

peared in vaudeville as “Those Tailored Italian Girls.” Their repertoire included “Kiss Me Again,” “Swanee River,” and “Are You from Dixie?” The transition to the Met was as outrageous as it sounds, including recognition not only by Caruso but by Victor Maurel, the first Iago and the first Falstaff. The next thing she knew Rosa, at the age of 21, had a contract with the Met and a lot to learn. Ponselle responded with all the effort she could muster, but she never completely overcame her fear of performing. She retired from the stage in 1939, though she maintained an engagement with the musical world in Baltimore and also coached such notables as Placido Domingo, Sherrill Milnes, Raina Kabaivanska, and James Morris. The recordings she made in 1954 show that she was still Rosa Ponselle, and that her voice had darkened and deepened with age.

Rosa Ponselle was more than a voice, or even The Voice. She was a

sportswoman, a great lady, and, though a star, a person who maintained a certain honesty and simplicity all her life. She was a great singing actress with natural dramatic instincts, who believed what she sang. She was endowed with a tremendous gift, which included her “mask”—she liked to think she looked like Caruso. And she used that gift very well.

Like many artists, she was divided against herself in some way. She had an unwise relationship with an unscrupulous man in the 1930’s, and married an abusive one later. Perhaps we can say that, like Tosca, she lived for art, and had to suffer in life. She was a diva after all and a great American, one whose image is now on a postage stamp.

The other compensation, besides Phillips-Matz’s biography, is the legacy of the recordings of Rosa Ponselle. All of them are of compelling interest, and some are indispensable experiences. The collection of Columbia acoustics

published by Pearl is mandatory—we hear her first operatic work as well as her vaudeville songs. Her later Victor electricals and her Villa Pace recordings have been gathered by Romophone. The 1935 broadcast of *La Traviata*, available on Pearl, wins no acoustical plaudits, but is a stunning demonstration of Ponselle’s mastery.

Listening to Ponselle is something else—a glass of Barolo and a kick in the pants. What other singer of any kind so combines power and beauty, strength and agility, conviction and plush? How can we not think of Rosa Ponselle first, last, and always when we think of Verdi’s two Leonoras, of Bellini’s Norma, of Elvira and Aida—whenever, indeed, we think of music in the night and an inviolable voice?

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Keeping Up With the News

by Harold McCurdy

Bleak is the prospect: wars and rumors of war,
Floods, or dearth of rain,
Steady or unsteady allergies, or
Diseases of the brain.

We crawlers on the earth, we squalid flocks,
Victims of circumstance,
Worship the high technology that unlocks
Pandora’s box of Chance.

Our Doppler systems warn of passing storms
That might blow us away,
Our telescopes of asteroidal swarms
Threatening a future day.

For these and other benefits, and those
Hyped by the President,
We thank our scientists, and take the blows
They, unintending, invent.

Meanwhile, sex scandals give us some relief.
Our lives would otherwise
Be purely Hobbesian—brutish, nasty, and brief,
Under foreboding skies.

Letter From Montana

by Uri Dowbenko

The Freeman Trial



Ever heard of the Federal Protective Service? Like the commercial says—you will. I was taking a photo of the federal courthouse in Billings, Montana, when the police pulled up and stopped me. They asked me for my I.D. When I looked more closely at the cop's badge, I realized it wasn't the Billings Police. It wasn't the Montana State Police. It wasn't the Montana Highway Patrol. It wasn't the FBI or the United States Marshals. It was—surprise!—the Federal Protective Service. The cop's badge read "GSA."

The General Services Administration has a police force that stops people on American city streets? You could just say, "Bad Cop—No Donut," and let it go at that. But I was bold. I called Bill Bearden, media spokesman for the GSA. He defended the FPS: "The Federal Protective Service provides physical security, law enforcement and other services in federal buildings, U.S. courthouses, and GSA-controlled leased space. They are the federal police force. If they didn't know you were a reporter and they just saw you taking pictures of a federal building, it would send a flag to them to be security conscious enough to at least check out who you were." For "if they didn't do things like that, you could have the recurrence of the Oklahoma City bombing. It sounds like they were simply doing their job."

"You know what the spin on this story is?" I asked him. "It's kinder, gentler Nazis in Billings, Montana." "Ha, ha, ha," Bill laughed. "You laugh there in Washington D.C.," I said, "but this is absolutely outrageous."

Just like back in the U.S.S.R., boy. Under the Soviet dictatorship, people were forbidden to photograph certain public buildings. I shouldn't complain,

though. Unlike the KGB, the GSA cops did not confiscate my camera or club me with nightsticks.

Living in a police state can make you paranoid. There's no doubt about it—the federal government does target groups like the Republic of Texas and the so-called Montana Freeman, who are on trial here in Billings. The Montana Freeman are a mixed bag of individuals who can best be characterized by being in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong "friends." Edwin Clark was a rancher and farmer in northeastern Montana. Elwin Ward happened to arrive just as the feds decided to create a "standoff." Jon Barry Nelson and Stewart Waterhouse were apparently "idealistic members of the militia who snuck onto the Clark ranch in order to help prevent the FBI from creating another Waco-type massacre," according to legal investigator Phillip Hoag. Steven, John, and James Hance were not "Montana Freeman" either, but evidently fugitives from criminal charges in North Carolina.

The Freeman were each charged with seven counts, ranging from accessory after the fact, bank fraud, and false claim to the IRS to illegal possession of firearms. There were seven defendants: Steven Charles Hance, John Richard Hance, James Edward Hance, Jon Barry Nelson, Elwin Ward, Stewart Waterhouse, and Edwin Clark. And this is just the first trial; the defendants were accused of being "accessories after the fact" because they didn't roll over and testify against the "big fish," Leroy Schweitzer.

Like the proverbial revolution, the Montana Freeman Trial will not be televised. You can't get it on Court TV. You can't get it on C-SPAN. You have to go there in person, or read the AP—Associated Propaganda—to get the story.

The scene is Billings, a squalid grease-spot of a town in eastern Montana. Earlier in the century, it had a reputation as the place where mobsters would lay low when things got too hot in Chicago. Today it's a haggard-looking burg. Pedestrians look like they're waiting to get their next dose of crystal meth. It's a sleazy town with undercurrents of crime and corruption. The feds in their cheap blue suits somehow fit in perfectly.

It was a long, strange trip to Billings. Coming into town, you see billboards for "K-BULL Non Stop Country" and "Ostrich Farm Investors Welcome," then at least four used car lots for mobile homes. It's an overcast winter sky—and a bleak forecast for freedom in America.

Inside the courthouse, you sit on hard wooden benches like church pews. Watching the spectacle of justice requires penitence, patience, and a hard rear end. U.S. District Judge John C. Coughenour from Seattle is presiding. The chief prosecutor is Assistant U.S. Attorney Jim Seykora, an overbearing, arrogant, middle-aged white man who acts as if he has all the power and resources of the federal government behind him. Don't kid yourself—he does.

Five of the defendants are not in the courthouse. The trial itself is staged like performance art or maybe a scene out of Kafka. Men are carried out of the courtroom for swearing. Someone else yells that the judge is under arrest. Like the Marx Brothers in *A Day at the Courthouse*, the Freeman claim they are beyond the prosecutors' jurisdiction. Only two of the defendants remain—Edwin Clark, 47, and Elwin Ward, 57. From the timely and speedy trial department—they had been in prison for more than 600 days for refusing to recognize the jurisdiction of the court.

"For Elwin Ward, this case is about his family," says attorney David A. Duke in his opening statement. He shows the jury photos of Ward's wife and children as well as a map of the United States which marks Ward's cross-country journey to retrieve his children, kidnapped by his wife's disgruntled ex-husband.

And how did the Wards get involved with Leroy Schweitzer, the kingpin Freeman? "They were seeking a legal way to get Steve Magnum [the ex] out of their lives," continues Duke. "They took the class [which Schweitzer offered on common law practices] and the proof packet, proof and evidence from Schweitzer that things were working. They were not motivated by money, but resolving their custody problem."

"They showed up in Justus Township in the 17th month of the 18-month investigation by the government, on March 25, 1996, starting the 81-day