

# The **MONTEBELLO** Voice

an independent gazette

fools rush in

April 1, 2021





# Vaccine Lingua

By Sue Allen

COVID-19 vaccines have spawned – among other things – a whole new lexicon. We have become fluent in the strangest words, like Pfizer, which looks unpronounceable but now flows off the tip of our tongues. Some can even spell it, keeping in mind that silent “P.” We speak fluently of Moderna, AstraZeneca, J & J, and CoronaVac. We’ve become experts on these vaccines that didn’t exist six months ago, treating them like sports teams.

“I don’t know about AstraZeneca – it didn’t do so well in the trials.”

“Man, Moderna just crushed it.”

“J & J won’t make it to the playoffs.”

“WTF is CoronaVac? Loser.”

The vaccine is now the stuff of small talk. Get on the elevator and instead of

saying, “Nice weather,” someone behind a mask will ask, “Have you been jabbed yet?” You know that when someone says, “I got number one already and am going for number two next week,” they are not referring to pee and poo.

Some vaccine lingo makes us sound like eager masochists or junkies: “I can’t wait to be jabbed,” or “That needle’s going to feel so good.”

It brings a whole new meaning to roll-out, which has nothing to do with the polka song Roll Out the Barrels.

Sprinkled across social and mass media are new terms reflecting our expanding vaccination culture:

- Vaccine hesitancy
- Vaccine skepticism
- Antivaxxer
- Vaccine envy

- Vaccine nationalism
- Half-vaxxed
- Vaxcation

And the latest word? “Vaxhole,” as in someone who gets fully vaccinated, then posts a selfie on Facebook from a bar in Cancun.

We’re rolling up our sleeves and chatting about it at record rates, inching toward herd immunity, one poke at a time. When we started this thing, little did we know that getting humans to cooperate would be harder than herding cats...well, maybe not that hard. Cats are definitely antivaxxers with their fangs and claws out.

My hope is that a new term will come to fruition very soon – Vaccine: Mission Accomplished. **M**



Photo by Linda Brownlee  
The Montebello Voice

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Cover photo by Casey Hartman

# Saturday morning with Jimmy Levine

By Bonnie Jacob

When conductor James Levine died on March 9, a lot of people had a lot to say. I'm not surprised. Within the select society of classical music, he was something of a godfather, until he wasn't. His rise and fall is grist for biographers, psychologists, or – who knows – maybe even an opera.

I have a story, too. It happened almost 70 years ago, when I spent an hour playing a game with a child who I remember as Jimmy, whose life and career path were already being set. I didn't know that. I just saw a kid, a little unkempt and ingratiating, who was totally in command once the music started.

It certainly didn't occur to me that he would become one of the most celebrated orchestral conductors of our era, with a career that spanned decades at the Metropolitan Opera, and included the Boston Symphony, and many other venues around the world. Or that he would end that career in Palm Springs, California, following debilitating illness, accusations of sexual predation, professional ostracism, and lawsuits. That Saturday morning in 1954, I was just trying to avoid mortifying myself with thousands of Cincinnati, Ohio, music lovers. Spoiler alert: I didn't succeed.

I was 11 at the time, and had earned my way to the finals of *Sharps and Flats*, a tournament-style musical game show featuring sixth-graders from the city's elementary schools, supported by Cincinnati's own Baldwin Piano Company and broadcast on a local radio station. The first round had been easy – the competitors were all from my school and the topic was John Philip Sousa. I won a young person's book of musical history, signed by Cincinnati Sympho-

ny Orchestra conductor Thor Johnson.

Some weeks later, the semi-final round brought together winners from several schools and, again, didn't require real knowledge of musical works – just information. Once more, I walked out with first prize: a season subscription to the next year's series of



13-year-old James Levine and Van Cliburn playing at Marlboro in 1956

Young People's concerts and a seat at the table for the final round, scheduled for the following Saturday.

As I left the radio studio with my Dad, who had been chatting up production folk along with other parents, he shared a bit of scuttlebutt: the final round questions would be "all musical recognition." In other words, could I identify Beethoven's *Fifth* when I heard it? The short answer: no.

I had, in fact, been exposed to music all my life – my Dad's parents had been popular local performers, and two of my uncles had studied with a CSO concertmaster – but my knowledge of the classical repertoire was limited to kid-friendly selections I'd learned in music class, like *Carnival of the Animals* and *The Nutcracker*. I did know that I could binge on symphonies and concertos all week and still wouldn't retain enough to win. I just had to hope that

the other kid finalists knew even less than I did.

Saturday morning, I walked into the studio and took a seat at the big table with a microphone in the middle. All the contestants were two-time winners, so we felt as comfortable as kids could be at the center of attention. I don't remember when Jimmy Levine arrived. I do remember him sitting a couple of chairs to my right, chatting with the host, a Baldwin executive named Dick Fluke. He made a lame joke: "My dad told me that if I win, it will be by a Fluke." Mr. Fluke might have chuckled; I don't think any of the rest of us figured it out.

Soon the red light flashed above the studio door, we sat up in our chairs, our host introduced us, and called for the first piece of music. I remember it was an instrumental work, beyond that, I couldn't say. Jimmy could, and did.

And so it went for the rest of the show. Clip after clip of familiar themes by well-known composers. Jimmy pretty much ran the table. One other boy and I managed to identify a composition apiece. No one else had scored. Then, our host introduced the final selection – incredibly, something I recognized. And – an act of mercy, perhaps – Jimmy didn't call out its title immediately.

Of course, he knew what it was. Still, he waited. But instead of seizing the gift, I just sat there – was this a trick? Finally, the other boy with a right answer blurted "Waltz of the Flowers," from *The Nutcracker*. His courage earned him second place. With my single right answer, I came in third.

Driving home with my Dad, I didn't feel bad about losing, (though I did regret not pouncing on *Nutcracker*). Dad and I agreed that Jimmy was someone special – absorbed in music all his life, gifted with skills that never could be learned from books. As his prize for



## personal history



winning the *Sharps and Flats* finals, we knew, he would receive a pair of subscriptions to the CSO's next adult concert season. We didn't know – at least I didn't—that at age 10, he already had made his debut as a soloist with the orchestra at a Young People's Concert, performing Felix Mendelssohn's *Piano Concerto No. 2*.

Throughout a career in arts promotion, I've met and worked with more famous performers and organizations than I can readily count – from living legends like Marcel Marceau and principals of the Bolshoi Ballet, to award-winning actors, to young upstarts shaking things up. I've worked with a leading concert impresario and Pavarotti's fabled manager. But I never again met James Levine, or even heard one of his concerts in person.

Once, while working at the Public Broadcasting Service, I did ask a Met Opera publicist, in the most respectful of tones, if it might be possible to interview Maestro Levine for a feature I was writing about the upcoming *Live from the Met* season. She, as if humoring a small child who had asked for the moon, told me it was not.

All in all, I think that's a good thing. I probably would have tried to tell him this story.

### Afterward

Later narratives about James Levine's abusive behavior, both personal and professional, going back decades, seem to suggest that his downfall was as inevitable as his success. But was it?

When I was writing this piece, I was remembering a child with astonishing gifts, already at the edge of a legendary career. I'd had a glimpse of the benefits but also the costs: how he related (or didn't relate) to other children; his confident-but-awkward interplay with grown-ups; his will to win and, perhaps, to please; the unkempt appearance that was a mini-me of his familiar look as an adult.

That's the story I've told myself all these years. But as I revisit that Saturday morning, I see that there's more to think about. Such as: How did it happen that a boy with prodigy-level skills was competing on a kids' game show? Was it his idea or someone else's? Of course, he had every right to be there – he was a student at a city school at the qualifying age and grade level, even if

he was receiving stellar tutelage on the side. But why did he want to?

Jimmy had already performed with the CSO, so, if not a professional, he certainly was out of our league. This might explain why someone tipped my Dad (and other parents, too?) about the format of the final round. Were they trying to level the playing field, if only a little?

I do know that many great musicians, like elite athletes, are identified, instructed, protected, and managed by adults from an early age. Was Jimmy's appearance on *Sharps and Flats* an opportunity for him to get into the sandbox with other kids? A chance for him to excel at a game only he knew how to play? Something to add to his performance credits? And did he feel it all was a throwaway, or was he truly happy with the win?

Finally, I have to wonder if the other kid contestants remember that morning as I did: As a rare, spontaneous moment with a young artist, as open and accessible as he would ever be. Were we surprised by all the things – the best and the worst – that he would grow up and do?

Or did we know it all along? 📖



*Travel in style*

## Another option: small ships

By Bob Shea

“To travel is to live.”

*Hans Christian Anderson (1805-1872)*

### When? Some day?

Next fall? Maybe 2022? Many of us have spent the last year thinking about a trip we want to take. It may be just to get away from what has been our unchanging reality for far too long, or to visit a distant loved one, or a trip to a favorite city, or maybe even an international trip that has lingered on our bucket list for years. Whatever category, we have the mindset of “please, if not soon, when?”

For many of us, our travel has been like the stages in our lives. Recall “Europe on \$10 a day and a EuroPass” when all we needed was a rucksack filled with a spirit of adventure. Then careers, kids, and budgets made Disneyland, camping, and grandma’s house some of the preferred destinations. As empty-nesters, we expanded our horizons to quaint B&Bs, package tours, or mega-cruise ships with 4000+ of our closest friends. Our travel plans evolved as we had more disposable income, time, and freedom.

What is the next step?

As one who has visited 57 countries and all 7 continents, I would suggest that we might consider a small ship cruise as a next logical step. I define a small ship as one with less than 120 passengers. A disclaimer: I have taken 11 small ship cruises with one company. However, there are many reputable companies, or were before the pandemic shutdown, with many of the same attributes, but I do have my favorite. For one thing, it owns most of

its ships, and thus can mandate standards not always possible on a leased ship.

I have enjoyed river cruises from Paris to Normandy on the Seine, Paris to Nice on the Rhone, Nuremberg to Vienna on the Main and Danube for the annual Christmas markets, Amsterdam to Vienna on the Rhine-Main-Danube (twice), Antwerp to Basel on the Rhine-Moselle, Moscow to Saint Petersburg on multiple rivers and lakes, Wuhan to Chongqing on the Yangtze, and open sea small ships from Ushuaia (Argentina) to Antarctica via the Drake Passage, Barcelona to Lisbon with port calls along the Mediterranean including Gibraltar, and London to Edinburgh circling the UK with port calls in Wales, Ireland, the Outer Hebrides, the Orkney Islands, and Aberdeen. Plus shorter cruises on the Nile from Luxor to Aswan and a 3-day Atlantic to Pacific transit of the Panama Canal on a 24-passenger catamaran, both part of longer in-country programs. What are the small ship attractions?

The biggest are:

- 1) Your hotel travels with you, so you unpack and pack just once in two weeks.
- 2) Major cities, the ones you most want to visit, are usually located on rivers or along the coast with almost downtown docking facilities. Example in both Regensburg and Cologne, Germany, the ship docks within two blocks of the city center, and in Valencia, Spain, we docked a 8-minute walk from the city center.
- 3) The small number of passengers



allow flexibility in dining, disembarking, and attentiveness of the staff. Note below the crew-to-passenger ratio.

4) The smaller ships can also visit cities that the mega ships can only dream of visiting. An example: The M/V Clio was able to cruise 50 miles up the Guadalquivir River to Seville where we docked close to the downtown wonders of that ancient city.

5) Small group gatherings on board for demonstrations of local cooking and art, plus guest speakers and local historians.

Other distinct advantages include informal dining on exceptional multi-course meals prepared by international chefs; a separate program director for each 25-30 passengers who is with you all day everyday both on and off the ship (some companies have just one program director who does not leave





THE M/V CLIO

the ship when in port); the program directors are from the area, but have exceptional English skills; on-board local entertainment when the ship stays in a city over-night; local guides in each port who love to show the small groups their hometowns; and passenger-controlled time management. By that I mean that the daily schedule is divided into 3 parts: 1) Included tours of local highlights (walking and by coach) with many included lunches in local restaurants, 2) Optional tours that are available but not mandatory, and 3) Free time to revisit the city for personal excursions with scheduled shuttle buses to and from the ship, to meet new friends, to play bridge, or even nap.

With four groups, each with its own program director and a separate coach in each port, it requires only minutes to disembark or reboard. Try that on a mega ship with 4,000+ passengers. By the second day of the cruise, the program director and the staff members all know your first name, your limitations, and your favorite drink at the bar. With open seating at meals, you meet new friends everyday in a casual setting where the multi-course meal is elegant without having to dress elegantly unless you want to “dress up.” Lunch and dinner include complimentary beer or wine. There are mini-gyms, libraries, sun decks, bars, and an international but English-speaking ship’s staff that

prides itself in spoiling you in every way possible. Be careful what you ask for, as a staff member will do everything possible to make it happen. Also, all the cabins are outside cabins, some with balconies, thereby avoiding the claustrophobic feeling of being in a windowless box.

One other feature of the company I travel with is that its clients are limited to Americans, thus avoiding complications of multiple languages on board. Another is personal wireless head sets that allow one to hear the mic’d program director or the local guide even on busy streets and crowded markets without having to cluster close to him or her.

For those who like numbers, some facts on the two typical ships pictured:

	<b>The M/V Clio</b> <i>open-sea cruises</i>	<b>The M/S Bizet</b> Grand Circle Cruise Lines <i>river cruises</i>
Length:	328 feet	415 feet
Beam:	46 feet	38 feet
Draft:	11 feet	6 feet
Passengers:	89	120
Crew:	60	33
Decks:	5	4
Elevator:	yes	yes
Program directors:	3	4

The river cruise ships have to be long, low, and narrow to fit under low bridges and through the many locks within Europe river system that normally have a maximum width of 40 feet. For example, there are a total of 66 locks on the 945 miles between Amsterdam and Vienna. The crown jewel is the 106 mile-long Main-Danube Canal with many locks including three that lift or lower the ship 80 feet within a single lock. The highest lock is 1,332 feet above sea level. The system was first attempted in 793 AD by Charlemagne, and later by King Ludwig I of Bavaria in the 1850s. The engineering dream of connecting the North and Black Seas was not completed until 1992.

As an aside, I quoted Hans Christian Anderson above. According to legend, Hans was a prolific traveler who gained a reputation for being a skin-flint, who often overstayed his welcome by months as he visited other literary greats of his time, such as Charles Dickens, and who never hosted his peers at his home in Odense, Denmark. I wonder if the words “off others” were part of his original quote. Maybe?

I highly recommend exploring the world of small ship cruises once we can again safely dust off our passports. If I can answer any questions about this exceptional travel option, email me at [Robertshea0612@gmail.com](mailto:Robertshea0612@gmail.com). 📧



# walks 'n wags





## walks 'n wags



*Photos by Dian McDonald*  
The Montebello Voice



flights of fancy



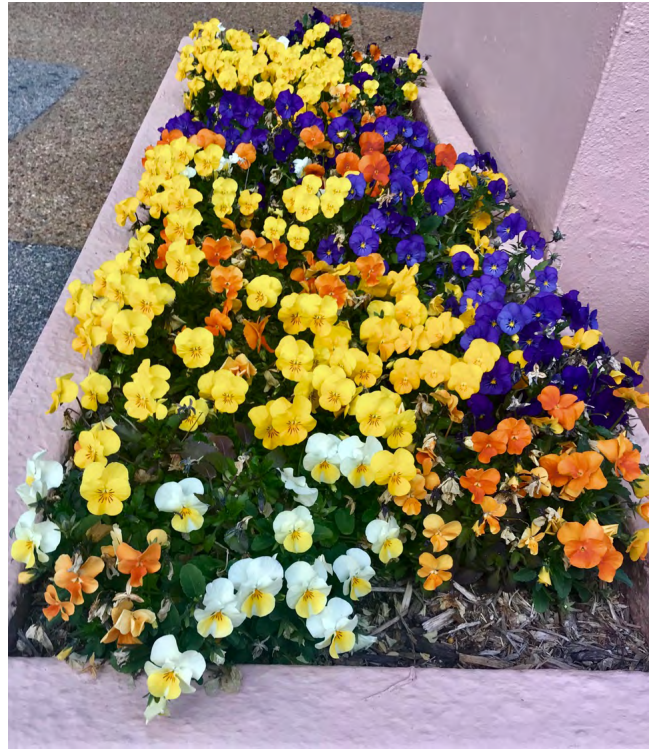


## early bloomers





early bloomers





The Montebello Grounds Committee Presents:



## The Birds of Montebello

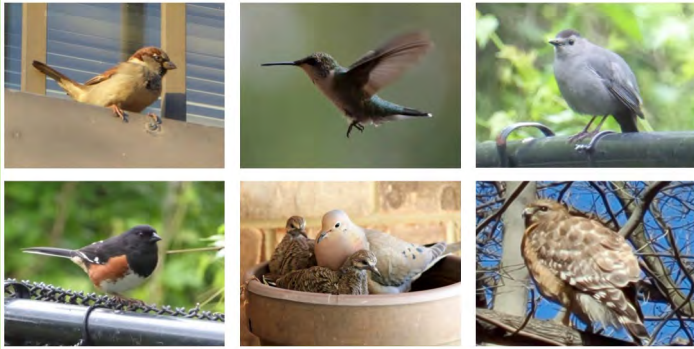


Presenters: Cathy & George Ledec

**Cathy Ledec** is president of the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park, chair of the Fairfax County Tree Commission, board member of the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia, president of the Pavilions at Huntington Metro Community Association, a Virginia Master Naturalist, and an enthusiastic native plant gardener.

**George Ledec**, a former Montebello resident, recently retired as Lead Ecologist at the World Bank. He is an enthusiastic birder, having viewed over 6,300 bird species in 85 countries.

George and Cathy have led several bird walks and Christmas Bird Counts at Montebello.



**Thursday, April 29, 7:30 pm**  
Live video webinar - check email for how to join

**THE TRAVEL CLUB**

## The Galapagos Islands

DESTINATION OF A LIFETIME

Encore Presentation  
By Amy Shapiro and Jon Kandel

Thursday, April 8 | 7:30 pm | Virtual by Zoom



Book club photo by Dian McDonald



**the final glance**



*Photo by Turo Dexter*