

The Drink Tank 249



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Mo Starkey, that's all I have to say about that cover. Everyone knows I have a thing for abstraction, and this is a fun little abstract that Mo sent my way!

So, the last couple of issues have been whole and hearty. That Clarkes issue was a monster, but I have to say that I'm proud of the work James did in getting all that great writing together and I think I even pulled my weight! I've been re-reading Phillip K. Dick is Dead, Alas, which is one of my faves from the early years of the Clarkes, and I'm really enjoying it. I've read *The City & The City* for a third time now. It's just so good!

I've been reading a lot lately, which isn't much of a surprise, I'm always reading something, but I've started work on what will likely be the longest and most thorough issue of the Fall- The Stephen Baxter issue. I love Baxter's stuff, and I'm planning on reading at least five more of his books before the issue, which I'm hoping will be out around my birthday. It'll sorta be a present to myself. I'll be looking for folks who have something to say about the guy, so if you read 'im, lemme know and you'll be dragged into the process!

As for other theme issues coming up, there's *Trains II* and the *Whiskey* issue. I'm also planning a special issue dedicated to...well, you'll have to wait to see. It'll be a fun summer.

So, what's this issue all about? Well, it's a general issue, the same as most of the last 248, but it's got a long piece about one of my favorite albums ever and why it is the perfect addition to the National Recording Registry. There's also Taral Wayne, Walt, Letters and so on!



The Forgotten Recorded Decade Part Eight: Workin' the Net

OK, this one's a good bit longer than the previous, largely because I had access to the makers. This story isn't just about the recording, though that is certainly about how this is the best possible representation of modern a capella there is, but it's also about what it meant to me and how a couple of eMails brought everything back. I talked a little about this in the Fifth Annual Giant Sized Annual, but this is a much fuller story.

Also, this one's for my Uncle Wayne, who first introduced me to what I still consider to be one of the ten best albums I've ever had the privilege of hearing. Thanks Wayne!

OK, this one'll be a little different. I'm gonna follow-up my reasoning for why *What's In The Bright Pink Box* with an interview with the four members of the Flips. They were so kind as to let me ask them questions and they were so kind as to answer them.

In the 1980s, there were several a cappella groups that rose to some prominence. These included San Francisco's The Bobs, who were a pretty good group and could always be counted on for a good show. There were The Nylons, Canadians, who I remember from a cassette tape that made many long car trips with us. Popsicle Toes is the song I best remember for some reason. Anyhoo, these were the best known a capella groups going at the time, but, as always happens in these stories, there was another.

The Flips.

You'll hear more about the formation

of the Flips later, but let's just say they came together in the mid-1980s and recorded an album.

That album is the perfect example of 1980s a capella. It's not an album of covers, though there are a couple on there, but it's a record of brilliantly written songs that tell stories. There's a certain magic to the entire piece, it flows, but even better than that is that it's one of those albums that manages to be of the time, not just in the time. It is the 1980s. Love, life, sex, religion, aging, art, and so on all happen in the songs that are featured on *What's in the Bright Pink Box*. These are songs that take the best of what was going on lyrically at the time. There's some Lennon & McCartney in there. There's some Sondheim. Some Cash, King, Brecht and Jones. It's amazing to think of the

directions in which the songs go.

And, of course, part of it is that the personnel were so damned talented. Great voices, but you can expect that with just about any a capella group, but the way they bounced off each other, particularly when they're playing counter-point in songs like *Cloud Nine*. The four of them were just magic on the album.

Why does *What's in the Bright Pink Box* belong on the Registry instead of something by The Nylons, Rockapella or The Bobs? Part of it is the fact that no other album I've ever heard feels more like it's time. When I think of the 1980s, I think of the songs on *What's in the Bright Pink Box*. Not when I think of 1980s music, when I think of the 1980s. There has to be something to the lyrics and the vocal presentation that just brings it out. There's a certain emotion timbre to just about everything that feels very 80s, a brightness, authentic falseness perhaps. If I had to put my finger on it, it's in a song called *Working the Net*. This is not about the internet, that was still a dream waiting for Tim Berners-Lee to pound it out on his NeXT Cube. This was about dating, how things had gone to the point where trying to make new connections wasn't about really connecting as much as collecting business cards, names, people. I was 13 when I first heard it, and I kinda got it, but when I first tired dating after leaving college, I got it. I really understood where it came from. I got it.

That's not the only one. There's a song called *Cloud Nine*. I can not

think of a better song to illustrate the power of a capella. Yes, when you hear the phrase a capella, you think of *Under the Boardwalk* and the like, but *Cloud Nine*, in both tone and execution, is so different. It's complex, the speed increasing, the frenzy growing, the lyrics getting only more gnarled, harsher.

The first verse- *Mist was rising and the night was dark, me and my baby took a walk in the park. He said be mine and you're on Cloud Nine, better watch out when you're on Cloud Nine.*

Sang sweetly, gently, wisely.

The Final Verse- *Bride 65, the other one seventeen. They fucked in the back of a limousine.*

This is followed by a frenzied and marvelous breakdown. It's remarkable. It's stunning. I was listening to it just a minute ago. I had a moment. That's the power of the song. After having heard it hundreds of times, it's still able to bring that sort of power. That's never happened to me with a Nylons song. Never with anything from The Bobs (except for the time they sang *House of the Rising Sun* for me and three of my friends who happened to be in the room at the moment). This is amazing stuff, the kind of songwriting that you so seldom find. It's simple. I was going to count how many total words and I'm sure it'd add up to something like 200, and every single one of them mattered. Every one pushed the whole thing forward. It's exactly the kind of song you end a side of a record with, which is where it was placed on the album.

This is an album that combines timeless songs (*Cloud Nine*, *Eyes in the Dark*) with songs that are ultimately of their time, which I think is a great thing for the Registry. Songs



like Workin' the Net and I Got The News and Spy (For the Moral Majority) are so very 80s that they're practically definitions. The album is a combination of so many different aspects of singing and songwriting combined with remarkable fluidity and just plain fun. It's amazing stuff.

I could go on. This is the album that defines a cappella for me, and it represents the best in the genre and it's period of creation. Yes, there are better known examples, but none of them have the power and perfection of *What's in the Bright Pink Box*. It's a remarkable (and sadly out-of-print) album that stands as a record of a movement and of a time.

And I still listen to it in the car every chance I get.

Next issue: We are the ones who make a brighter day...



The Flips: An Interview... slightly after the fact.

After I bought What's in the Bright Pink Box off of eBay, I was hooked. I listened to it non-stop for the first time in more than a decade. I then thought, 'Hey, this was only 23 years ago, I wonder if I can find them?'

And with the help of Facebook and Google, I got a hold of two of them. Those two then got me in touch with the other two. I managed to get in touch with the Flips, all of them! That's a very cool thing. I pitched them this series of articles and said that this was an album I really believed should be on the Registry. I asked if I could ask them some questions, and they said "YES!"

I was over the moon.

I will also note that the eMails that flew between these four, with me being copied on them, were hilarious and so very fun. I happily let my in-box flood with them. These were four great friends and I was getting a chance to look in on that.

The following is the compiled questions and answers from The Flips- Kirk Livingston, Kevin Carter, Patti Lesser, and Shanna Strassberg.

) Tell me a bit about creating the album? Can you talk about the through-line for the album? And where did that title come from?

Kirk Livingston: Okay, we're talking about a whirlwind period of my life with The Flips from over twenty years ago now, and my memories are really sketchy on details, so bare with me...

Just a little background on how the group got started: We were all theater students at San Francisco State University doing shows together. Kevin and I were roommates in the dorms for a year (1983-84) and Shanna and Patti were roommates in an apartment together the following year (1984-85). Somehow in various configurations of Kirk & Shanna, Kirk & Kevin, Patti & Shanna, we were constantly singing together, making up songs and harmonies, whether it was when riding home from rehearsals, or hanging at home or at parties. We all just loved to sing. I had also been given a tape of The Nylons' *One Size Fits All* album and was blown away by how tight their harmonies were and how much sound they could get out of just four part harmonies (although I later found out that they actually recorded multiple tracks of extra harmonies on their recordings, and even played extra tracks behind their voices when they performed live.) I had heard The Manhattan Transfer's music and was inspired by their tight harmonies but it wasn't until I heard The Nylons that I actually thought about what you could do just with a cappella. (sidenote: Ironically, The Flips actually got to meet both The Manhattan Transfer and The Nylons during our later success while performing.) Also, around that time, Shanna was singing in an all-girl trio named Aquabop, with other actors from SFSU. Aquabop was doing some original songs that they had written and were very popular singing at parties, and I think they were a huge inspiration for us in forming The Flips.

I think the moment that really brought the four of us together as a group, though, was when we were all in an acoustic version of *Jesus*

Christ Superstar (Funny side note about that show: The genders were reversed for all the lead roles. Patti was cast as Jesus and Kevin was “Michael” Magdalene). During rehearsals for that show the four of us began hanging out doing four part harmonies of various songs that we had written. I remember going to theater parties and we’d be standing around someone’s kitchen or hanging on a front stoop and we’d start singing and everyone totally loved us. At some point Patti or Shanna suggested we go down to Castro Street at 2AM to sing in a particular little alley next to the movie theater there that had great acoustics. The next thing we knew there were tons of people all crowding around us listening and applauding and throwing us money. I think that moment was what inspired Patti to take notice of an ad she saw in the newspaper for auditions at the 1177 Club (formerly on Nob Hill at 1177 California Street), which was looking for acts for a new cabaret show.

Patti suggested that we go to the 1177 Club audition but since we hadn’t yet done any formal performing as a group, other than singing at the parties and busking on the street, we needed a name. As I recall, our name, The Flips, also came from Patti, who would typically just blurt out all kinds of hilarious non-sequiters at the drop of a hat. I have this vivid memory of the four of us driving together in someone’s car, riffing on names and rejecting them one after the other, until Patti suddenly said, “How about The Flips?” and we all instantly knew that that was the name.

Our first official performance was, as I mentioned, at the 1177 Club sometime in the summer of ’85. From that show, Steve Silver,

the creator and producer of *Beach Blanket Babylon*, came to one of those shows, saw us and expressed interest in grooming us (for what specifically I don’t remember, maybe for his show or maybe to produce a show just for us). Anyway, because of Steve Silver’s interest, we then developed a full show that we performed as a showcase at SFSU, where Kevin and Shanna were still going (Patti and I had both left school by then).

It was at the showcase at SFSU that we then met Peter Heimlich (and, yes, his father is *the* Dr. Heimlich of “the maneuver” fame), who was then dating a friend of ours, Linda Hill, a comedian who we’d met doing one of the 1177 Club shows. Peter had toured as the bass player for metal rocker Lita Ford’s band before she became famous in the late 80’s, so he had had previous experience in the music business. I guess he was looking for something else to do after he stopped gigging with Lita and was toying with the idea of managing a group. So when Peter came to see our show, he approached us about being our manager and we immediately said yes because none of us really knew the first thing about the business side of music and didn’t really want to take that on. Once Peter took over the business end for The Flips that’s pretty much when things really took off for us.

Just as a side note about some of our achievements: We won the Bay Area Cabaret Gold Awards two years in a row – (1986 & 1987?). We won the Harmony Sweepstakes 1986. And I believe we were the “comedy pick of the week” by the L.A. Times sometime during the summer of 1987. Our biggest gig we ever played was performing for hundreds



Kirk Livingston

of thousands of people at the Golden Gate Bridge's 50th Anniversary Celebration at Chrissy Field in 1987.

Another side-note: Our comedy for our shows came about because none of us were comfortable talking directly to the audience and we didn't want to do the cheesy stuff that cabaret acts do, like saying "... and for our next song, ladies and gentleman... blah, blah, blah" which felt corny. So we started coming up with weird segues, sketches and faux commercials in order to transition from one song to the next. So even though we started out thinking of ourselves purely as a music group, a lot of people ended up thinking of us equally as a comedy group.

In fact, it got harder as our career grew to just sing serious songs during our sets because our audience always expected us to bring the funny. Particularly on the Alex Bennet radio show where we started off always doing our comedy songs and then one show we decided to just sing a serious song and I remember when we finished, there was this pause and Alex kind of looked at us like "what happened? Where's the joke?" I think our manager had a really hard time later on trying to market us because we couldn't easily be categorized. (Are they a legitimate singing group or are they a comedy group that just happens to sing a cappella songs?)

I think I can say without a shadow of a doubt that the title of the album came from Patti but I can't tell you how or why she came up with that accept to say that there was a Playtex tampon commercial running on TV at the time and the tag line was "What's in the bright pink box?" because the tampons were sold in a pink

box. As I recall we went through a brief phase where Peter asked us if we would consider changing our name, The Flips, for whatever reason, and amongst the long list of names we threw out for consideration, Shanna liked "The Pink." So it's quite possible that Patti took that and ran with it until we were suddenly calling our album "What's in the bright pink box?" But I can't say for sure. (sidenote: I think Peter ended



up unofficially renaming us "The Flips – Off-the-Wall A Cappella" in all of our advertising.)

As I recall, the idea of recording an album originally came from our manager, Peter Heimlich. Wherever and whenever we performed people would ask if we had an album and so it just seemed like a logical thing to do to generate money for the group, to use to promote ourselves and, perhaps, to help cement our legitimacy as a professional group. We recorded it at Emerald City Studios, in the Excelsior District of San Francisco, which was a pretty sketchy part of town back then (and even now to a degree). The studio was a converted guesthouse in the backyard of the house the owners lived in. (Sorry but I don't remember who the Emerald City owners names were.) It was actually a very professional recording studio. Or at least it was to me, since I'd never been in a recording studio before.

Because we didn't make a lot of money, Peter got us cheaper studio rental rates by having us record really late in the evening - the graveyard shift if you will – maybe starting at 10pm and going until 2pm or 3pm in the morning. So most of the time we were completely loopy from exhaustion, which made Peter and our sound engineer, Garry Mankin, totally frustrated with us. One or more of us would say something wacky and it would start fits of laughing from one or all of us, which could go on for hours. Shanna in particular was the most susceptible to laughing so out of control that she would fall to the ground and remain there until one of us had to drag her out of the studio until she could collect herself. Don't ask me what we thought was so funny. It would never translate now, of

course. (although I do recall one long riff on “Lesbian Clown Nurses” that seemed to render us incapacitated for hours) Ironically, all of our delays due to our squirrelness during recording sessions probably ended up costing us as much in studio rental costs as we would have if we had simply paid the higher price for “prime time” in the end. But the hours of non-stop laughter we had during those late night sessions were truly priceless and I wouldn’t have traded them for the extra sleep or the extra cash in looking back on it now.

We didn’t really have a grand concept for the album other than that the group, including our manager, Peter, thought it should be purely a cappella. So for the most part we only used our voices and what our bodies could create for percussion. There’s only one “non-human” instrument on the album and that’s a tambourine, which Patti used in our live performances because there was no way to really duplicate that sound with our bodies. We did do some overdubbing with extra harmonies to fatten the sound in places but for the most part we really strived (strove?) to have the album sound as close to what we sounded like in our live performances.

Peter Heimlich also added one vocal to the song *I Got The News* because we wanted a really bassie harmony in one spot and when the “God voice” sings “don’t touch that dial.” Kevin was really more of a baritone and his voice just didn’t sound low enough. So Peter (a natural base) did it. I still don’t think you could call adding Peter’s voice as “cheating” the purity of our recording because quite often he actually said that line into a mic from the sound booth

during our live performances.

Our choices of songs for the album, as far as I recall, came out of simply picking the best out of the ones we performed. There were only two songs that we recorded for the album, *Mano* and *Place Your Bets*, which we couldn’t make work for the album and so they got cut. I think it was because they just sounded too flat and would have needed more than our voices could provide, and so we would have needed to add extra instruments.

Although we were aware of people who could do vocal beat-boxing, this was back before everyone and their grandmother was doing it, and so none of us knew how to do that as added percussion. (Unlike, now where having a beat-boxer is not only standard practice but is pretty much expected as part of almost all modern a cappella groups.) So the kick drum on *Workin’ The Net* was created by thumping directly on the microphone, the snaps were done with our fingers (obviously), and the high hats with our tongues.

Since, like I said, there wasn’t any grand concept or through line to the album, I can’t really say how the order of songs were chosen except that *Workin’ The Net* was definitely the “show piece” that we decided should be the first song because, well, it rocked quite frankly. We had also added the most extra vocal tracks and reverb on *Workin’ the Net* and it really felt like the right song to start the album off with a bang.

We also specifically put *Since I Fell For You* at the end because that’s the song we always sang at the end our shows. We had a specific running gag throughout the show where we would start

singing *Since I Fell For You* but couldn’t get past the first few bars because bizarre things would begin to happen that stopped us, until the very end of the show when we were able to finally sing the whole song.

The answering machine song was one that I had written and recorded on my little handheld tape recorder (which was how I wrote almost all of my songs) with just me singing all the parts and then recording that on my home answering machine. Peter loved it and thought it would be a clever song to add as a “bonus” track



at the end of the album.

Peter and our sound engineer, Gary Mankin, did the final mix on the album but I recall that the group had final approval on finished master.

Kevin Carter: Wow, Kirk you remember a hell of a lot more than I do! But I can solve the mystery of the title. Yes, it was from a 'woman's product' commercial from the 70's that I recalled as a child. It was back when they wouldn't say

exactly what the product did they would just speak in circles around it, so I'm not sure what the product was exactly. Just that two women bumped into each other at the supermarket, one looked in the other's cart and asked, "What's in the bright pink box?"

Then, in highschool, my friends and I would write (intentionally) bad poetry ("Colleen, Catch The Onion", written in that period, became a mainstay skit of our performances: w/ Patti reciting the poem, Shanna on the recorder, me doing interpretive dance and Kirk, what did you do?) My friend, Brian, wrote a poem called "What's In The Bright Pink Box".

So that's the history of the album title.

Patti: About the title, there was a commercial running for Tampax tampons in the early 80's with the catch phrase, "what's in the bright pink box?" Why we decided on that name would be a mystery to anyone else but not to the four of us. Most people who came to see our show had no idea what the hell to expect. Our music and stage performances were not easily categorized, and that is what was so exciting, for me at least. It was a "bright pink box experience" for most audiences and frankly, sometimes for us too. Using that album title made perfect sense and I guess it still makes sense in my mind today.

We began as the little engine that could. We allowed ourselves to

just write whatever bubbled up from the depths of our souls or subconscious. We wrote songs about bad break-ups, unrequited love, sex, of course, and sex. These are the subjects that occupied our every waking thought. When it came time to decide what songs should go on the album, I think we picked songs that allowed us to be represented as individual singers as much as a group. I think the songs have stood the test of time because these weren't just 80's songs, but Flips songs.

Shanna: As far as I can remember, there was no through-line discussed. No particular story to be told. We just picked the songs that we were particularly fond of, the ones that got a good audience response and those that represented the group well. We did make sure we had a good balance of all of us singing lead.

2) I know that What's in the Bright Pink Box was a college radio fave, especially on stations like WERS and KZSU. What sort of airplay did the album get beyond that?

Kirk: You know I honestly don't know. I never tracked our airplay on the radio. We were so focused on our live performances that it never really occurred to me to track where we were on the radio. Maybe some of the other Flips can answer that. I do remember hearing that we were getting played on college radio and that there was one station somewhere in the South that was playing one of our songs on heavy rotation at one point but I couldn't tell you anything more than that. We were really popular



guests on The Alex Bennet Show on Live 105FM here in the Bay Area and consequently wrote a jingle specifically for Alex's show which he then used continually until the program ended.

Kevin: I don't really know either. I just know I got one royalty check once for around \$12. So someone was playing it!

Patti: I honestly don't know. Alex Bennett used the little ditty we wrote for him every morning when he was on Live 105, but that was not on our album. Beyond that, and other than actual live appearances at radio stations, I don't know if songs from our album were ever in play rotation.

Shanna: I know we got airplay in Minnesota, because Kirk's mom told us we did. And my mother single-handedly got us a lot of airplay in Eugene, Oregon. I seem to remember hearing from people that we had been heard on numerous stations around the country, but I never kept any good records, unfortunately.

3) ***I think I remember, and it may be that I'm simply crazy, that y'all were on Channel 7's morning show (A.M. San Francisco?) at some point. And, though I only saw it the once, you did a song not on the album, Scary Man (I think). I may be fuzzy on that, I was 13 at the time. Are there any other recordings out there that could be dug up by an industrious seeker?***

Kirk: Oh Hell Yes. We have almost 20 other songs recorded in some rough form or another. Some were done at Emerald City Studios which are of better quality but weren't professionally mixed to the level of our album. Other songs are just capture on cassette tapes from our rehearsals and are only in mono. Sadly, *Scary Man* is not on any of our tapes that I know of but it may turn up someday. Also, to my great dismay, we don't have any record of *Get A Job*,

early 90's.

We are actually trying to work out how to get the rights back from the company that took over Flying Fish Records in order to do a digital re-master of our album, maybe add some of our other songs, as well, and then put it out on iTunes. We shall see if we can get our collective butts together to make that happen but cross your fingers and I'll keep you posted.

Kevin: Yes we were on some AM show in SF. I actually just recently transferred it to DVD. I am a little embarrassed by my bad 80's ponytail.

Patti: Yes, we performed on AM SF and made the hosts a little uncomfortable when we sang *Scary Man*. Despite the fact that this was SF in 1985, TV was/is still rather conservative, and since we were anything but conservative, it felt like we were The Clash performing on Regis and Kathy Lee. The only thing we had in common with the show hosts was the abundant use of hair spray. We have lots of "studio" recordings, and by studio I mean songs we recorded in bedrooms, at rehearsals, on hand held tape recorders, that never made it to the public at large. I think we had enough material for another album.



which was hugely popular with our audiences. We also have three songs that Shanna, Patti and I recorded years later with Kevin's "replacement," Tim DiPasqua, when Shanna, Patti and I made a brief attempt to reform The Flips back in the

Shanna; I think the other flips covered this, which is good, because I have little to no memory of this experience. I do remember that we did a tv in Sacramento....anyone remember that?

4) *How long did y'all perform together?*

Kirk: As I said earlier, we started messing around with making up songs in college at SFSU sometime between Fall of 1984 and Spring of 1985 but our official debut as The Flips was when we performed at the 1177 Club sometime during the summer of '85, I think.

The group finally disbanded sometime in 1988, I think. Peter had been getting a lot of interest in us down in L.A. and wanted us to move down there, with the idea being that we would have better exposure if we were there to audition or whatever. Patti had gotten married and her husband was actually living in L.A. as a make-up artist, so she was really gung-ho to move. Shanna and I were game but Kevin was not. Kevin did some soul searching and realized that he wasn't willing to move. So for the sake of the group he decided to quit so we could find someone to replace him. However, things disintegrated pretty quickly after that because the strength of the group really centered on the four of us specifically, and no one else. I really believe that there is magic between the four of us, and even when Shanna, Patti and I tried to regroup later (with a good friend of ours, and a fantastic singer/songwriter, Tim DiPasqua) the same magic just wasn't there. So, as much as we tried to move on without Kevin, we couldn't keep it going. Without going into more detail, basically our relationship with our manager Peter got ugly when Kevin left and within a really

short time we both fired Peter and disbanded as a group.

Sadly, the demise of The Flips happened just as our album was finally released. Consequently, we never really got the opportunity to properly promote the album the way we could have. We held our record release party at The Great American Music Hall and then almost immediately after that the group fell apart. So it's actually surprising to hear that our album was as popular as it was on college radio, since we didn't do any promotion of it.

In any case, the up side of our story is that we all stayed friends after the break up, with the exception of our manager Peter who to this day is still not speaking to any of us. (Bummer for him.)

Patti: To my recollection, we performed together through 1987. That would be my best guess. However, in my mind, we are all singing together, but I think that called psychosis.

Shanna: 1984-1988

Our last gig together was at an outdoor fair, north of SF. I had just been dumped by my boyfriend and the band picked me up at the therapist's office to go to the gig. I wept in the back seat...all the way to the show. Somehow I kept it together during the set. I ate 1/2 a hotdog after we played. Such a sad story.... It wasn't bad enough that we were having a

last show, but the dude had to dump me!
ok ok. I'm ok now. 😊

5) *Do you think (as I certainly do) that you had an effect on the explosion of a cappella groups in the early 1990s?*

Kirk: My huge ego wants to say Yes! But honestly I don't know. We did seem to hit the scene just before the 90's a cappella boom began but what influence we may have had in bringing that new wave of a cappella, I don't know. As I mentioned previously, The Manhattan Transfer, The Bobs and The Nylons were already around and big influences for us when we started. And, of course, the college a cappella scene, particularly with the Ivy League colleges, has been around since the 1950's, and I'm sure there were plenty of other groups doing their thing over on the East Coast. But, whoever they were, The Flips weren't aware of them. A friend of mine, whom I later sang with in another a cappella group, Vocal Designs, in the mid-90's, went to UC Berkeley and he told me that The Flips' album was big with the a cappella groups that he sang with on the Berkeley campus. But I leave it to you or other historians to research what influence we might have had on the world of modern a cappella.

Patti: I would love to think that we had an effect on the world around us, musically or otherwise. When we started singing acapella music, it was

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for our own amusement. It was extremely satisfying to harmonize and make music in the car, a hallway, an alley, anywhere really. We didn't realize how powerful an effect this art form would have on us. And by saying that, I can imagine that we made a lasting impression with people who came to hear us sing.

I recently got to meet an original member of The Persuasions, who is retired and lives in Scottsdale. That group really laid the foundation for all other a cappella groups to come. The Persuasions toured all over the country and the world, sang with the likes of Etta James, and created a genre out of street corner singing. I was honored and humbled by his talent and I thanked him for blazing the trail for The Flips.

Shanna: The only indication of that, for me, was that we started having groupies come to some of our shows. Kids that wanted to sing for us, in the same way that we wanted to sing for the Nylons. It wasn't showing off exactly, but more like we wanted them to know what an inspiration they had been to us. Plus we would sing for anyone, anywhere...we were so excited by the sounds we were making. When bands started coming to our shows and telling us how great we were, I was so moved and surprised. If they went on to create music, then yes, I guess we had an effect.

Also, I had a stalker, so I guess we were doing something right.

6) What have The Flips gone on to do separately over the years?

Kirk: I'll let the other Flips tell you what they're up to now. I stayed in SF and went back

to my roots in theater. I was in a long-running comedy, Bar None, which I did from 1989-91. In 1988 I started taking improv comedy classes with Bay Area Theatresports (now called BATS Improv), the largest improv theater company and improv school in Northern California. I eventually worked my way up to being in the main stage performing company with BATS, starting in 1990, began teaching for the BATS school around 1995 and eventually did a run as BATS's Artistic Director from 2000-2002. At the end of my time as A.D., I was totally burned out and decided to take a break from performing all together and haven't gone back since. Other highlights would be: I was in another a cappella (all male) group in the mid-90's, Vocal Designs. Vocal Designs came in third place in the San Francisco Regionals for the coming A Cappella Harmony Sweepstakes (in 1995, I think?) and won "Audience Favorite" for best original song – *Why Can't We Be In Love?* which I had written for and originally recorded with The Flips, ironically. I now push paper as an administrative analyst at UCSF, and am also writing children's books with the hope of some day being a full-time published author.

Kevin: I did a year in *Beach Blanket Babylon* in SF in 1989. In 1991 I moved to NYC and worked for most of the 90's as

an actor in regional theatre, summer stocks and bus and truck tours (highlight: touring Europe w/ Richard Chamberlain in *My Fair Lady*). I also musical directed shows, including *Into The Woods*, starring...Joann Worley!). In 2000, I was getting burned out on performing and got accepted into the BMI Lehman Engel Musical Theatre program in Manhattan (a breeding ground for all the up and coming musical theatre writers: the Avenue Q guys were two years ahead of me). Since then I've been writing musicals and doing readings and workshops in hopes of getting a full production. I've been lucky to get some big Broadway names working with me (Tony-winner Beth Leavel, Hugh Panaro, Laura Bell Bundy).



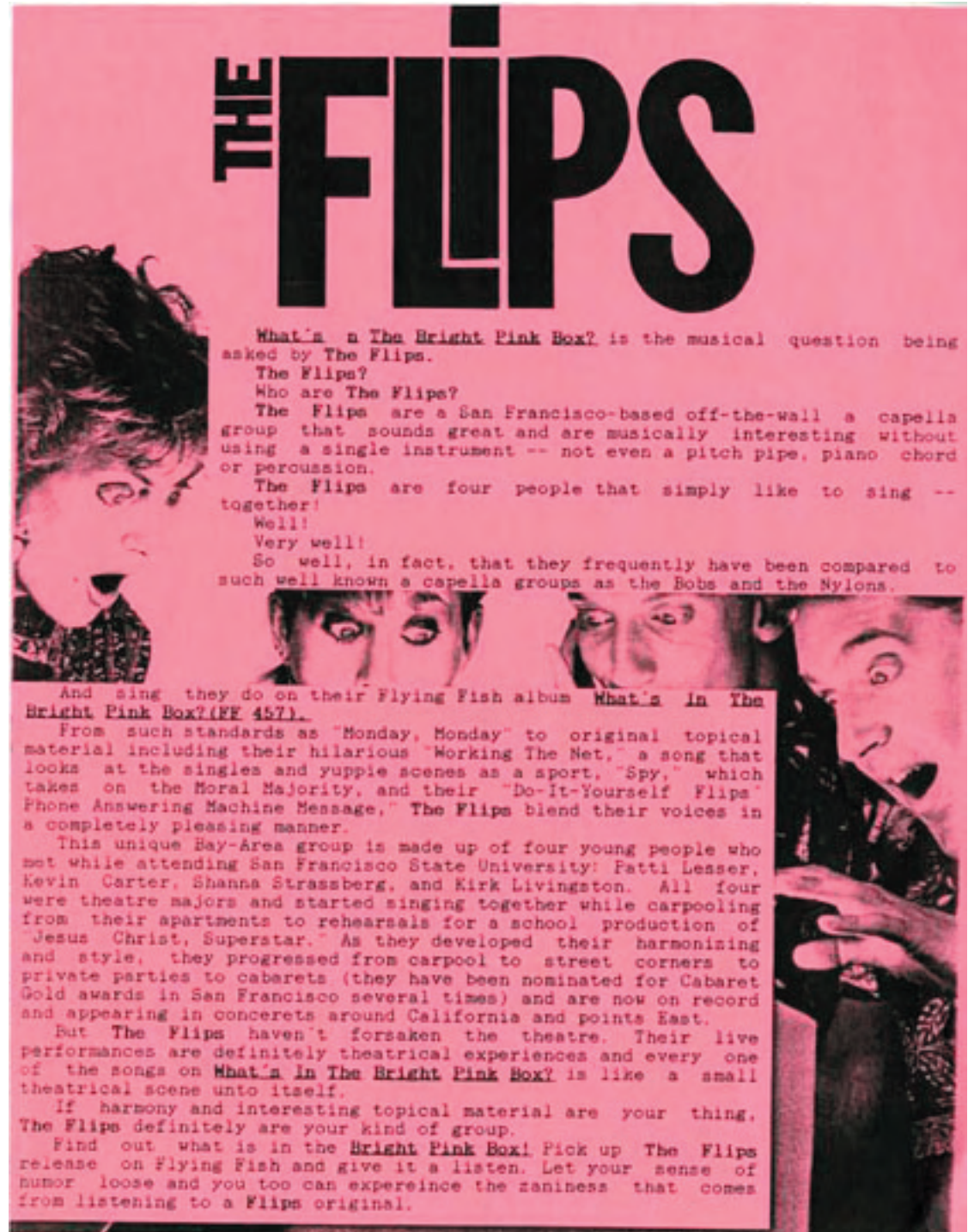
And I, too, have a dayjob: as an executive assistant at Morgan Stanley

Patti: After The Flips, I had an acting career for a minute in LA, SF, and Seattle. And I did a few commercials and voice-overs when I lived in Macon Ga. Now I am a certified paralegal and happy that I can pay my mortgage.

Shanna: After unsuccessfully trying to put the Flips back together without Kevin, I stayed in sf and waited tables. doing that for a few years I realized I needed a change. My brother was going to grad school in Nashville, which happened to be "Music City USA" so I decided I would come out for 6 months or so, and see what it was like. I have now been here for 16 years. I have worked in the music industry for 13 of those years, although I started singing out in clubs within the first year of my arrival. I have worked at a record label as receptionist, office manager and asst. to the president. I have sung background vocals for various country music artists both on the road and in the studio. I have had the incredible opportunity sing on the Grand Ole Opry many times. I have worked in talent management as well and am now in the tv industry. I work as the talent booker for a music video network, Great American Country, also known as GAC. I also continue to sing and do some on-camera tv/video work as well.

Kirk: I have to say that the amazing period we were together as The Flips was most creative, exciting and hilarious time of my life. I adore Kevin, Patti and Shanna. They are beyond former band mates to me. They are life-long friends and will always be family to me. (I Love You Guys!)

Kevin: Ditto. I wouldn't trade any of my amazing experiences with The Flips for anything. It is a very treasured period of my life and I will always be close to these guys. Whether they like it or not!



THE FLIPS

What's in The Bright Pink Box? is the musical question being asked by The Flips.

The Flips?
Who are The Flips?

The Flips are a San Francisco-based off-the-wall a capella group that sounds great and are musically interesting without using a single instrument -- not even a pitch pipe, piano chord or percussion.

The Flips are four people that simply like to sing -- together!

Well!
Very well!
So well, in fact, that they frequently have been compared to such well known a capella groups as the Bobs and the Nylons.

And sing they do on their Flying Fish album What's in The Bright Pink Box?(FF 457).

From such standards as "Monday, Monday" to original topical material including their hilarious "Working The Net," a song that looks at the singles and yuppie scenes as a sport, "Spy," which takes on the Moral Majority, and their "Do-It-Yourself Flips" Phone Answering Machine Message," The Flips blend their voices in a completely pleasing manner.

This unique Bay-Area group is made up of four young people who met while attending San Francisco State University: Patti Leaser, Kevin Carter, Shanna Strassberg, and Kirk Livingston. All four were theatre majors and started singing together while carpooling from their apartments to rehearsals for a school production of "Jesus Christ, Superstar." As they developed their harmonizing and style, they progressed from carpool to street corners to private parties to cabarets (they have been nominated for Cabaret Gold awards in San Francisco several times) and are now on record and appearing in concert around California and points East.

But The Flips haven't forsaken the theatre. Their live performances are definitely theatrical experiences and every one of the songs on What's in The Bright Pink Box? is like a small theatrical scene unto itself.

If harmony and interesting topical material are your thing, The Flips definitely are your kind of group.

Find out what is in the Bright Pink Box! Pick up The Flips release on Flying Fish and give it a listen. Let your sense of humor loose and you too can experience the zaniness that comes from listening to a Flips original.

Hair Raising

Walt Wentz

Whenever I hear somebody wailing about the end of personal opportunity, that all the fortunes have already been made, that all the gold in California is in a bank in the middle of Beverly Hills in somebody else's name, I think they have simply failed to look around.

What's the booming market these days? Aging people. Not aged, just aging, and bitterly resentful of the fact. Wrinkle re-siding, scalp upholstering, fat vacuuming, all are booming businesses catering to the aging-agonized. And That's only the most obvious opportunities. Father Time plays all sorts of amusing and unsightly little jokes on us as we grow older.

Ear-hairs, for one. We all go through our careless youth with only the lightest fuzz adorning our jug-handle ears, perhaps blasting our eardrums inside-out with Led Zeppelin, the Grateful Dead or contemporary equivalents, but never giving a thought to the hirsute future awaiting the outsides of our auditory mud-flaps.

Then, somewhere around the dread age of 40, we look in the mirror and see one long whisker poking impudently out of one ear, like a flagpole in a lunar crater.

Indignant and horrified-- why do They even ALLOW this sort of thing?-- we yank out the offending appendage, but the next month another hair is waving insouciantly from the opposite ear. From then on it's a losing battle.

After we hit 50, the harvesting of ear-hairs is no longer a job for simple tweezers,

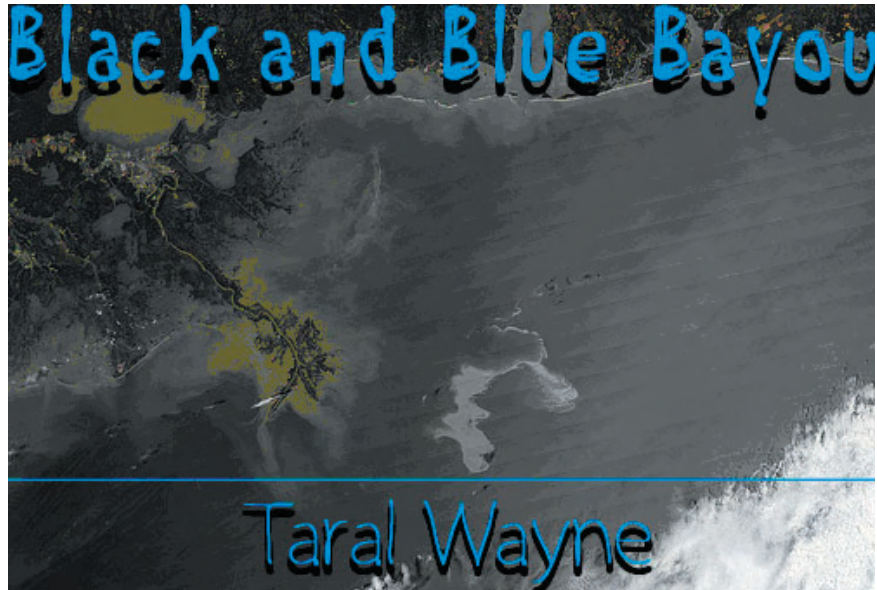
but would seem instead to call for something manufactured by McCormick or John Deere. On the downhill slide from 60, unless your barber is kind enough to run his snarling mower through the convolutions of your aging ears, your head will begin to look as though starlings had been nesting under the eaves while the old place stood vacant.

If you already suffer from tinnitus, having the barber's electric hedge-clipper shoved in your earhole is no great pleasure-- but if you try to pluck your own ear-hairs in public, people will

think that you suffer from Voices. Worse, you'll find that the damn things more than keep pace with your most diligent efforts.

What the world needs, then, is a simple, cheap and effective, rotary reciprocating ear-hair plucker, preferably battery-powered. The young entrepreneur who stops complaining long enough to invent such a device will fill a long-felt want, confer a great boon upon suffering humanity-- and rake in the scads hand over fist.





is bound to get caught in the Gulf Stream and be carried around the tip of Florida, where it is likely to threaten the Eastern Seaboard. That delicate environments and valuable Gulf fisheries – from Louisiana to the western coast of Florida – are endangered, goes without saying. Even the damage to the economy from Hurricane Katrina could pale in long-term significance.

Get ready, New York. You might wake up one

morning to find Lady Liberty hiking up her skirts to keep them out of the oil sludge.

You know... ? Maybe it's a damned good thing, too. It might scare Americans, scare the administration and maybe even scare the industry into taking seriously the risk of off-shore oil drilling. Industry has been reassuring the public for ages that their new drilling techniques and modern rigs can drill the continental shelf for oil more safely than ever before. They tell us that in the near future they will be able exploit resources hitherto out of bounds, without danger to the environment.

Oh, *really*? So why did *this* happen? That this is the biggest oil spill in history, and all those shiny new techno-baubles are junk at the bottom of the Gulf, is *not* a persuasive selling point. With the reliability of an atomic clock ticking off the nano-seconds, oil rigs have exploded, capsized and burned to their waterlines. What makes anyone think a few more water sprinklers and emergency drills will make a fundamental

difference?

Especially when the sinister name of "Halliburton" enters the picture. The paramilitary corporation that pulled the strings behind the Bush White House has never been known for its public accountability. Guess what? A measure improperly carried out by Halliburton to cap the drill site is most likely to blame for the blow-out.

Yet the industry now suggests that there are vast reservoirs of untapped oil deep in the Earth's crust that we can extract and consume for hundreds of years. (Capture-and-sequester technology for carbon emissions is taken for granted, of course.) They also dream of harvesting methane-hydrates from the abyssal plains below the Arctic ice-cap and off-shore of America's largest, most populous cities. Maybe, with the experience of the Gulf Spill as a hideous example of what can happen, Obama will at last put to rest such dangerous fantasies.

Fooling around with planet-scale forces isn't safe, particularly when we live in a very vulnerable ecological niche that is literally skin-deep, as far as the Earth goes. It never was safe. And it's not likely to be safe in the foreseeable future. Not was carting vast quantities of toxic crude around the globe in giant steel balloons -- the heart of the Exxon Valdez disaster -- ever really safe.

But hey! Who's going to put non-leaded premium in my Lincoln Navigator if we don't take chances?

In the meantime, I'd invest my life-savings in seafood, particularly shrimp and shellfish. They're going to be in short supply soon, and the price will skyrocket.

What's the largest man-made object that can be seen from space? Nope, not the Great Wall of China. Not even the parking lot in front of your local Wall Mart. It's the oil slick off the coast of Louisiana. And it's growing...

That oil spill in the Gulf is rapidly building to be one of the biggest ecological disasters in US history. Two or three days ago, the volume of crude that had spread out over the blue waters of the Gulf was only 16 million liters. Yesterday it was 34 million liters, and already approaching the magnitude of the infamous Exxon Valdez spill. And the Gulf spill is not only *still* growing, indications are that it's growing *faster*. The slick off Louisiana has tripled in size from yesterday to today! Officials don't want to speculate, but one estimate in a mid-week news story raised the possible total spillage to **over 70 million liters**. The Exxon Valdez was *only* 42 million.

If the rate of leakage has increased since then, is 100 million now a possibility? 150 million? More? Expectations are that some of the crude

Letter Graded Mail sent to garcia@computerhistory.org by my Gentle Readers

Who else but Lloyd Penney!

Dear Chris:

Happy Star Wars Day! How many issues behind am I? Four? Watch a fifth one come in this afternoon... Gotta get moving, so here are some frantic comments on Drank Tanks 244 to 247.

I'm still not sure why it's supposed to be Star Wars day!

244...Mo Starkey sure likes her Time Lords, and they do look good. This one also looks a little like Dustin Hoffman, though...

Most folks don't know that Mr. Hoffman played the Master for several seasons...

I sure would like to be at your Corflu. Who's on your committee? I can see Andy and Kevin running your con suite; I know they'd do a great job. I checked the Corflu website; you've haven't taken it over yet. I can see certain folks screaming their heads off if the con isn't just right, so I'd concentrate on keeping more modern folks happy, and letting the older ones stew a little if they aren't completely happy. I hope there will be a virtual consuite set up; it's all I can do these days.

I'll do what I can. I'm working with a small committee (Spike's handling the FAAn Awards, I'm doing programming, Linda's doing The ConSuite, though I'm sure she'll have a huge team). I need to get the Website under control, but first, I understand that we need to find a new Webmaster to take over from Traci Benton.

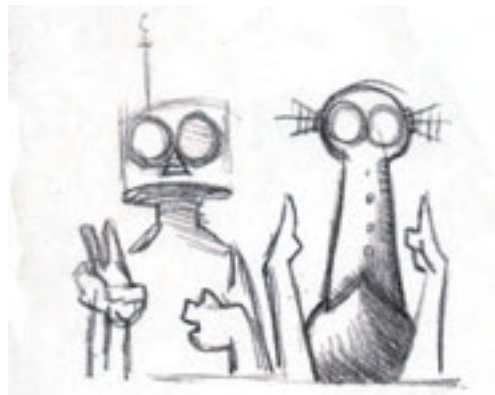
When those two issues of The Drink Tank dedicated to Community and Glee come out, I won't be able to offer any comments on either. I know of them, and both are shown on local television, but I have never seen an episode of either. I want to see your mayor's platform! And no, not the one you'll be standing on...

If you don't end up obsessed with the shows after the issue, your pizza is free!

Hey, John Purcell! Yvonne collected Marvin the Martian for a while. Mostly plastic figures, but we both have Marvin cloisonné pins, and I have a rare Marvin and Duck Dodgers t-shirt. Chris, did you ever get to see Alice in Wonderland? I think it's out of the theatres now, but when it goes to DVD, I think I'll buy it.

Haven't seen Alice, but I'm looking forward to it on DVD!

My loc...not long after writing it, and after some true hassles coming from the chairs, Yvonne and I resigned from the committee of Ad Astra. We fulfilled our commitments for this year's con, but will just attend next year's con. I didn't ask for special treatment, but I did want decent treatment, and neither one of us got that. Oh, well, a good career or 29 years. Next year's con is the 30th Ad Astra, and we will see if



anyone remembers its history. Much is promised; I expect little will be delivered.

I ended up on the Baycon staff as a writer for the newsletter. No real responsibility other than writing copy. That's what I'm good at!

245...Hitman is a comic book I don't think I've ever seen, but then, it has been mumblety-mumble years since I've actually looked in the comic aisles in a comic store. Who finances those thousands of rounds he's always firing off?

Wow, I could write a GIANT thesis on the matter of that last question.

246...Who IS a Charles Dickens these days? I envy you that trip to England. Now that there is officially a London in 2014 Worldcon bid, we have purchased our pre-supports, and we hope to go with most of fandom to England. Toronto used to have something like the Brighton Pier, but that was a number of years ago, and where there was an amusement park was near the lake, there's a major highway. British television is certainly different, and that's why it's so popular in DVD and on PBS.

Does T-dot still have an amusement park?

Excellent trip report. Such trips like that are beyond what I can do...as you can tell from when this is being sent, I am on the job hunt again. My six-month contract with The Law Society of Upper Canada finished this past Friday, and there might not be much chance of getting back on with them again. So, time to look again, about a dozen or so resumes in the mail, we'll see what happens. Yvonne's working for a document shredding company, but she is continuing to take classes to be a law clerk, so she can find something really good.

Walt Wentz mentioned Krispy Kreme donuts, the ring-shaped heart attack. I tried them once...good when warm, congealed and disgusting when cold. They were introduced into Canada, and were bankrupt within two years. I saw in the local papers that these donuts were just introduced into Russia. We'll see if they last any longer there. I will take Tim Horton donuts any day.

I much prefer Dunkin Donuts or the local Stan's Donuts for donut love, but on the other hand, there is a rare donut that doesn't make me happy.

247...handicapping the Hugos. I was monitoring ConReporter.com, and chatting with Cheryl Morgan and others when the announcements were made. Of course, I knew two weeks earlier, but to see the reactions of others (w00t! from Chris, I heard), that was the biggest dish of feelgood I'd had in a while.

I was just happy to know that you were on the ballot!

I hope you're right about Taral. He's been nominated a lot, and his artwork deserves the recognition of a silver rocket. Of course, handing out a Hugo last year meant I got to hold it, even for a split second, to give it to Cheryl, and Dave Howell's Hugo is a heavy sucker. I am very curious as to what design the Australian Hugos will have.

I've always wanted to enter a design, and Linda and I have an idea for a future WorldCon, but you'll have to wait to hear about it.

And, I hope you're wrong about me. It was pointed out elsewhere that for the first time in some time, who know how long, the

nominators and voters are from two non-American Worldcons, which means there's a lot of non-American input into the ballot. That may be a bump from the Canadian Worldcon, and seven Canadians are on the Hugo ballot, including Robert Sawyer. (Whoops, James Cameron makes eight. I hope there will be an Australian bump, and Ditmar and Bruce Gillespie will be on the Reno ballot.) I would like to think I got the benefit on that Canadian bump, but I may have an advantage...over the last 20 years or so, I've gotten a lot of Australian fanzines, so I am hoping that those many Australians who belong to the club in Melbourne may remember my name from Ethel the Aardvark, Thyme, Gegenschein, Weberwoman's Wrevenge, and many other Australian zines, and vote for me. I have my hopes.

I really only see the Gillespie zines from Oz, and Interstellar Ramjet Scoop, but I should have someone grab me zines from AussieCon.

I hope you're worried about becoming irrelevant, because smoke coming from the Gulf be any oil slick clean-up effort venting a lot of anger. Last year I simply wanted the Hugo, and to get it for them, and StarShip same thing. The nominators and voters from the Australian Worldcon all hope for some interesting stuff. ***I just wish that folks who are still getting hard and harder Plus, I'd take Challenger a***

over StarShipSofa anyday.

For Best Dramatic Presentation – Long, I'd be happy with either UP or Star Trek. I never saw Avatar, either, because there was nothing about it that appealed to me at all. Graphic Story...Girl Genius could win it again, but I found the current story over the past year or so has really dragged. Best Novelette...you've got Peter Watts in sixth place, and while his writing may not have the profile it should have, Peter's mix-up with US Customs at the border at Bluewater/Sarnia has given him an enormous profile with many people, so I think he will do better than sixth, but not win it.

That might get him some more attention, but the fact that I knew about the event and I didn't even think that he could finish higher should say something!

And all done, and on page 3. Had to clean it up, and now I have some time to respond to them all. I have one Journey Planet and two

Exhibition Halls to respond to, and those are just three of many to comment on. Wish me luck on the Hugos, and see you soon with another loc.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

Thanks much, Lloyd!

