

POEM AND SONG FESTIVAL

The following are texts or descriptions of original pieces performed at the Poem and Song Festival on Friday evening, August 8, 1986. The Festival was held in Phillips Auditorium of Harvard College Observatory as part of the 75th Anniversary Meeting of the AAVSO.

THOUGHTS OF A VERY VARIABLE VOLUNTEER

I give a toast to variables -
 The observers, NOT the stars.
Amateurs or astronomers
 Your union knows no bars.

You vary in your home towns,
 Your sex, your size, your age.
You use binoculars or scope.
 To find a Nova is the rage.

You pop into the office
 By impulse or by plan.
You linger or you hasten on.
 The bus is handy if you run!

You want to see the building;
 You want to meet the staff;
You want to chat with Janet.
 That isn't all by half.

You're awed by our computers,
 Our office space so gracious,
The library's peace and quiet,
 And the storage rooms are spacious.

Your data clog our pipelines.
 We love it! Send in more!
We chew them up, record them,
 And digest them by the score.

Keep up the work! Stay up all night!
 May darkened skies be always bright
With many variables in sight.
 And may your estimates be right!

Katherine S. Hazen

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Z CAM VARIATIONS

A musical slide show arranged and composed by Gerald P. Dyck was performed by Gerry Dyck on recorder, and Helga Magrath on the guitar. The musical arrangement and improvisations were based on a computer-generated light curve transposed onto a musical staff. The audience was able to follow the musical notes of the performance by observing a portion of the long-term light curve of the variable star Z Camelopardalis.

Gerry Dyck and Helga Magrath

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WRIGHTWOOD CHRONICLES

This poem is dedicated to Clinton B. Ford in recognition of his generosity, dedication to astronomy and his love for limericks.

A variable astronomer named Ford
Made a telescope from a board
He looked at the sky,
Got splinters in his eye
And said with a wink, I'm floored!

A telescope made of wood
Isn't excellent, only good.
I'll make one of steel
Cooperate a good deal
And locate it in Wrightwood.

A one-eyed observer named Cook
Drove to Wrightwood to take a look
But wouldn't you know
There came massive snow
So there's only to sleep and to cook.

A look-alike named Bilodeau
Computed, composed and played so.
For clear skies - only wishes
So Clint did the dishes
And drove around in the snow.

The trip to Wrightwood didn't waste,
Of observing there was only a taste
Stranded in town
No need to frown
A portable 'scope from a case!

Finally the skies did clear
The milky way seemed so near
Inner sanctums I'd say
Right in the driveway
At Ford's cabin of good cheer!

Lewis M. Cook

* * *

THE CLOUDY BAY BLUES

Let me tell you 'bout the clouds 'round dreary old Saginaw Bay;
They roll right in and hang around for days and days.
The only stars I've seen to date;
Was the night they rolled in late.
I said, "Oh, my! Is that the sky?"
Kept observing 'till the moon was high.

I need some L.P.V.'s and some inner sanctums too;
Tryin' for every program star down to fourteenth magnitude.
If these clouds will ever go,
I'm goin' to get me a hundred or so;
Workin' for Janet Mattei and the AAVSO!

Oh nimbo-stratus, what a rotten thing to do:
You're hangin' around just to obscure my view!
There's a supernova up there (I'll bet),
And SS Cygni's developed a flare.
My wife says, "Don't cry; come on inside;
Someone else will be calling JAM's line!"

Got my charts in order and my flashlights all set to go;
 My equatorial's oiled and my mirror just came back from Panchro!
 If these clouds would ever part,
 I could get an early start;
 Workin' for Janet Mattei and the AAVSO!

I've got this month's circular and bulletin forty-nine;
 I've got my Cutters on and a black patch over one eye.
 If the stars come out to play,
 I'm goin' to sleep the whole next day;
 I'll say, "Hi, boss! Don't be cross!"
 All he'll do is dock my pay!

I've got a Scovil atlas and a trusty old Norton's too;
 and my wife's hairdryer is ready to fight the dew!
 If these clouds would ever go,
 I'm going to get me a hundred or so;
 Workin' for Janet Mattei and the AAVSO!
 Workin' for Janet Mattei and the AAVSO....

Charles A. Fausel (FCA)

* * *

HALLEY'S COMET

Halley's Comet cometh
 Can we see it?
 Far from it!
 For as the comet rises,
 Thick clouds invade our
 Skies's!

Robin M. Foster

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MUSICAL MUSINGS ON OBSERVING NIGHT

(a description of the performance)

The "song"... has to do with musical titles descriptive of a night's observing with some commentary and a few bars of each descriptive musical piece. It is intended to be done using 4 different instruments (C flute, alto flute, bass flute, and B-flat clarinet).

Tom Cragg

* * *

I REMEMBER

I remember, I remember Ray Penhallow, he was my father
 - he brought me here through the back roads from Woonsocket

I remember, I remember Leon Campbell sitting at his desk at HCO
 - he gave me an eyepiece and oh, so much encouragement!

I remember, I remember Harlow Shapley welcoming guests at
 his front door - he asked me where I was from.

I remember, I remember Dave Rosebrugh giving a
 talk on boxes or something - it didn't matter what,
 he was so much fun to listen to

I remember, I remember Margaret Mayall and the
1950 Nova Lacertae alert - we got the first
observations in the U. S.

I remember, I remember Clint Ford and the
AAVSO Endowment Fund Campaign - that became
our declaration of independence.

And finally, I remember my 3 1/2-inch Skyscope reflector that
sold for \$19.75 plus postage - it made me a thousand
observations!

That's 40 years ago, but I remember.

William Penhallow

* * *

WHAT STAR IS THIS?

(based on first verse and first chorus by Connie Phillips)
(to the tune of Greensleeves)

What star this is, I cannot tell,
Be it Alkihba or Rigel,
White dwarf, red giant, or in between,
Red, yellow, orange, violet, blue, or green.

O B A F G K M
Are those Balmer lines or Paschen?
O B A F G K M
Is it one of those symbiotics?

I went to check at HCO
The many references I did know.
I read the catalogues with great care,
But no trace of my variable was there.

O B A F, etc.

So on I went to MIT
In hopes that they could answer me,
But nothing more I there could learn.
Disappointed, from their doors I did turn.

O B A F, etc.

At last into AAVSO
My stumbling steps led, my spirits low.
They took one look, then I danced a jig -
By its light curve they knew it was SS Cyg!

K5 V peculiar (U Gem)
TiO bands, Balmer, and Paschen.
K5 V peculiar (U Gem)
It is one of those cataclysmics.

The moral of this tale I sing:
If to AAVSO you will bring
Your query on a variable star,
With their data and resources you'll go far.

Go ask AAVSO -
 On a daily basis their archives grow.
 Go ask AAVSO -
 For good data you just can't beat 'em!

Elizabeth O. Waagen

* * *

VSO'ing

You swear the clouds lasted ten days or more,
 Although the log book says it was really only four.
 Tonight the moon is waning, it does appear;
 Isn't it always full for a week when the sky is clear?

Take some water to heat up for the coffee later
 Hoping it stays clear and does get "later".
 Your mate says "make sure you keep warm";
 Advice which never does you harm.

Finally it is dusk out at the observatory
 Setting up the telescope feels like being out of purgatory.
 Naturally no star can be seen for half an hour at least,
 But one's enthusiasm seems never to cease.

Take care that the finder is precisely collimated,
 As you try to keep from getting too agitated
 About Headquarter's Alert Notice asking to be "closely watched",
 A star which you have consistently botched.

The setting circle lights have flickered out again
 How can one anticipate everything?
 And the old worn batteries are dimming my flashlight
 Maybe it is going to be a short night!

The seeing is not great, according to my eye;
 Yet perhaps it will be better by and by.
 Besides, one must persevere constantly,
 In order to fill Headquarters' computer memory.

Here come some of my neighbors to see the comet.
 Why did they have to pick tonight to do it?
 Don't people know one gets weary of the thing?
 It has been featured and seen since last spring.

Which constellation's variables shall I try for tonight?
 Or would skipping around for a while be all right?
 I realize I should begin with the U Gems.
 Since that is the sequence which Ernst recommends.

I don't know why I can't find that guide star
 I distinctly remember I have to go just this far.
 Ah, the problem is not the four arc minutes or less,
 The problem is I don't know east from west!

There's the triangular group with the seven point three
 What a mixed-up asterism that turned out to be.
 Now locate the ten point seven and the twelve four
 Oh, no, someone turned on the porch light next door!

Use the "quick glance" method according to protocol
 In the meantime you have hit the telescope and lost it all.
 But don't get upset - that's bad for your eyesight,
 I read an article in "Sky and Tel" about it.

The very bright moon is rearing its head,
 and I suppose that means it is time for bed.
 If my portable tape recorder has been working okay,
 Then I won't have to reconstruct observations all day.

For just one month I would like to best Charles Scovill
 He always seems to exceed my total;
 Still, Janet says I am a good observer,
 And I am content to be able to please her.

A final word I leave with you all
 Not about observing - I am having a ball
 But promise you won't tell my literature prof
 I tried to write poetry - he'll write me off!

Dwynal Pettengill (PED)

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CANOPUS

I wander away from the midnight VAX:
 Renounce approximation for a time,
 And, since no one is waiting, I relax,
 Find the stairs that lead to the roof, and climb.

Canopus shimmers over subdued palms,
 The first time it has ever touched my eyes.
 It adds an oddness to familiar calm,
 Reminding me of changes, and I sigh,

Remembering when Orion was cold, but clear.
 Neither he nor I needed anyone near,
 And the things that I didn't know, couldn't see,
 Did not then matter as much to me as now.

I have gained much, but I'm not sure how.
 And for all the time and effort I've spent,
 I'm - not more unhappy, but less content.

Alain Porter

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A SONG ABOUT THE PLEIADES

Sei-ichi Sakuma staged a media-event by "performing" on a portable tape recorder a popular Japanese love song which described the Pleiades in its lyrics.

Sei-ichi Sakuma

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THE AUSTRALIAN ASTRONOMERS' DRINKING SONG

(with apologies to W. S. Gilbert)

When I was young I thought I'd be
 an expert in the field of astronomy.
 I read textbooks voraciously
 and finally graduated with a Ph.D.
 He finally graduated with a Ph.D.!
 And with my Ph.D. in hand
 I thought my chance to get a job was really grand.

So I sent my name and resume
to each observatory listed in Ap.J.
 So he sent his resume
 and a copy of his grades
 to each observatory listed in Ap.J.

For some reply to come to me
I waited for what seemed like an eternity,
and the weeks dragged into months but still
there was nothing in the mail but my student loan bill!
 There was nothing in the mail but his student loan bill!
But finally a reply came through
with a stamp that showed a picture of a kangaroo.
Since I'd never seen the southern sky,
I resolved to go down under and give it a try.
 He had seen the northern lights
 but the south was out of sight,
 so he thought he'd go down under and give it a try.

In Australia I received a chance
to work alone with very hefty research grants.
But I didn't know if I could hack
being stuck out in the middle of the great outback.
 Being stuck out in the middle of the great outback!
So I went, but much too late to know
that my instruments were manufactured by Tasco.
But I got a huge supply of beer,
and that's what kept me going for about a year.
 With a huge supply of beer
 he had vanquished all his fear,
 and that's what kept him going for about a year.

When they found me I was almost lost
from genuflecting nightly to the Southern Cross.
I was dazed and crazed and feverish, too,
from trying to build a transit from a digeri-doo.
 From trying to build a transit from a digeri-doo!
Now, I'm a sane and healthy bloke,
and astronomy I'm leaving to those other folk.
So to heck with Miss Urania,
I'm happy driving taxis in Tasmania.
 So to heck with all the stars,
 to him Comets are just cars,
and he's happy driving taxis in Tasmania!

Ronald B. Sawyer
(performed by David Levy and Peter Jedicke)

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THE STARS GO NOVA

(Sung to the tune of "When Johnny Comes Marching Home")

The stars go nova one by one, KA-BOOM! KA-BOOM!
Nucleosynthesis is done, KA-BOOM! KA-BOOM!
The supernovas dissipate
what fusion energy helped create
and the stars go nova in the galaxy...in the galaxy.

The heavy elements are born, KA-BOOM! KA-BOOM!
And from the stellar cores are torn, KA-BOOM! KA-BOOM!
Shells of gas are strewn through space
distributing matter all over the place
and the spiral arms are littered with debris...with debris.

As years go by the remnants spread, KA-BOOM! KA-BOOM!
 But the Universe is far from dead, KA-BOOM! KA-BOOM!
 To eliminate the tedium
 the interstellar medium
 forms the molecules that make up you and me!

Peter Jedicke and David Bigelow
 (performed by David Levy and Peter Jedicke)

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NEUTRON STAR

(Sung to the tune of "Jealous Heart" by Loretta Lynn)

Neutron star, oh, neutron star, you're massive,
 and your tidal forces are intense.
 You have crushed your atom shells to pieces,
 neutron star, your gravity's immense.

You were once a star like all the others,
 shining brightly in the evening sky.
 'Til your thermonuclear reactions
 consumed all your hydrogen supply.

Neutron star, oh, neutron star, you're spinning,
 'round and 'round at such a fever pitch.
 You conserve your angular momentum
 and speed up with every little glitch.

You were once a star like all the others
 somewhere on the Hertzsprung-Russell graph.
 Now you're in the lower lefthand corner,
 stellar mass reduced by more/less than half.

Neutron star, oh, neutron star, you're pulsing,
 twisting your magnetic lines of force,
 and electrons spewing from your axis
 form a synchrotron emission source.

You were once a star like all the others
 'till your hydrostatic balance failed,
 and you lost your radiation pressure,
 and your outer chromosphere exhaled.

Peter Jedicke
 (performed by David Levy and Peter Jedicke)

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BETELGEUSE

(Sung to the tune of "Edelweiss" by Oscar Hammerstein II)

Betelgeuse Betelgeuse
 Bright red star in Orion
 Soon, I'm told, you'll explode
 So you're worth keeping my eye on.
 Only two hundred parsecs away
 And we know what this means
 You're so near that some year
 You'll blow us all to smith'reens.

Betelgeuse Betelgeuse
 Speckle interferometry
 Seems to show spots that glow

Spoil your spherical symm'try.
 You're losing mass by convecting gas
 To a stationary layer
 Then there must be some dust
 And an ejection sprayer.

Betelgeuse Betelgeuse
 You'll soon go supernova
 When you burst I'll be first
 Among those looking you over.
 Matter in your circumstellar shell,
 tenuous and so wide,
 will, in fact, interact
 with what's going on inside.

Peter Jedicke
 (performed by David Levy and Peter Jedicke)

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STARRY, STARRY SKIES IN APRIL

(Sung to the tune "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory")

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the Whirlpool Nebula
 I have photographed M27 in Vulpecula
 I know my way around the dust lanes of the Milky Way
 I dread the break of day.

Starry, starry skies in April
 Starry, starry skies in April
 Starry, starry skies in April
 And clear, warm nights in May.

The wonders of the heavens are displayed each night to me
 And Nature's laws reveal themselves in everything I see
 I feel the vastness of the void; I hear each evening
 The constellations sing

Starry, starry skies, etc.

(performed by David Levy and Peter Jedicke)

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IT'S A LONG WAY TO BETA CYGNI

(Sung to the tune of "It's a Long Way to Tipperary")

It's a long way to Beta Cygni,
 It's a long way to go.
 It's a long flight to reach the double
 that we call Albireo.
 Goodbye, it could be cent'ries
 'til we're back in town.
 It's a long, long way to Beta Cygni
 'cause our warp drive broke down.

There's a planet 'round Beta Cygni
 where I'm longing to go.
 I have my mem'ries to lead me back there
 to the sweetest girl I know.
 I know that she'll be waiting
 for me to return
 but it's a long, long way to Beta Cygni
 'cause our ramjets won't burn.

My wealthy uncle owned Beta Cygni
 and he just lately died.
 They'll find his will soon and then we'll all see
 how his Empire will divide.
 I could be rich and famous
 long as I'm alive
 but I won't make it back to Beta Cygni
 limping on impulse drive.

Ronald B. Sawyer and Peter Jedicke
 (performed by David Levy and Peter Jedicke)

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SHORELINE BY STARLIGHT

A series of haiku in honor of the AAVSO's 75th anniversary.

Now it clears a bit,
 Clouds scudding, stars winking through
 A cold front come home.

Fall rolls summer stars
 Beneath the curve of treetops.
 From sea come more.

R Scuti is lost,
 Its Shield hung high in maples
 On the ruddy hills.

Autumn waves move in,
 All majesty and longing -
 Cycles of the storms.

Algol, demon star,
 Holds a finely turned stop watch.
 Is Orion late?

Hint of endless time,
 The silent vault of heaven
 Sparks above our heads.

Stick around and see
 More of Seven Sisters bright,
 Swaying through the night.

Jeremy H. Knowles

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WHEN I LOOKED UPON THE HEAVENLY FIRMAMENT

When I looked upon the heavenly firmament this year
 With an air of great expectation,
 The touted Halley ends up a dismal dud!
 But alas, FORD and the 75th AAVSO rise
 majestically on the scene
 To create hurrahs and great exaltation!

Congratulations AAVSO!
 FORD has risen to the fore!
 AAVSO has a lasting monument
 to a great man -
 C. B. FORD galore!

Ray and Jinny Kardas