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Henri Temianka Correspondence; (lte)

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Description

This collection contains material pertaining to the life, career, and activities of Henri Temianka, violin virtuoso, conductor, music teacher, and author. Materials include correspondence, concert programs and flyers, music scores, photographs, and books.

Keywords

Henri Temianka, culture, virtuosity in musical performance, violinist, chamber music, press, March 28, 1987, humor, Gene Webster, George Shearing, Walter Alford, California Chamber Symphony Society

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CRITIC AT LARGE

WORDPLAY JUST FOR THE PUN OF IT

6230
By CHARLES CHAMPLIN,
Times Arts Editor

As I should have expected, a recent report on the International Save the Pun Foundation's 1986 winners provoked a large response from other lovers of puns and assorted wordplays.

Pun-lovers are a clandestine fraternity, carrying around our favorite puns like hot watches or dubious post cards and displaying them in lieu of a secret handshake.

Gene Webster, a veteran radio producer, television editorialist and current president of the Los Angeles Press Club, remembered a beautiful, spur-of-the-moment pun (always the best kind).

Several years ago, Webster was producing a radio show with George Shearing, who was going to play "Stranger in Paradise." Webster reminded him that it was from the show "Kismet," based on themes by Borodin, and in the present instance "Prince Igor." Shearing played his solo, beautifully, and then, chatting about its origins, said, "No one here seems to remember just how long ago that musical was staged, but I'm Igor that know the year it was Borodin."

The great pianist is a master of wordplay as well as music, and Webster sent him the pun column, which evoked the following outrageous communique:

"I read about you and puns and I've been Champlin at the bit to talk to you about it. I must say you had me on puns and needles for a while but, in the mane, I horsed around too long before bringing it up. I don't wish to saddle you with too many of them, but you must realize that, regarding puns, there are those who say 'yes' and those who say 'neigh.' But that's a horse

of a different coloratura. I was once asked whether I preferred Count Basie or Claude Thornhill. I said, 'When it comes to swinging, nobody tops Basie. But when it comes to ballads, Claude Rains.'

There seems to be a curious affinity between puns and music. Betty Bennett Lowe, the fine jazz singer and wife of guitarist/trombonist Mundell Lowe, reminded me of two melodic puns by the composer Hugo Friedhofer (who did, among many others, the score for "The Best Years of Our Lives"). Lovers of '30s ballads may appreciate Friedhofer's invention, "Shos-

takovitch Small by a Waterfall." Later, Friedhofer was heard humming, "It Marcus Welby Spring."

Walter Alford, who did film publicity in Europe for years, was a press agent for the Shuberts in New York in his earlier days. He remembers popping into the Imperial Theatre to hear Mary Martin rehearsing "That's Him" for the Kurt Weill-Vernon Duke "One Touch of Venus." A handsome gentleman interrupted her and gave her some pointers. She began again.

"Who's that man?" Alford asked.

"Her husband," said an unidentified bystander.

"What does he do?" Alford inquired.

"He lives by the sweat of his frau," said his companion.

Alford also reminded me of what may be the most famous Broadway musical pun, which he attributes to a legendary theater publicist named Richard Maney. The wife of Frank Loesser, who wrote "Most Happy Fella" among other shows, used to protect her husband by disparaging other composers. "Ah, yes," Maney is said to have said, "she is the evil of two Loessers."

That play, possibly apocryphal, is so perfect that the suspicion grows that the pun came first and the supporting text afterward.

The conductor and violinist Henri Temianka of the California Chamber Symphony Society recalled a whole genre of wordplays, of which his favorite example was:

"We're out of flowers," the florist said lackadaisically.

Another that rumbled out of my memory was: "We don't have two together," the ticket seller said wanly.

I had mentioned the childhood joys of "What's the matter with your baby, buggy?" Director Delbert Mann wrote to remind me that we also had slapped our elementary school thighs, he in Tennessee, I in Upstate New York, over the likes of "What's that coming in, the window?" and the classic, "What's that on the road, a head?"

The playwright George S. Kaufman had advanced degrees in verbal facility. My favorite among his many spur-of-the-moment creations is told in Howard Teichman's

biography. Kaufman accompanied his new, young wife as she went shopping for draperies in Bloomingdale's. She wandered away and he was standing there, feeling forlornly misplaced, when a brisk clerk came up and said, "Can I help you?"

"Have you got any second act curtains?" Kaufman asked miserably.

Once in a while, of course, wordplays are quite inadvertent. On a day in the mid-'50s, the tabloid New York Post carried a front-page headline that asked "DID CHAMBERS LIE, OR HISS?" The paper got it the right way around in later editions, but not before it had joined all those other turns of phrase in blessed memory.