

Good People and Fellow Folklifers,

This month, I feature an article on **Newman Levy, the Barrister Bard** by Stewart Hendrickson [Reprinted from Victory Review with permission of both Stuart and Anita who is Editor Victory Review Magazine.]

When I read about Newman Levy in the MUSICAL TRADITIONS article that Stewart had written, it woke some long ago and far away memories.

Between the Fall of 1956 and Spring of 1961, taking weekend breaks from chasing a doctorate in chemistry, I became active in the IFAS [the Illini Folk Arts Society.] For our IFAS Friday night sing-alongs we used the long out of print Intercollegiate Outing Association songster book called "Song Fest" Edited by Dick and Beth Best. [Crown Publishers, Inc. of New York, Library of Congress number 54-1206.] It's the frayed yellow colored book Stewart mentions in his article.

In addition, of course, using the spirit duplicators available to us, the IFAS also printed several volumes of the IFAS song book. Alas, I'm again getting distracted.

In kinship with Stewart, I too loved *Thais*. I discovered when I contacted Stewart Hendrickson we had a lot more than a song or two in common. We actually overlapped in our stays at the University of Illinois, and the Chemistry Department, but never met. Anyway, Stuart's addition to the Musical Traditions Column, was something too good not to pass on.

Before I reproduce the Newman Levy Article, I'd like to ask all of you, if you've not done so to become a Tumbleweed Music Festival Volunteer. I've attached a volunteer form to the end of this eTalk to make things easier for you. Volunteer, help us out and use your expanded festival access to meet the performers, and more intimately share our festival, not only with your friends and neighbors, but also with the other folks who time and caring continue to make TMF a fun filled success.

Harry (doc) Babad

hbabad@owt.com

eTalk Editor and member of the 3RFS Board.

PS:

If you need only a text copy of eTalk let me know and I'll send that to you directly inserted into an eMAIL message. Kendal Smith is working to assure those who need a text copy of Folk Talk, that information.

MUSICAL TRADITIONS

Newman Levy – Barrister Bard

By Stewart Hendrickson

When I was a student at Pomona College (Claremont, CA) in the late 1950s, folk music was just appearing on the scene. A classmate of mine was a little unusual since he was one of the few students who had a beard, and he sang folk songs and played guitar. One of the songs he sang was *Thais*, a five-minute humorous synopsis of the opera with witty verses and clever rhymes. With thirteen verses, it is an epic poem set to music.

*One time in Alexandria,
in wicked Alexandria,
Where nights were wild with revelry,
and life was but a game.
There lived, so the report is,
an adventuress and courtesan,
The pride of Alexandria,
and Thais was her name.*

I learned this song from *Song Fest*, “the old yellow songbook,” which was a popular source of folk songs for group singing – sort of like *Rise Up Singing* is today. My two surviving copies are well worn with the covers mostly missing. Lyrics and music were given for each song, but never the source or author.

A few years ago while driving through Death Valley (an appropriate locale for this song), I thought of this song which I hadn’t sung in many years. Much to my astonishment, I knew all the words even though I had never formally memorized it – I always sang it from the book. All I had to do was to put the lines in the right order and I had the whole song, all thirteen verses!

When I sang this song again in public, someone asked me who wrote it. I hadn’t the faintest idea. With my curiosity

piqued, I did a little research. The author turned out to be Newman Levy (1888 – 1966), an interesting man who lived a double life. He was a former Assistant District Attorney of New York City, trial lawyer, and a writer of light verse who loved opera and theater. His father, a highly successful lawyer, insisted that his son become a lawyer, but Newman really wanted to become a writer, lyricist, and a musician like his cousin Richard Rogers. In fact he studied music composition with Deems Taylor and composed musicals as a college undergraduate before going to law school.

In the course of a successful law career, he also became a writer of light verse for the *New Yorker*, the *Saturday Evening Post* and other popular magazines of the early 20th century. He also wrote several books of light verse including *Opera Guyed*, *Theatre Guyed*, *Saturday to Monday*, *Gay But Wistful*, and an autobiography, *My Double Life – Adventures in Law & Letters*.

Thais was one of the epic poems in *Opera Guyed*, his best-known book. This book is a delightful collection of humorous poems describing the stories of many operas in terms that the average guy could understand. Another well-known song came from his poem about the opera *Carmen* set to the tune of the song *El Paso*.

*In Spain, where the courtly Castilian hidalgo
Twangs lightly each night his romantic
guitar,
Where the castanets clink on the gay
piazzetta
And strains of fandangoes are heard from
afar;
There lived, I am told, a bold hussy named
Carmen
A pampered young vamp full of devil and
guile.
Cigarette and cigar men were smitten with*

Carmen;
From near and from far men were caught
with her smile.

Theater Gued is a similar collection of poems about famous plays. I have set some of these poems to music, including *Oedipus Rex*,

List to the story of Oedipus
Rex,
Poor little, misunderstood
little Oedipus,
Victim of sad maladjustment of
sex,
Poor little Oedipus Rex.

When Oedipus was but a babe,
(So runs the tale historical),
His dotting dad betook the lad
(A custom that those ancients
had)
To interview the oracle.

Rain, the story of Sadie Thompson and the missionary, Reverend Davidson,

On the isle of Pago Pago,
land of palm trees, rice and sago,
Where the Chinaman and Dago
dwell with natives dusky hued,
Lived a dissolute and shady,
bold adventuress named Sadie,
Sadie Thompson was the lady,
and the life she lived was lewd.

and *The Three Sisters Karamazov* (set to the tune of the Russian folksong *Stenka Razin*).

His name was Boris Makaloff
Alexis Gregor Mackaloff,
His neighbors called him Grisha
In their quaintly Russian style.
His life was sad but lecherous
Mid landscape bleak and treacherous

Where Nevsky Prospekt pleases
And only man is vile.

Another song that I haven't documented as Newman's, but am quite certain is his because of the same use of words, similar phrases and rhyming patterns, is *Bluebeard*.

A maiden from the Bosphorus,
with eyes as bright as phosphorus,
Once wed the mighty bailiff
of the caliph of Kelat.
Though diligent and zealous,
he was somewhat prone to jealousy,
(Considering her beauty,
'twas his duty to be that!)

If you want the full text of these and other songs from his poems, and the music that I have set them to, you can visit my web site: <http://www.stolaf.edu/people/hend/songs/NewmanLevy.htm>

Newman is said to have replied to George Gershwin's question "I wonder if my music will be played a hundred years from now?" with the answer, "Yes, if you're around to play it!" Quite a wit, he deserves to be better known to a later generation.

Newman Levy (Nov. 30, 1888 - March, 1966) was a former Assistant District Attorney of NYC, trial lawyer, writer of light verse, opera and theater fan. He wrote for the New Yorker Magazine, The Saturday Evening Post, and other periodicals, and published several books of light verse including OPERA GUYED, THEATRE GUYED, SATURDAY TO MONDAY, and GAY BUT WISTFUL. He wrote an autobiography, MY DOUBLE LIFE, in 1958. He is said to have replied to George Gershwin's question, "I wonder if my music will be played a hundred years from now?" with the answer, "Yes, if you're around to play it!" Quite a wit, he deserves to be better known to a later generation.

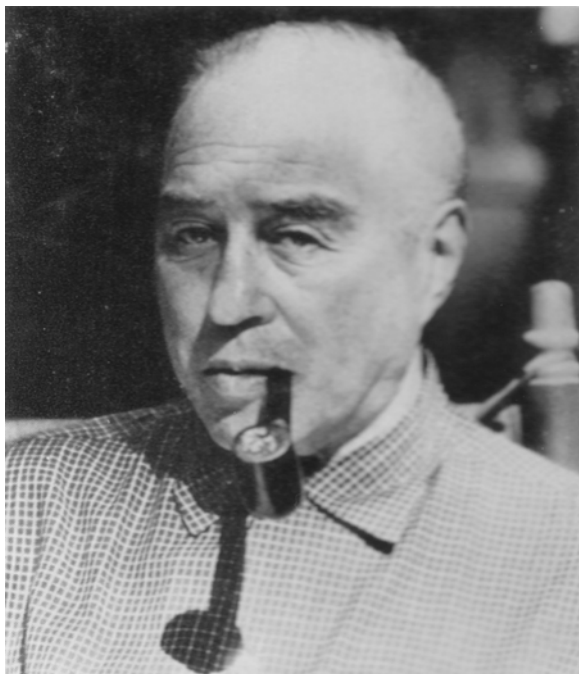


Photo credit: Newman Levy by Eva Garshon Levy

Stewart Hendrickson is Chemistry Professor Emeritus – St. Olaf College, Research Professor Emeritus – University of Washington, and in his new career, an unemployed folk musician (voice, fiddle, guitar; <http://www.stolaf.edu/people/hend/music.html>). Contact him at hend@stolaf.edu for questions, ideas or comments.



Dear friends of Three Rivers Folklife Society and Tumbleweed Music Festival
 (www.3rfs.org)

This year we are trying to be a little more organized in our recruitment of volunteers for Tumbleweed Music Festival-hence this form. The festival is September 3rd& 4th this year. We are asking you early to sign up early for the work crews and time frames of your choice. We will be calling you later about specific times and assignments, but it will help us greatly if we know your preferences. Positions will be filled on a first applied, first scheduled basis. Thanks! Tumbleweed needs you! Our volunteers are the heart and soul of Tumbleweed.

Name(s) _____ E -
 Mail _____
 Address _____ City _____ State _____ ZIP _____
 Phone: Day _____ Eve _____ Cell # _____ Best time to call _____
 Employer(s) (optional) _____ (This information is helpful for grants, etc.)
 Past jobs at Tumbleweed, you enjoyed doing _____

 Special requests or needs _____

Please check you preferences for work crews, specialty jobs, and days and time periods you would be available. If more than one person in a family will be working, fill in names where appropriate. Normal shifts are 3 hours-or more if you can

Friday Setup Crew- {Sets up fencing and info booth) 4-8 PM or whenever we are done _____

Monday Unload Truck & Put Things Away Crew time TBA _____

Days of Festival	Saturday		Sunday	
	AM	PM	AM	PM
Host performers in my (our) home or backyard				
Information booth (on grounds)				
Auxiliary information booth (in Community Center)				
Kitchen Crew (prepare meals)				
Hospitality crew (serve food and maintain hospitality area)				
Sound crew (set up sound, run soundboards or assist with sound)				
Emcee/stage manager (introduce performers, keep stages on time)				
Stage support (gofer, surveys, raffle sales, etc)				
Ticket takers for evening events				
Vendor hospitality (interface with vendors, keep 'em happy}				
Parking monitors (deal with traffic and parking problems)				
Instrument check monitors (check in and guard instruments)				
Dance stage support (emcee and run simple sound set ups)				
Contra dance crew (set-up, cleanup, and hospitality)				

Pick up/fold up crew (Load truck on Sat and Sunday evenings)				
Truck Driver for U-Haul truck				
Baked goods provider (cookies, muffins, coffeecakes, etc.)				
Provide Golf Cart(s) for use on festival grounds				
Pass out, Collect., Charge Two Way Radios (Radio Chief)				

Pre-festival help is also needed: Check where you can help

Soliciting sponsors ____ Sending out press releases ____ Advertising ____

Making Buttons _____

Distribute Posters _____ Flyers _____ Yard Signs _____ Applications

Collecting food donations _____ Collecting sponsors' banners ____ other

Volunteers' Gathering & Orientation/Training Session will be Sunday, August 28th, 1:00 At Howard Amon Gazebo

Please return this form ASAP to Bruce Mesford, 1205 Roberdeau, Richland, WA, 99352. or call 509-946-9226 email mesgrump@hotmail.com

A one page version of this form is available in our website