

Year One, Week Two

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22 Mar 2020

Sunday

Well. A few things have happened since I last wrote to you! The times have become interesting, to say the least. We have continued to isolate ourselves at home, with no close contact with anyone, running only a very few errands as necessary. For people with, in theory, nothing to do, we have been busier than ever. So I'm not going to write a lot tonight; it is already almost 10 p.m. and I am going to start a live stream on Twitch at 11.

My Live Streams

I will try to do these as regularly as I can, depending on response. You can find my Lonely Faces Club stream here, but of course only when I'm actually doing one. So check my Twitter feed. I will also announce the streams on Facebook, although in general I don't spend much time on Facebook. I think anyone can listen to the Twitch stream without an account, but will need to make an account if you want to comment.

Last Friday I wrote:

I'm sending this issue out a few days early, on Friday evening, because I want to try to spend the weekend unwinding a little bit. I won't have an opera to review, unfortunately, as the rest of the Metropolitan Opera's season has been canceled. I called to ask them if they would do a special live-stream performance for me, so I could review it for my newsletter, but for some reason they hung up the phone.

Shortly after I wrote that, the Met announced they were going to stream a different recorded opera every evening at <https://metopera.org>. And so we've been watching some amazing operas, although it hasn't been easy to keep the kids quiet and settled enough to watch.

The Metropolitan Opera Free Streams

After a little bit of frustration trying to get the stream going on Monday night — I think they under-estimated the demand — we watched most of *Carmen* on Monday night. It was presented without subtitles, which made it a bit less interesting for us. The music is very familiar, though, and I’ve seen this opera before, in the form of the 1954 film, *Carmen Jones*, starring Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte.

On Tuesday night we watched *La boheme*. Well, actually I went to bed after the first half. The Met’s *La boheme* had truly incredible sets.

Similarly, I made it through only about half of *Il Trovatore* on Wednesday night before I had to go to bed.

We didn’t watch any of *La Traviata* on Thursday, although I listened to the music while I worked in my home office on Friday, and may have glanced at my personal laptop’s screen a few times during the final act (don’t tell my boss).

On Friday night we watched *La Fille du Régiment*, which was a big hit — it’s a comic opera, and everyone loved it. It was very welcome after the tragic deaths by respiratory illness!

The Met production has lots of terrific visual gags and great moments of physical comedy, as well as beautiful singing. We didn’t manage to see *Lucia di Lammermoor* at all, but I think we’ll live. I will probably listen to tonight’s opera, *Eugene Onegin*, tomorrow while working on code.

The Met has announced that next week will be Wagner week. I know very little about Wagner except for the famous Bugs Bunny cartoons, but I am hoping to watch every one of the next week’s operas.

On March 18th I posted an update on Facebook:

Personal news update:

Went in to the office Monday since there hadn’t yet been clear guidance on whether we could work from home. Most of the engineering staff were leaving. So I packed up a couple of boxes of sophisticated electronic gear (aka “a pile of my junk”) and got set up in my basement office. Don’t ask me how it’s going, OK? It’s going. I can get stuff done but there are various issues, like not being able to get on the VPN yet.

Last night after work hours I went to pick up a package, maintaining a “no contact” protocol — wiped down the doorknob with a Clorox wipe, used my RFID ID to unlock the door. Got the package. Wiped it down with a Clorox wipe. Then back out.

There’s a local farm that would sell us some processed chickens, so

we arranged a “no contact” delivery — Grace paid over the phone, I drove up, opened the trunk, and got back in the car. They came out in gloves with bagged-up chickens and stuck it in the trunk, and that was that.

Grace, Joy, and I check our temperatures every day. No one has a fever. Some mild cold/allergy symptoms. So we’ll just have to see how it goes. If one of us comes down with the virus it seems very likely we all have it already. But we have designated an “internal hot zone.” If one of the adults gets a fever we’ll put that person in the hot zone and do our best to quarantine at home.

So! What are we doing to relieve stress and anxiety? Because there’s plenty of that to go around!

The kids are playing outside and older kids are required to take the babies for walks. We’ve been watching the Metropolitan Opera live streams as best we can (it turns out that screaming babies don’t really enjoy opera all that much). I need to be getting more sleep than I’m getting (kids are feeling the disruption, so acting up). I need to be getting more exercise than I’m getting. We have a treadmill and a very basic weight bench set up so it’s possible, it’s just a matter of trying to find time.

I am working on ideas for live stream things I can do, although (go figure) it’s not all that fun to get off the computer after a work day on the computer and then jump back on the computer.

Too, we’re keenly aware of just how hard this is already hitting workers and trying to figure out how we can do volunteer mutual aid work in our community. I suspect that the small local businesses we’ve been trying to support since moving here may not make it.

How are you all doing?

While much has changed in the news — so much! — it doesn’t feel as if much has changed at home. We all still seem well. We are getting adjusted to isolation. Yesterday I took a long “no contact” walk down the dirt roads in our neighborhood, with the older kids. Today we had bacon and oatmeal for breakfast, and potato soup for dinner with home-made coleslaw. I’ve been teach the kids to use dumbbells. I’m craving takeout pizza. I’m craving an egg salad sandwich from Joe and Rosie’s. But for the foreseeable future we’re unfortunately not going to even get takeout from restaurants. We’re setting up boxes to allow our mail to sit for three days before we open it. We’re making reusable face masks out of old t-shirts to use when one of us has to go into Costco or GFS. I am terrified that the company I work for will decide to shut down the entire Ann

Arbor operation. I can't imagine trying to interview for a new senior software engineering position under these circumstances.

Tonight we had a slightly belated bonfire to celebrate the spring Equinox. At dusk we got a fire going in the front yard and Joy read a poem by Wendell Berry, called "A Purification." At the risk of getting in trouble with copyright, here's the poem:

*At start of spring I open a trench
in the ground. I put into it
the winter's accumulation of paper,
pages I do not want to read
again, useless words, fragments,
errors. And I put into it
the contents of the outhouse:
light of the sun, growth of the ground,
finished with one of their journeys.
To the sky, to the wind, then,
and to the faithful trees, I confess
my sins: that I have not been happy
enough, considering my good luck;
have listened to too much noise;
have been inattentive to wonders;
have lusted after praise.
And then upon the gathered refuse
of mind and body, I close the trench,
folding shut again the dark,
the deathless earth. Beneath that seal
the old escapes into the new.*

I can't really top that, and I need to start my live stream in a few minutes, so I'm not even going to try. Stay safe, everyone, and get in touch to tell me how you are doing; if you give me your permission, I'll include your responses in the next newsletter.

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