

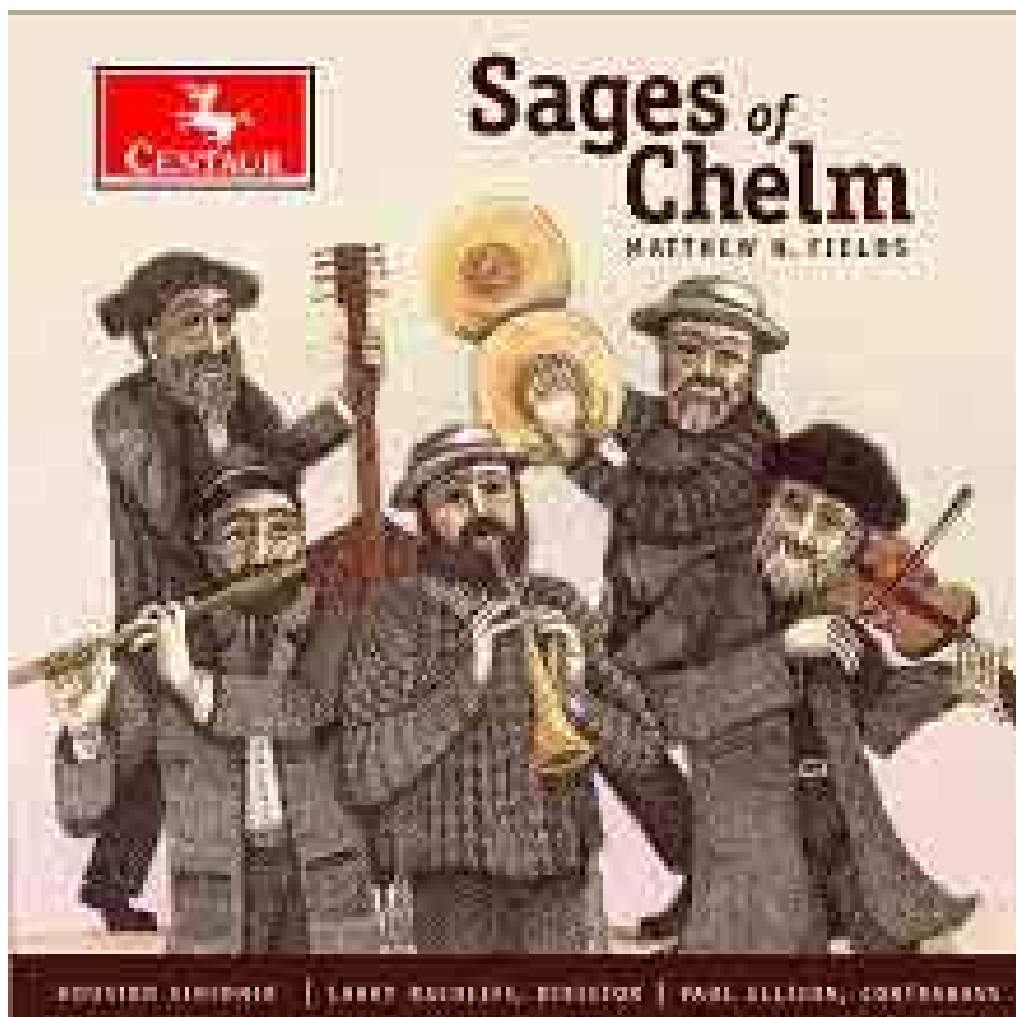


The Matt Behind The Music

Newsletter of Matthew H Fields, composer

Issue No.9. First electronic issue. April 2005

Time has marched on since the November 2001 issue. All previous issues of this newsletter were mailed out on paper at great expense, without the advantages of electronic publication. While some of my potential readership does not have Internet access, I decided to make this issue electronic. While I am by nature chatty, it is difficult to encapsulate 3½ years without reducing events to highlights.



●**The New CD.** “Sages of Chelm” is here! After a composing process spanning 1997-2001, and planning from 2001-2003, an ensemble newly dubbed “Houston Sinfonia” met for 15 hours in Stude Hall at Shepherd School of Music at Rice University in Houston, Texas, USA to record this work. Under the leadership of director Larry Rachleff and producer Judith Sherman, with recording engineer Andy Bradley, the top-notch crew made a marvelous recording of the 57-minute 3-movement chamber symphony. Final edits



were complete by December 2003, and Centaur Recordings published the CD in November 2004. It is now available worldwide wherever fine classical records are sold.

Related links:

●[Sages of Chelm on Amazon.com.](#) ●[Audio clip from Sages of Chelm.](#)

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● **Two Petersburgs, Paris, Moscow, and Yerevan.** Since the last newsletter, I've received concert programs from performances of works of mine in Paris, France; Moscow, Russia; Yerevan, Armenia; St Petersburg, Russia; and St Petersburg, Florida, USA. These were chamber performances—solos, duets, and trios—performed under the auspices of Armenian Contemporary Music Center and Tampa Bay Composers Forum.

But changes have arisen.

Tampa Bay Composers Forum went out of business, and its membership reorganized, so I am not currently affiliated with the new organization there.

Armenian Contemporary Music Center has been producing varied concerts ranging from very good to unprepared. No matter the quality level, it meets its expenses by requiring a substantial subsidy from the composers themselves. After 3 successive performances which I felt did not minimally accurately represent the works of mine named on the program, I decided that my works are too precise and their players are too uneven for the relationship to be mutually beneficial, and besides, after my investments in the recording of “Sages of Chelm”, I cannot afford that kind of gamble.



● **Rhea.** In February of 2004 we marked the passing of Rhea the golden retriever, after a yearlong battle with cancer. Rhea came to my household from the Humane Society in January of 1993. While she never mastered any elaborate tricks, she was one of my two well-leash-trained “wonder-dogs” which inspired comments from neighbors about their excellent and relaxed behavior. Rhea is survived by sheltie-whippet-mix Mimi and Don Giocoso the tuxedo cat.

● **Ruchel-Isaac 2004.** Ruchel and Isaac Wegman were Jews who married in 1861 in Bogoria, Poland. Of their children, seven survived to adulthood and had offspring, thus launching a seven-branch family. One and much of another branch were eradicated by the Nazis ca. 1942, leaving a majority in the United States. Daughter Malka married David-Noach Finkelstein, whose eldest son Isadore married Anna Sweigenbaum, whose sons changed their names to Fields. The youngest son Marshall had three offspring by his first wife Natalie, the youngest of which is yours truly.



Periodically over the past many decades, the Wegman clan has been holding grand reunions, and I learned of them from their web site. In 2004, for the first time, I was invited to attend a reunion of over a thousand relatives, and to present my CD “Sages of Chelm”—particularly because it makes thematic use of folkloric melodies with roots in the ghetto of Bogoria, melodies which I’d heard in Isadore and Anna’s house. This was a very interesting experience. Wegman relatives are scattered on every inhabited continent and in many island nations, though most are in North America; they truly span all “racial” types, though a majority fit either into a blonde blue-eyed pale-skinned “Russian Jew” type or a olive-skinned black-haired brown-eyed “Middle-Eastern” type (most folks reckon me in that category). A wide variety of philosophies and religions are represented, though most are at least moderately conversant in the assumptions and rites of moderate Jewish monotheism. All possible political views are represented, with an emphasis on preventing repeats of the Holocaust.

I was especially gratified when some of the elder aunts clapped and danced along with the finale of “Sages of Chelm”.



● **Reconnection 2004.** When I got my first teaching assistantship and fellowship to Stanford in 1985, I lost touch with Marshall and Natalie. I didn't fit their hierarchy and could not play my assigned role in their daily quarrels with each other, on top of which I refused to pretend-away the bizarre treatment I'd experienced from them in the 1960s and '70s. So there really was no basis for a relationship.

In November 2003, Natalie's uncle Robert Perlman passed away in Sausalito, California. I received the news from Natalie's brother Kenneth Krischer and her mother Sara Krischer, neither of whom were

willing to share the information with her, so I called her with that information. She and I have exchanged brief messages at least once a month ever since. From a perspective well outside the old power relationships, I'm able to engage her, though she evidently still dreams of a mother-son relationship the likes of which never had a chance to arise between us.

When I was in Chicago for the Ruchel-Isaac Reunion, I accepted her invitation to dinner at her house, a location which still conjures up for me sad memories of decades of daily torment, but which no longer frightens me. There, I learned only the barest outlines of events since I'd left—Marshall and Natalie's mid-1990s divorce, Marshall's subsequent marriage to another woman, and his eventual death, Natalie's retirement from jewelry-making and cloisonné due to arthritis, and her devotion to Sierra Club, volunteer tutoring in the public schools, and her greyhound. She listened attentively to "Sages of Chelm" all the way through, and seemed to genuinely enjoy it rather than fearing it as a challenge to her uniqueness as *the* artist of the family.

This made a nice preparation for reconnecting with my two older siblings the next day in Chicago.

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● **More valuable reconnections.** A special trip to Ithaca, New York allowed me to finally get to know my cousin Gary Fields and his wife Vivian.



Trips to Florida a year apart have given me the chance to see my maternal grandmother Sara Krischer, and to observe the surprisingly rapid changes coming over her in her 90s. In addition to some much-needed winter sunshine, these trips also gave me opportunities to connect with two personal heroes: my cousin Cindy Goodman, who writes a column for the Miami Herald about surviving in the role of SuperMom; and the retired great illusionist, heir to the mantle of Houdini, advocate and teacher of critical thinking, righteously indignant thorn in the sides of hurtful frauds, and general debunker of nonsensical, magical, gullible, goofy, delusional, mythological and demonstrably harmful

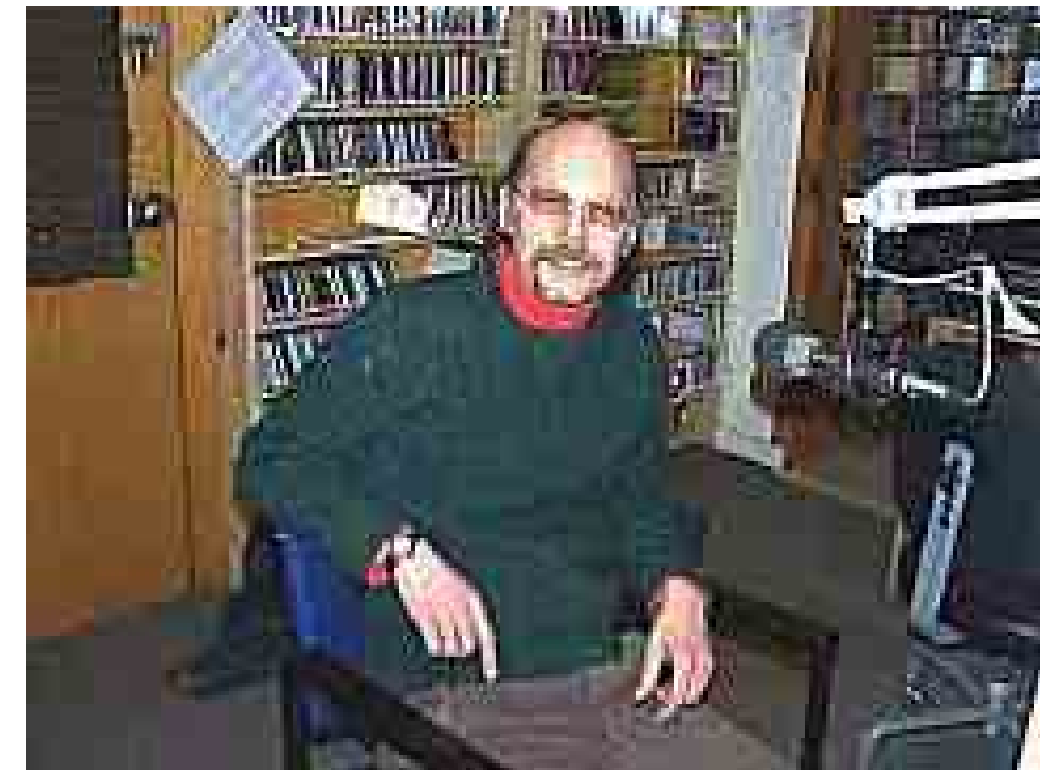
and expensive superstitions everywhere, James “The Amazing” Randi.



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● **Amid Green Mountains.** March 2005 brought me back to the studios of WGDR in Plainfield, Vermont, where my music was broadcast on the radio and the Internet, and those clones of the wild enharmonic, Kalvos and Damien, grilled me gently. They generously gave



57 minutes of their weekly 2-hour show to playing all three movements of “Sages of Chelm”, and into that mixed 45 minutes of interview with me, introduced by one of Damien’s humorous essays accompanied by music by Jim Fox. The whole show and more than 500 episodes can be heard from their web site in Realaudio and MP3 streams so compact that they even work over a modem.

● **Upgraded: Wheels.** Just days ago, I reached a decision point when my used 1988 Pontiac Bonneville needed over \$1000 in repairs just to remain road-worthy. Considering years of advice from my auto mechanic as well as Click and Clack and other comparable experts, and after serious soul-searching about how I wanted and



needed to use my money, I traded in the Bonneville and paid cash for a new Honda Civic. Almost all Civics that I see are silver, so I chose blue to help me spot my car.



● **Introducing:** No journal of highlights of my life and music-making since the previous issue of this newsletter would be complete without mention of Kathy Freedman, that wonderful person who has so enriched my life for the past year and a half.

● **Related Links.**

- **Matthew H. Fields home page.**
- **“Sages of Chelm” on Amazon.com.**
- **“Kabala” on Amazon.com.**
- **Ruchel-Isaac Cousin Club.**
- **Professor Gary Fields.**
- **Balancing Act, with Cindy Krischer Goodman.**
- **Kalvos and Damien’s New Music Bazaar.**
- **James Randi Educational Foundation.**