharmonia Orchestra cond. Paul Kletzki: **Berg: Violin Concerto/Bloch: Violin Concerto** (EMI Classics)

These are not pieces I know well, although I have a fine version of the Bloch concerto on an old LP. I bought the CD because I expected any performance associated with the name Paul Kletzki to have that extra edge of excitement that I was trying to describe above. The name of Menuhin is a guarantee of first-rate violin playing. And the pieces are interesting. The Berg concerto very much sounds like the product of the twentieth century: rather craggy and abrupt, vaguely atonal in approach, but brilliantly organised and played. Bloch's concerto was composed this century, but could easily be mistaken for a product of the late nineteenth century. The orchestral parts are very rich, and the violinist can get stuck into much fine melody. Not very fashionable, but a concerto that has not been ignored. Other versions probably sound very different. I'd like to make comparisons sometime.

- Nathan Milstein (solo violin): **J. S. Bach: Sonatas and Partitas** (EMI Classics: 2 CDs)

I can still remember the first time I heard the Bach sonatas and partitas for solo violin. It was late at night when I was up at Ararat (when I was attempting to teach there; lonely; miserable; etc.). The radio I had then did not often pick up 3AR (as Radio National was then), but that night it bore this unearthly sound that went on for nearly two hours. I can't even remember which version it was. The splendour of the experience made me think that life was worth living, at least until I could escape Ararat. The next time I heard one of these pieces was on a street corner in New York. A busker was playing it perfectly. The sound cut through all the grind and grit of a New York streetscape. There *is* perfection on earth. Why then buy new versions of pieces like these? I don't know. How do you choose one above all? I don't know. The fun is in listening and comparing and relistening to favourites and discovering new favourites. The best of Bach's music is inexhaustible; it merely makes you realise how short life is, that the only real point of life may well be listening to very great music. Milstein is one of the century's great violinists, and I had to buy this particular set (recorded from 1955 to 1966) when I saw it, but I could just as easily recommend recent boxed sets by Perlman, or Szigeti, or any one of a dozen others.

Enough of classical music for now.

Which ANZAPA members would understand if I started rapturing on about the latest country albums I've been buying?

I don't know why so many people have an automatic reaction against country music. To me, country (along with the blues) is the last section of popular music where (a) singers can still sing; (b) performers can still play non-electronic instruments; and (c) song-writers can still write an honest sad song about deeply felt subject matter. It is not quite true that most other sections of popular music are populated by incompetent zombies with about as much music skill as a decapitated frozen chicken, but it does seem that way when you listen to most radio stations.

Most of the people who are today labelled as 'country performers' are playing exactly the sort of music that was called 'rock' or 'country rock' in the early 1970s. It's competent, harmonious and well played; it's also very unfashionable.

So here are some really interesting CDs I've bought recently:

- **Iris DeMent: *My Life*** (Warner Bros.). Her squeaky, down-homey voice is a bit like that of Victoria Williams, but the lyrics are about her Deep South family background, and Iris writes some great tunes.
- **Laurie Lewis: *True Stories*** (Rounder).

Laurie Lewis's voice is a lot smoother and northern-educated than Iris's, but the intention is still the same: here's the story of her life, with lots of great melodies and the backing of some of the best country pickers in the world.

- **My Friend the Chocolate Cake: *Brood*** (White). If they came from America, they would be country artists. Because they are deeply hip Melbourne people, the members of My Friend the Chocolate Cake (aka Not Drowning Waving) are racing up the charts. Half their luck. Lots of good country pickin' here, with Helen Mountfort's cello and David Bridie's Melbourne-based lyrics.

One last (non-country) review, because I promised it to Julian Warner:

- **The Rolling Stones: *Voodoo Lounge*** (Virgin). A reviewer in the *EG* was accurate when he said that this album sounds like the result of four rich blokes, sharing a hobby of being in a band called the Rolling Stones, who get together once every four years to indulge in their hobby. By the time they've made the album, they've almost remembered what it was like being in a band. Almost.

— Bruce Gillespie, 3 August 1994