

# Classical Claverack

BY HOWARD KISSEL

Late one damp, chilly Sunday afternoon last February, the interior of Christ Church Episcopal in Hudson resounded with the mighty D Minor Toccata of Johann Sebastian Bach. The rich sound of the church's organ and the authoritative performance by Chris Lastovicka made the bluster outside disappear for the people who filled the pews. It was a little early for Vespers, but in fact the people were not there to pray. They had come for a concert to raise funds for the restoration of the organ.

The concert, which also included works by Brahms and Fauré, took on a personal tone as Lastovicka and cellist Jay Shulman performed a piece by his father, the late American composer Alan Shulman, about whom he spoke warmly. At a cosy reception afterward, Lastovicka told some admirers that the D Minor Toccata is seldom performed because, she said wryly, organists consider it "a cliché."

Both performers live in Claverack; Lastovicka and her partner, Robin Andrews, in Philmont, Shulman and his wife Margreta von Pein, on Route 23. Apart from the rare joy of hearing a live performance of the Toccata, I was struck by the local presence of two serious musicians and wondered how the musical life could be lived here.

Shulman has known Columbia County since he was a child at camp on Copake Lake. His father, who played cello in the NBC Symphony under Toscanini, had a music copyist, Bert Kosow, who lived in a house on Route 23, near the dam. In 1987, the younger Shulman and his wife bought the property next door and two years later, built their own house there.

Back then, Shulman found himself commuting a lot. He has been a member of the Long Island Philharmonic since 1980. He also teaches in Westchester County and performs in the Senior Concerts at Carnegie Hall, a series endowed by Lucille Lortel. Lortel, best known for her benefactions to the New York theater, including the theater on Christopher Street that bears her name, created the Senior Concerts to give older musicians a chance to perform, and older people, who often cannot afford to attend concerts, a chance to listen.

"Your hair's starting to thin on top," the conductor told Shulman. "So the little old ladies in the audience won't know you don't qualify for this orchestra."

In recent years, Shulman has made his musical life closer to home. On the one hand, he is a member of the River Quartet, which explores serious music, from the standard

classical repertory to lesser known composers like Carl Nielsen, Astor Piazzola and Alan Shulman. On the other, he is a member of the Rosamond Trio, which performs at upscale catering manors on both sides of the Hudson and in the Berkshires.

Much of Lastovicka's income comes from performing (she has been the organist at Christ Church Episcopal since 1997), but she is primarily a composer. Interestingly, she seldom writes pieces for the organ, though she notes that improvisation is considered an essential skill for organists. Most often, she finds herself composing for strings, piano and voice.

In June, a piece she wrote for harpsichord and Baroque oboe d'amore was performed at the Boston Early Music Festival. (The instrumentation, rather than the age of the composer is the determining factor.) In July, a piece of hers for solo flute will be performed at the Spoleto Festival in Spoleto, Italy. Her music has also been performed at the Abode of the Message, a Sufi Center in New Lebanon and can be heard on her website: [www.aharipress.com](http://www.aharipress.com).

Lastovicka means "swallow" in Czech. When her paternal grandfather arrived here from Czechoslovakia during the Depression, he Anglicized his name, but a few years ago she decided to revert to the original.

She began her musical studies as a child with her mother, who was a piano teacher in Hartsville, South Carolina. After studying at the University of Cincinnati, which shares teachers with Eastman and Juilliard, she went to Minneapolis to do graduate work in composition at the University of Minnesota with the eminent contemporary composer Dominick Argento. It was, she recalls, "disappointing—in orchestration class he would say he'd rather be watching a Viking game."

She returned to South Carolina, not sure what she would do. For a while she studied chemistry, which her father teaches, before resuming her musical career. She met Robin Andrews, a publishing consultant, at a luncheon arranged by their two mothers. They have been together for nine years, happily in Philmont for the last five.

Lastovicka, whose concert with Shulman raised \$1,000 toward the restoration of the organ, describes herself as "not very urban at heart—I'm easily overstimulated."

*Howard Kissel, a resident of Philmont, is chief theatre critic of the New York Daily News.*

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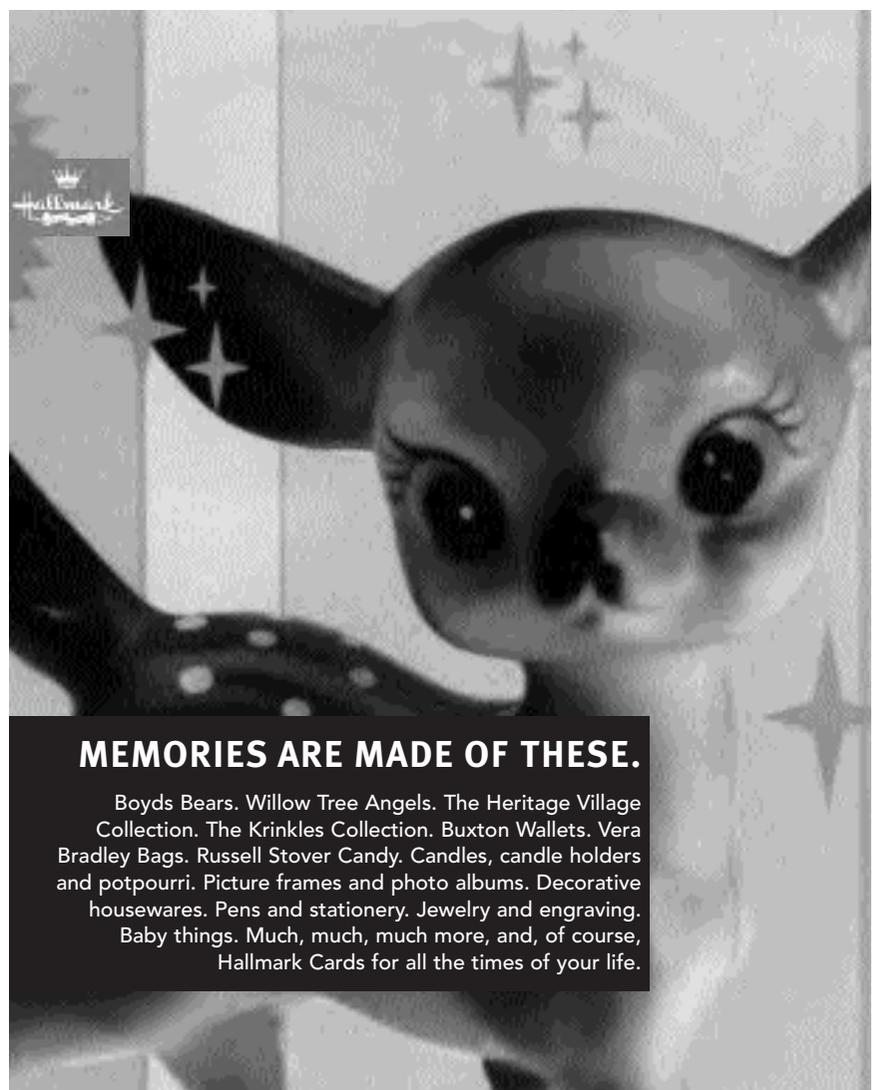
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