

ROBERT ARTHUR • LEGENDARY SANTA • LEWIS GINTER

VOLUME 27 NO 12 DECEMBER 2021

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Cover photograph by Dale Vanderheyden

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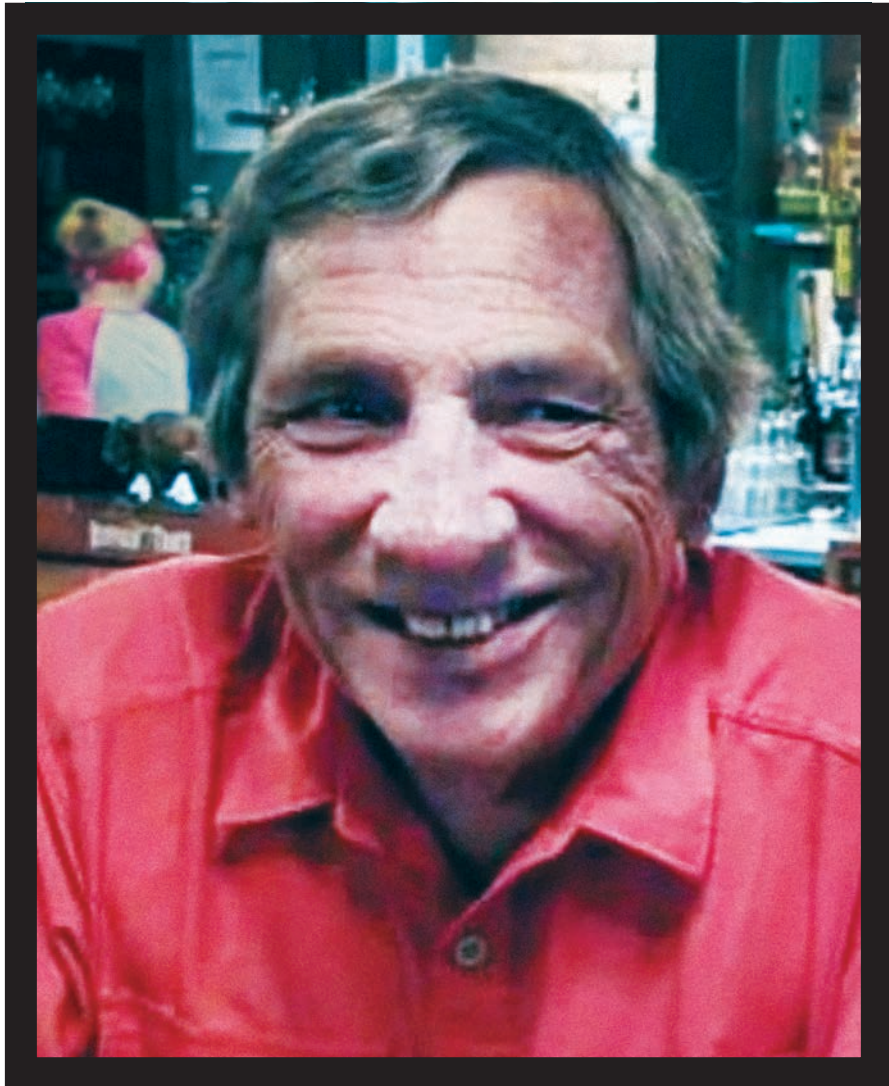
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# Robert Arthur: The Godfather of Lawnmowers 1948-2021

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN



**R**OBERT ARTHUR LEFT home early that morning, not long after six, as was his wont. Before arriving at Arthur's Electric, the family business he had taken over thirty-five years before, he stopped at the convenience store owned by Mr. Patel. He bought a monster drink, a pack of cigarettes, and, as an afterthought, a single lottery ticket. When his wife Linda entered Arthur's Electric two hours later, he wolf-whistled at her, wearing his customary smile, as he hunched over the counter, a cigarette smoldering in an ashtray as big as a salad plate. Throughout the morning he fielded phone calls, and waited on a dozen people. He checked the status of some stocks he had recently purchased, then scratched the lottery ticket, and discovered he had won fifty dollars. Just after ten he lifted up a large

propane tank, and felt a slight tightening in his chest, and, as had been his custom since he had gotten sick some months before, Robert left the shop a few minutes before eleven. He drove straight over to the convenience store to redeem his lottery ticket. He pulled into a space, thrust the gearshift into park, and cut the engine. That's when his heart stopped.

"He did what he did every morning, and with extras," Linda Arthur tells me, recalling the November day her husband died. "As he was walking out the door that morning, I said, 'Call me when you get home.' Within ten minutes of him leaving here we got the call that he was dead."

Here in the business office at Arthur's Electric, I'm facing an arc made up of the three women in Robert Arthur's life—his wife, Linda, of course, and his daughters, Tonda and Barrett.

Linda begins telling me about the man she was married to for half a century. She considers Robert's unflagging integrity in all things. "He was truthful and honest," says Linda. "He was honest with the customers, he was honest with me and the family. He was the most honest person I have ever known. And there were times you didn't want to hear what he had to say, but you always knew he was being honest."

Robert also avoided the limelight at all costs. "Robert was always real humble," says Linda. "He downplayed his achievements." Over the years Robert was recognized for his business acumen. His business was named a Henrico Legacy Company, and he was nominated by the Retail Merchants Association for the Distinguished Retailer of the Year Award.

He also supported organizations committed to making his community a better place for all. He and Linda have volunteered with the Glen Allen Ruritan for twenty-five years. As a matter of fact, they served as grand marshals for the Glen Allen Day Parade. Robert and his wife are also supportive of the Healy Gala, which each year awards a scholarship to a graduating senior from Glen Allen High School. And for many years now, Arthur's Electric has donated generously to St. Joe's Villa. The Arthurs also supported the Richmond Symphony's Youth Orchestra. "Robert also always gave discounts to any police, firefighter or military serviceman," says Linda. "And if any church were having a fundraiser he would always donate."

Robert was never one to harbor a grudge or fan the flames of resentment. "He would argue with you and then five minutes later it was like you never had an argument," Tonda, his oldest daughter, tells me, and Linda nods.

Linda's eyes move across her daughters, and her gaze settles on her grandson, Brighton. "Robert had so many families," Linda says, and tears well up in her eyes. "He had bowling families, and people that we traveled with, and our customer family, and our family, and a work family. Everybody here has been working at Arthur's for fifteen years or more."

In less than two years, Arthur's Elec-

tric will celebrate its 100th anniversary. "Arthur's Electric started in 1923, so in 2023 it will be a hundred years old," says Linda. "I think that's one of the reasons Robert didn't retire."

Linda first laid eyes on Robert when the pair attended Brookland School, but they would not start dating until several years later. While Linda attended Hermitage High School, Robert went to Fork Union Military Academy. After high school Robert went to Ferrum Junior College, and Linda studied art at Longwood College. And during her college, Linda dated a number of other young men along with Robert. Once Robert finished his studies at Ferrum, he joined the U.S. Army National Guard and was stationed at Fort Rucker in Alabama. And though he was in active service for two years, Linda until recently didn't know he was a veteran. "He just never talked about it," she says.

As a kid, Robert was a Virginia State Go-Kart Champion, and racing in one form or other remained a passion throughout his life, whether it was riding an ATV or testing the maximum velocity of a jet ski at the Arthur's river home—one of his favorite places in the world.

At that riverfront property, early in the morning, before anyone else in the house had risen, as the stars began to fade and the planets continued to wander, as a faint silver sliver marked the curvature of the horizon, and as the tide shifted, backwashing the natural flow of the river, Robert would make his way to the sandy shore, listening to the faint lapping of the tidewater, and then he would face the East, almost reverentially, pull his phone from his pocket, tap the camera mode on the black mirror, and wait for that uncanny resurrection of light that came with the dawn as it has since time immemorial. And then he would snap photo after photo, capturing in the blink of the camera's eyes that moment of renewal.

"He did this religiously," Linda says.

"When we scrolled through his phone there were just tons of them," says Tonda. "Some were photos and some were videos, but they were all of the rising sun," Linda adds.

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## IN MEMORIAM



*Linda Arthur flanked by her two daughters and grandson.*

Though Robert was a member of Bethlehem Methodist Church, he was not a regular churchgoer, for he believed Christianity was rooted in corporal works of mercy, in practicing what Christ had preached, and not in dogma or institutions. “Robert thought to be a Christian was to do the right thing, and you didn’t have to go to church,” Linda says. “It was in you and your actions.”

That being said, not long ago Robert did receive the Holy Eucharist in both its species, if almost accidentally. While Linda attended services, Robert waited in the car that morning. Suddenly a woman appeared by the driver’s side door. She held a chalice and a paten.

“She thought he was just waiting to go to church” Linda recalls. “And so she gave him Communion.”

When the service was over and Linda returned to the car, Robert said, “I just had Communion.”

“Really?” Linda asked. “They made you have Communion?”

Robert shook his head. “No, she just came out with the plate and the bread and the wine, and it made me cry.”

“So that was his last Communion,” Linda tells me.

His family, his business, his employees, his customers were always on his mind. “He would wake up at five in the morning,” Barrett tells me. “Sometimes he couldn’t sleep because he was thinking about the business or his employees or his customers. A lot of people that weren’t family didn’t see the hours that he would wake up in the middle of the night thinking about how to work through things.”

That was particularly true during the pandemic. Richard could easily have shuttered the business for an extended time and lived on savings. “But he

thought about everybody else,” says Tonda. Her sister nods. Robert understood that his employees needed job security, and that his customers, who were gearing up for their busy spring season just as COVID shut down many other businesses, required his services to survive. Robert often put the needs of others above his own.

“His actions showed you what he thought was right,” says Barrett. “And that was somebody that was reliable, that was somebody that you could count on, and I thought it was God working through him.”

Barrett remembers when she was in college driving home from Virginia Beach through a driving rain that fell in columns. She was travelling on fumes when the last cylinder fired with a sputter, and Barrett found herself stranded by the side of the road in New Kent County. It was in an era before cell phones, so through the pouring rain she hunted down a pay phone, fed a quarter into the slot, and called her father, even though it was the middle of the night.

“He drove all the way from Richmond with a can of gas to fill my car and to make sure I was okay,” Barrett says. “I can’t count how many times I depended on him. That’s something I’ll miss. You always knew he would always be there for you.”

“He had friends of every background and he would not say anything bad about anyone,” Tonda says, and then she smiles, remembering something her father had given her.

“One time he gave me an award because I tended to be a little late most mornings,” she says. “He had drawn a star on a sheet of paper, and put it up here on the window. It was called the On Time Award and it was the best prize I’ve ever gotten.”

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# GardenFest of Lights At Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens



**T**HIS YEAR'S GARDENFEST is open nightly from 4 till 10 pm through January 9, except on Christmas Eve and Christmas day. Tickets are available online only, and must be purchased in advance with a specific arrival time. Children under age three do not need a ticket.

This year's theme is Naturally Connected. The show highlights how we are all connected to each other and nature. The popular maze of lights is designed as a spider web. Other displays include lights showing the lifecycle of a butterfly, oversized flower forms, and familiar favorites including the peacock.

The Poems of Positivity light installation from Orlosky Studio is a community-centered project featuring three sculptural towers with light shining through words cut out of black acrylic. The words were crowd-sourced through a social media invitation for people to share in a few short words, "what is something that makes you feel positive?"

Decked out in a botanical theme, a 25-foot live tree in the Conservatory promises to be a favorite photo opportunity. Model trains return to the Kelly Education Center with a new



"Farm to Table" theme.

Trees decorated by Henrico County Public School students brighten the Lora Robins Library, and botanical decorations grace the cozy Library Reading Room.

The Kelleher Warming Fire in the Children's Garden is a great spot to warm up, and drink hot chocolate and roast s'mores, which are both available for purchase at the nearby Carriage House.

The Garden Café in the Visitors Center offers casual dining, snacks, and drinks, while the Robins Tea House affords guest seated holiday dinners overlooking the lights. Reservations for the Tea House are suggested and are online only.

We encourage universal indoor masking while in public spaces for all patrons regardless of vaccination status. For those who are not fully vaccinated, masks are required indoors at all times and outdoors when 6-foot social distancing is not possible.

For more information please visit [lewisginter.org](http://lewisginter.org)

**Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden**  
1800 Lakeside Avenue  
Richmond, Virginia 23228

## THE BLUE GUITAR PERFORMANCE DATES

December 19 and January 2 from noon till 3, at Cul's Courthouse Grille, 10801 Courthouse Road, Charles City, VA 23030. January 7 from 6:30 till 9 at Richmond Main Public Library, 101 East Franklin Street, Richmond, VA, 23219. January 8 from 7 till 10 at Castleburg Brewery and Taproom, 1626 Ownby Lane, Richmond, VA 23220.

## Legendary Santa At Children's Museum

As Richmond icons since 1936, Legendary Santa and the Snow Queen have been delighting families for 85 years. It all started on the 7th floor of the historic Miller & Rhoads department store. That tradition continues at the Children's Museum of Richmond through Christmas Eve.

When it's your child's turn to walk onto the stage, they are first greeted by the Snow Queen who gives a Snowflake of Courage to Santa's smallest visitors. Eyes widen and jaws drop when Legendary Santa leans from his green and gold throne to call each child by name to come tell him what they want for Christmas.

An emailed professional photo is available with the Legendary Santa ticket; additional packages are also available for purchase. No flash photography is permitted inside Santa Land.

Admission to the Children's Museum is not included with the Legendary Santa visit.

Make your reservations now as there

are limited spots available. For more information visit [childrensmuseumofrichmond.org/legendary-santa](http://childrensmuseumofrichmond.org/legendary-santa)

Almost thirty years ago, NORTH of the JAMES photographer Rebecca D'Angelo had the honor of playing the Snow Queen. She remembers one little girl in particular.

As the child approached, Rebecca bent down toward her and, in a faint whisper, asked, "What do you want for Christmas?"

"A hidden talent," the girl responded.

Then Rebecca, adopting a sort of Glenda the Good Witch voice, said: "Well, everybody has a hidden talent; don't worry you will find yours one day."

"I will always remember the day that little girl asked me that," Rebecca told me recently.

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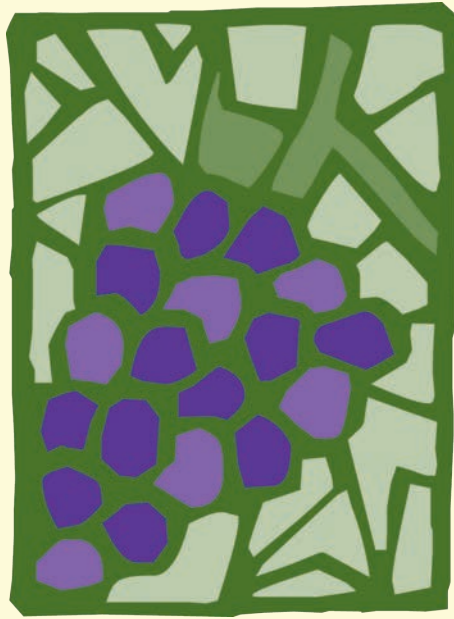
**SECOND ANNUAL HERMITAGE RICHMOND ILLUMINATION ON THE LAWN**

This holiday season, Hermitage Richmond is inviting everyone to bundle up and enjoy some festive fun and holiday magic. The upscale senior living community in historic Ginter Park is inviting the community to join them for their second annual Illumination on the Lawn.

Through January 6, the grounds at Hermitage Richmond will be transformed into a spectacular winter wonderland display of holiday lights and reindeer from 6 till 9 pm. each evening. This ongoing event is free to attend for the whole family, including pets.

"We are thrilled to once again bring to life our new Richmond annual tradition, and look forward to bringing the joy of the holidays to everyone with our festive light displays," says Amy Chapman, executive director of Hermitage Richmond. "There are brand new displays this year that are sure to amaze our residents, as well as new and returning guests of all ages!"

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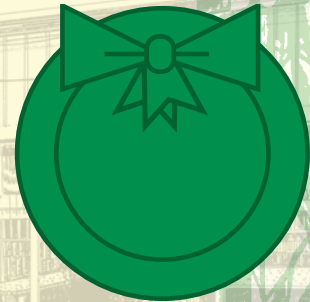
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# Revisiting Robert E. Lee

by JACK R. JOHNSON

**T**HEY HAVE TAKEN down the monument to Robert E. Lee in Richmond, and soon they will remove the pedestal for Robert E. Lee. For many, this is a bittersweet moment. Thanks, no doubt, to the tireless efforts of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and other proponents of the “Lost Cause” narrative. Their efforts have essentially recreated the General, while leaving the historical man safely entombed.

I, too, grew up reading about the ‘kindly’ General—I knew it was weird, but I didn’t know how weird at the time. There was a kind of breath-taking apotheosis of the man. Here’s a sample: one of Lee’s ex-generals, Jubal A. Early wrote this two years after his death: “Our beloved Chief stands, like some lofty column which rears its head among the highest, in grandeur, simple, pure and sublime.”

But, of course, once you get past that delusional reverence and read his actual history, you realize that Lee’s treatment of his own enslaved people, and Blacks, in general, could well fall into the category of plain old evil.

Let’s begin with his attitudes about race. He was a proponent of white supremacy: that was one of General Lee’s most fundamental convictions—and his fatal flaw; it was not ancillary to his efforts as general of the Confederacy; it was core.

Some folks point out that he once wrote a letter to suggest slavery was a moral and political evil. There’s some truth to that, but read the full letter ([theatlantic.com/national/archive/2010/08/arlington-bobby-lee-and-the-peculiar-institution/61428/](http://theatlantic.com/national/archive/2010/08/arlington-bobby-lee-and-the-peculiar-institution/61428/)), Lee considered it a greater evil to the white master than the enslaved Black. In short, slavery was another of the white man’s “burden”—an institution he quite usefully employed himself, presumably for profit as well as the ‘uplifting of the black race.’

Here are some examples of his general attitude.

Lee told Congress that Black people lacked the intellectual capacity of white people and “could not vote intelligently,” and that granting them suffrage would “excite unfriendly feelings between the two races.” Lee explained



that “the negroes have neither the intelligence nor the other qualifications which are necessary to make them safe depositories of political power.”

“Well,” his defenders might say, “Lee was a man of his time and place: that was the current attitude back then. He was just misguided, but truly, he ‘was a good Christian man, and gentle to his slaves.’”

No, alas, he may have been Christian, but he was neither kind nor just to his enslaved people, even by the letter of the South’s own oppressive laws on the matter.

In *Reading the Man*, the historian Elizabeth Brown Pryor’s portrait of Lee through his writings, Pryor writes that “Lee ruptured the Washington and Custis tradition of respecting slave families” by hiring them off to other plantations, and that “by 1860 he had broken up every family but one on his estate, some of whom had been together since Mount Vernon days.”

Pryor notes that the way Lee treated his enslaved people nearly led to a slave revolt. They had expected to be freed upon their previous master’s death.

John Reeves, a historian and author

of the book, “The Lost Indictment of Robert E. Lee: The Forgotten Case Against an American Icon,” said that Lee wanted to work the slaves beyond the five-year limit stated in his father-in-law’s will. Lee fought in court to keep the slaves working because he didn’t know if he would be able to pay off his legacies otherwise.


Wesley Norris was one of those slaves. He was born a slave on the plantation that Lee managed after his father-in-law died. Norris testified during the court fight that Lee beat him when he tried to run away. Wesley Norris recalled that “not satisfied with simply lacerating our naked flesh, Gen. Lee then ordered the overseer to thoroughly wash our backs with brine, which was done.”

It wasn’t just his own slaves that Lee fought tooth and nail to keep enslaved. Pryor writes that “evidence links virtually every infantry and cavalry unit in Lee’s army” to the abduction of free black Americans, “with the activity under the supervision of senior officers.”

According to Adam Serwer, writing in the Atlantic, “Soldiers under Lee’s command at the Battle of the Crater in 1864 massacred black Union sol-

diers who tried to surrender. Then, in a spectacle hatched by Lee’s senior corps commander, A. P. Hill, the Confederates paraded the Union survivors through the streets of Petersburg to the slurs and jeers of the southern crowd. Lee never discouraged such behavior. As the historian Richard Slotkin wrote in *No Quarter: The Battle of the Crater*, “his silence was permissive.”

Even as president of Washington College (now Washington and Lee University), Lee’s unflagging white supremacist attitude held sway. According to Pryor, students at Washington formed their own chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, and were known by the local Freedmen’s Bureau to attempt to abduct and rape Black schoolgirls from the nearby Black schools. There is no record of Robert E. Lee ever disciplining students for this activity, or ever publicly denouncing the KKK, which was initially founded in 1866 for the specific purpose of terrorizing freed Blacks.

Maybe it’s time to finally say good bye to the Lee Monument— not to erase history — but to embrace it, because Robert E Lee probably should have never been put on that pedestal in the first place. 

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# THE BIRDS

WITH DALE VANDERHEYDEN

## ARMED WITH PATIENCE, PERSISTENCE, AND A NIKON, THIS WOMAN

has given the cyber world, through thousands of photographs chronicling the lives of the inhabitants of the cities of the air, an ongoing record of the majesty and the diversity of the avian kingdom. She has also learned firsthand how our continued degradation of the environment through the use of fossil fuels and the haphazard destruction of ecosystems is pushing more and more animal species to the rim of extinction.

Back in college, Dale Vanderheyden studied sculpture, and dated a fellow VCU student named Bill Pahnelas, who wrote for The Commonwealth Times, Throttle magazine, and later the Richmond Newspapers. After graduation, the two went their separate ways, Dale moving up to the DC area.

“M

### Y FATHER WAS AN

administrative law judge at EPA, and he thought it'd be a good idea if I got a job with the federal government, which seemed not so cool when you went to art school to do something like that,” Dale tells me.

But Dale took her father's advice and went to work for the Department of Commerce. Then for about ten years she worked in public relations for the Hirshhorn Museum. “I loved it there,” she says. “Everyone was an art historian or an artist. It was a nonstop party, just like art school.” After that she went to work as a public affairs specialist for the Bureau of the Public Debt, an arm of the Treasury Department.

Dale took early retirement, lived in Baltimore for a while, and then returned to Falls Church where she had grown up to help take care of her father, whose health had declined. “I brought my father back home to the house I grew up in,” she says. “He wanted to die in his own home.” He has since passed.

Then, about four years ago, she reconnected with her college sweetheart, Bill Pahnelas, who was instrumental in helping her discover her next artistic passion. Bill sits in a chair opposite me in Dale's studio which is located in the house the couple shares.

“Bill had a lot to do with this,” Dale says. “He pretty much taught me everything. He bought me my first camera, a Nikon D-3500. It was a Christmas gift.”

In short order, what for another might have been just a hobby became a driving obsession for Dale. She began almost immediately capturing birds through the lens of a camera, committing them to digital memory which she freely shared online.

“It's compulsive, it's addictive,” she says. “I am out there every day, sometimes twice a day. You just want to keep getting a better shot.”

But these are no ordinary shots of wildlife. These

portraits possess an almost scientific precision coupled with an aesthetic in composition that rivals Audubon. You can make out every detail of the barbs and rachis in every feather, and the colors scooped directly out of nature astonish the eye. It's not just the bird though, much of it has to do with where and what position the bird was in, and birds are rapid in their movements so it takes real skill and perseverance to get just the right shot.

“There are four things that have to work together,” says Dale. “There is the environment, there is the bird, and there are the perches and you want a really good perch.” After a short pause, she adds, “And of course light is another really big factor. It's not like I just go out and shoot any old thing. I need all of these things working together.”

For this last reason, Dale is often up before the crack of dawn. “Lighting is always best early in the morning,” she says. “By nine the light gets too harsh. During the summer I'm at a location by six am.”

Three sites near Richmond are among Dale's favorites. “Bryan Park and Pony Pasture,” she says. “And I go out to Powhatan State Park a lot in the spring and summer. I love it there. I go almost every day. It's good for the tanagers and the buntings and the warblers.”

She shoots a fair amount at Pony Pasture, particularly this time of year when all the leaves are down. But more often than not, you'll find Dale in the Northside. “I really like Bryan Park,” she says. “It has a lot of different habitats and environments. It's got the water, it's got all that forest, it's even got a meadow. Bryan Park's got a lot going for it. And it's got the best owls.”

Human beings have an ineluctable tendency to disrupt the natural order. How many times have you heard a jet-ski ripping through the serenity of a spartina-ringed estuary? Or a gxxxamned leaf blower scattering the habitat of a pile of fallen leaves?



by CHARLES MCGUIGAN



Two years ago on one of her daily outings, Dale discovered a truly rare site—the nest of a great horned owl high atop a tree in Bryan Park. She kept its location a secret, but just this past summer someone else posted its location on eBirds. And that was the beginning of the end. What followed was disgraceful. People from all over thronged around the tree for weeks on end, while the parents were trying to get their babies ready for the world. When Bill saw a photograph of the crowds he said “That looks like a \*xx\*ing rock concert.”

“It was appalling,” Dale remembers. “It just broke my heart. People came and camped out for hours. People were coming from Williamsburg, from Fredericksburg. It was a nightmare, and I know it stressed those parents. I’m afraid they’re going to reject that nest this year.”

She considers the entire art of bird photography. “It’s not as authentic to just be told where the nest is, and then set up your tripod for three hours,” she says. “You’re supposed to go out and find it yourself, alone, and photograph it.”

The pair sometimes travels far afield to seek out a particular kind of bird. They once headed down to a pine savanna in southeast Virginia. Their quarry was an endangered species.

“Bill and I went to a wildlife refuge,” says Dale. “We went to look for the red cockaded woodpecker. On that refuge they thin out the pines by burning them to create a habitat for those birds which are going extinct. So stuff like that is really interesting to me because we’re losing birds fast.”

Dale mentions the causes of this environmental cataclysm, all of which are perpetrated by the most hideous version of greed imaginable, one that values money over life, human and otherwise, a sickness of the soul, an absence of love and conscience, evil incarnate. To sate their hunger for profits, they would destroy our entire planet. “Climate change, loss of habitat,” she says. “All of this horrible development. I

don’t want to depress you too much, but everywhere I go I see a drop.”


In the four short years since Dale started this project she has witnessed a rapid decline in bird populations. “This is kind of sad, but two years ago there were so many birds in the meadow at Bryan Park that I worked there almost every day,” she says. “Last year, hardly anything. That’s why I had to start going to Powhatan every day.”

When COVID hit a couple years ago, Dale found herself in the field even more frequently than before. “That’s when I started posting a lot online,” she says. “I wanted to do something uplifting for people at home. Some people thank me for the pictures. A lot of people can’t get out and see the stuff I see.”

Since the time Dale first began photographing birds she has shot hundreds of thousands of frames. “I wore out a Nikon D 500 in a year,” she says. “That was two hundred thousand frames on that one camera and I was using another camera, too.”

On more than one occasion people have encouraged Dale to produce a calendar or a coffee table book with her work, but she has no immediate plans to do so.

“What I’m interested in is the process,” she says. “And I love looking for birds, and I love the hunt, which is a big part of it. I love looking for these things, getting the pictures, coming home and editing. I’m not into having anything permanent.”

There’s more to it than that though. “The other reason I do it is this: We’re losing these birds at an alarming rate,” says Dale Vanderheyden. “I want to see every single one I can. If you’ve got something you love, and it may go away next year, you’re going to work your ass off to make sure you can see them when they’re gone.” 

*You can view Dale’s work on Facebook or Instagram, and if you’re interested in purchasing a print visit [fine-artamerica.com/profiles/dale-vanderheyden/shop](https://fine-artamerica.com/profiles/dale-vanderheyden/shop)*

*Above left:  
Dale Vanderheyden shooting in the wild*

*Above right:  
Great Horned Owl, mother and child, Bryan Park*

*Below:  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Tuckahoe Gardens*

*Preceding page:  
Ruby-throated hummingbird, Tuckahoe Gardens*

*On the cover:  
Great Blue Heron, University of Richmond*





*Above:  
Dale Vanderheyden on the lookout*

*Top right:  
Male Goldfinch, Tuckahoe Gardens*

*Below right (left to right):  
Blue Grosbeak, Bryan Park  
Evening Grosbeak, Maidens Landing*

*Red-headed Woodpecker,  
Tuckahoe Gardens*



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## DIVERSIONS

# Upgrading Christmas From Merry to Legendary

by FAYERUZ REGAN

**U**NTIL THIS YEAR, I thought I had been doing Christmas right. I've been taking my son to Richmond Ballet's *Nutcracker* since he was two. He's attended the Grand Illumination, met Father Christmas at Agecroft Hall, and rode the Dillwyn Santa Train. He spoke with Santa one-on-one as we chugged through the snowy countryside.

But it was recently brought to light that I had never taken my son to see the Legendary Santa. When my coworker used the term "legendary," I assumed it was like how restaurants claim that their chili is "world famous," though they couldn't possibly *all* be world famous, if any.

Coworkers passing by caught wind of my holiday travesty. There were audible gasps. They corrected me, saying that "Legendary" was his actual name—the brand. "How old is your son?" they asked. When I said seven, they exhaled, claiming there was still time. Little did they know that my son was questioning Santa's girth in relation to the interior of our chimney, and recently declared that sitting on a stranger's lap was creepy.

The Legendary Santa is a Richmond institution, starting in 1936 at downtown's Miller and Rhoads department store. People wax nostalgic when discussing Miller and Rhoads. It seems to have lent some big city grandeur to our mid-sized town. Like a Fifth Avenue storefront in Manhattan, there were stunning window displays, seven floors of retail, and the Legendary Santa.

Miller and Rhodes transformed the seventh floor into "Santaland." Lit trees lined the walkway that led to Santa's red velvet throne. There was a fireplace, a Snow Queen, a talking pine tree named Bruce the Spruce, and most importantly, Santa knew every child's name. "We would have lunch in the tea room that they set up. Santa would come down the chimney, drink a glass of milk, hold his belly and laugh out loud," says Judy Kostyniuk, reminiscing about Santaland in the 1960s.

I thought this tradition had ended



when Miller and Rhoads closed their doors in 1990. But after shifting to a few different locations, the big production has settled in at the Children's Museum of Virginia. I have friends who are former employees of the museum, and their eyes go wide when describing the event. Not at the wonder of it, but the chaos.

Drama is nearly inevitable with such a large undertaking. The consensus is that the children aren't the problem so much as parents, who are more likely to break into a tantrum. Before COVID-19, there weren't appointments to see the Legendary Santa, and the lines were long. That, coupled with wriggling children and holiday stress made the cheery holiday music almost mocking.

"They forget that Santa, the Snow Queen and those running the show are real people. Once, Santa got very sick. He physically could not do the job, and parents were livid," says a source. No one employed by the museum was willing to offer their name for the record. I find it charming that they want to protect the legacy.

Dan Rowe had been playing the Legendary Santa since 1966, when his brother Hansford retired from the job.

After serving a half century as Santa, and getting inducted into the International Santa Claus Hall of Fame in 2011, he passed away in 2020. It made the news, which reached far and wide.

To give an idea of how beloved the Legendary Santa is, know that families have driven in from Texas for the experience. Former Richmonders wanted their offspring to experience the magic themselves. While it's common for families to come in from Williamsburg and Roanoke for this tradition, you'll find the occasional family that's flown in from Colorado. "Going to see the Legendary Santa is a core memory for me," says Sarah Hallett, a native Richmonder. "I take my kids in hopes that it will have the same lasting impression."

Needless to say, I signed up. I hate the idea of missing out on a cultural phenomenon. I only went to prom so I could experience firsthand how disappointing it was.

I have a feeling that this is my son's final year of Santa Claus, elves on shelves and all the Christmas magic that orbits small children. We had a great run, and it will end a skeptical seven year-old sitting on a stranger's lap. At least that lap is legendary. **NJ**





# Lewis Ginter's Architectural Legacy

by BRIAN BURNS

**T**O CIGARETTE BARON Lewis Ginter, fashionable architecture was a feast for eyes and soul. Creating it was one of his favorite obsessions.

Ginter graced Richmond with his brick-and-stone Richardsonian Romanesque mansion at 901 West Franklin Street (1892), and the jaw-dropping, Beaux arts-style Jefferson Hotel at Franklin and Adams Streets (1895). But he also had a penchant for cute and charming. In 1895, laying the groundwork for his streetcar suburbs, he built a row of Victorian carpenter cottages. Six survive on Hawthorne Avenue.

Nearby, Ginter constructed a stylish “suburban villa” at 4016 Hermitage Road. Designed by D. Wiley Anderson and completed ca. 1897, it paired a Queen Anne silhouette with Colonial Revival detailing. An anchor for Ginter’s suburbs, the home was a gift for his handsome, young “companion and private secretary,” Anton “Tony” Thiermann.

Sadly, at least two of Ginter’s building projects have vanished: “Westbrook,” his one-of-a-kind Victorian Queen Anne country home at Brook Road and Westbrook Avenue, and the Bellevue Flats, a row of apartments at Fifth and Cary “finished up in the best manner.” But his philanthropic work reverberated long after his death, giving rise to some of today’s finest architectural icons.

In the mid-1880s, Ginter was disheartened by Richmond’s shortage of skilled labor. He joined the campaign for a school of technology. He and other manufacturers needed skilled labor to compete with Northern cities. Besides, boys and men laboring ten-hour days in local factories could improve their lot with coursework in mathematics, physics, drafting, mechanical drawing and other technical skills. Because of the North’s industrial might, Richmond couldn’t attract enough skilled immigrant labor. Its economy languished.

A school of technology could attract Northern capitalists, thereby spawning new industries. “By opening new avenues of industrial enterprise, [such a school] will be a safeguard against idleness, which is the mother of vice,” remarked the Richmond Dispatch. The school could also foster revolutionary inventions. From every angle, the school fueled Ginter’s master plan



*Lewis Ginter commissioned New York architectural firm Carrere and Hastings to design the Jefferson Hotel, which is considered to be among the finest examples of Beaux Arts style in existence.*

of boosting Richmond’s prosperity and image on the national stage.

In October 1884, advocates of the school organized the Virginia Mechanics’ Institute to “promote and encourage manufactures, the mechanics and useful arts, and the mental and social improvement of the industrial classes.” A board of directors was assembled in early 1885, which included Ginter.

A “practically-free” night school, the Institute’s first session began on October 1, 1885. To help defray its expenses, Ginter donated \$500 (about \$15,000 in 2020 currency). As enrollment swelled over the next few years, a huge heap of cash was needed to get the school out of cramped, rented quarters and into its own space. But fundraising didn’t go well. The Panic of 1893 threw the nation into darkness.

Meanwhile, ironically, Ginter was wealthier than ever, since he had joined the American Tobacco Company. He shifted his philanthropy into overdrive. In 1895, he donated eleven acres on today’s Brook Road for the Union Theological Seminary. The campus architect was Richmond native, Charles H. Read Jr., who incorporated a few of

Ginter’s design suggestions. The Victorian Gothic style dominated Watts Hall (1896), Spence Library and Westminster Hall (1897). Faculty houses were rendered in a simpler, modified Queen Anne style. In time, the distinguished campus would lure homebuilders to adjacent Ginter Park.

When Ginter died in 1897, he breathed new life into the Mechanics’ Institute’s building fund. He left it a whopping \$10,000 (around \$300,000 in 2020 currency). Canvassers also collected for the “Ginter Memorial Fund,” which was earmarked for the same project. In March 1901, with the depression over, the cornerstone was laid with Masonic pageantry at the northwest corner of Broad and Eleventh Streets. A few items were placed in the time capsule. Reflecting white Richmond’s maniacal devotion to the Lost Cause, one item was a horseshoe made from the armor plate of the Confederate ram, Merrimac.

About November 1, 1901, the four-story Beaux Arts-style Mechanics’ Institute finally opened. Designed by Noland and Baskervill in the same white brick as Ginter’s Jefferson Hotel, it was proclaimed “one of the handsomest build-

ings in the city.” Unfortunately, some six decades later, it would vanish as well.

The Mechanics’ Institute was headed by civil engineer C.P.E. Burgwyn, the Harvard-educated designer of Monument Avenue. Doubling as instructor, he and his colleagues shaped thousands of men’s careers. Some became prolific local architects.

One was the “important architectural designer,” Leon Otis Spiers (1897-1970). He received a long line of commissions from the Davis Brothers, a large architectural and construction firm that built homes throughout the city. Spiers’s designs include 2 and 4 S. Arthur Ashe Boulevard (1921), which renowned Richmond architect Robert Winthrop called “elaborate essays in the Arts & Crafts cottage style.” Spiers also created a parade of apartment buildings, including the handsome Tudor Revival at 3414-16 Monument Avenue (1927).

Another scholar of the Institute was “developer’s architect,” Carl Max Lindner Sr. (1895-1973). Among his designs are the elegant Lord Fairfax Apartments at 3105 Monument Avenue (1923) and the ten houses to the immediate west. They boast Revival



Top to bottom:  
Charles H. Read Jr.'s Watts Hall at  
Union Theological Seminary.

Two of the carpenter's cottages gracing  
Hawthorne Avenue in Northside.

styles, ranging from Tudor Revival to Spanish Revival to Colonial. Heralded as one of Lindner's finest designs, however, is the brick Georgian Revival mansion at 6 Amphill Road (1929). It was built for tobacco executive Edward Victor Williams, who started out as an office boy at Ginter's tobacco firm. Lindner also created the Spanish-Mexican commercial building at 4-10 East Grace Street (1927), currently home to a gay bar called Barcode.

Last, but certainly not least, was the "gifted architect," Bascom Joseph Rowlett (1886-1947). He designed stylish icons like Rixey Court at the intersection of Monument Avenue and Strawberry Street (1924), and Tuscan Villa at 511-13 N. Arthur Ashe Boulevard (1928). He also designed the English Village in the 3400 block of Grove Avenue (1926), which Robert Winthrop called an "architectural fantasy on Tudor themes."

Coming full circle, at least one Rowlett-designed residence graced Ginter Park. The grand, Tudor Revival at 3212 Hawthorne Avenue was built in 1929, more than three decades after Ginter was laid to rest in Hollywood Cemetery. **N9**

PHOTOS by DOUG DOBEY

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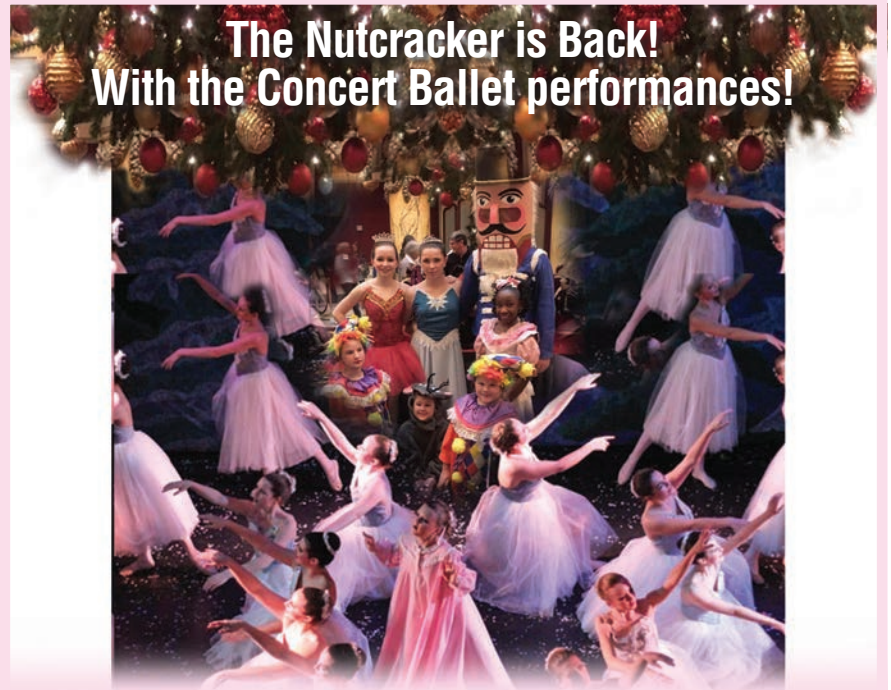
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# A Holiday Gift from VMFA



Above left: Man Ray's *Self-Portrait with Camera*, 1930.



Above right: Ansel Adams' *Mount Williamson, The Sierra Nevada, from Manzanar, California*.

**U**NTIL JANUARY 2, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts will offer twin tickets to see two critically acclaimed photography exhibitions—Ansel Adams: *Compositions in Nature*; and Man Ray: *The Paris Years*. Visitors purchasing tickets to both exhibitions online or at the museum will receive 40 percent off.

“As the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission, we want the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts to be a place of beauty, inspiration, respite and celebration for our visitors throughout the year, including the holidays,” says Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s director and CEO. “We hope all of our visitors will take advan-

tage of this unique ticket combination and see these exhibitions showcasing two of America’s most influential photographers while enjoying time with loved ones this holiday season.”

“*Compositions in Nature*” features iconic landscape images and rarely seen early photographs by the renowned artist and environmental conservationist whose work advanced photography as an art form. Through Ansel Adams’ use of light and shadow and emphasis on visual details, textures and patterns, his works evoke an emotional response and a greater appreciation of nature from its viewers.

“*Man Ray: The Paris Years*” focuses on the innovative portrait photographs that the American artist made in the French capital between 1921 and

1940. Shortly after his arrival in July 1921, Man Ray (the pseudonym of Emmanuel Radnitzky) embarked on a sustained campaign to document the international avant-garde in Paris in a series of remarkable portraits that established his reputation as one of the leading photographers of his era. The exhibition includes more than 100 portraits of such cultural luminaries as Berenice Abbott, André Breton, Jean Cocteau, Marcel Duchamp, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, Lee Miller, Pablo Picasso, Ruby Richards, Wallis Simpson and Gertrude Stein.

**Virginia Museum of Fine Arts**  
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## PAINTINGS BY JENNIFER HOLLOWAY BOPST

Recommended for Ages 4 & Up, recent works Jennifer Holloway Bopst will be on display at Eric Schindler Gallery through December 23. Of her work, Jennifer writes, “The human form is the foundation of my work. Figures are given autonomous reign of the canvas to engage the viewer’s imagination with direct eye contact as a focal point for subjective interpretation.”

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In the Dooley Foyer, visit “*City Street Life: Seen by Three*”—six street experiences, each illustrated by three Richmond artists, Steve Ferretti, Lisa Lezell Levine and Ed Tepper.

In Dooley Hall, experience “*Friends in the Streets: an artist’s view on homelessness*”, a four-year project, through which the artist, Connie de Bordenave, reveals the dignity, diversity and worth of each of the people she met on the streets.

On the 2nd Floor Gallery you’ll find “*Full Circle*”, mixed media collages ranging from natural sciences, the nocturnal sky, and surreal scenarios by Gina Catlin.

Paintings by Jordan Flower are on display in the Dooley Foyer Atrium. 

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# Sweet Water in The Deep South

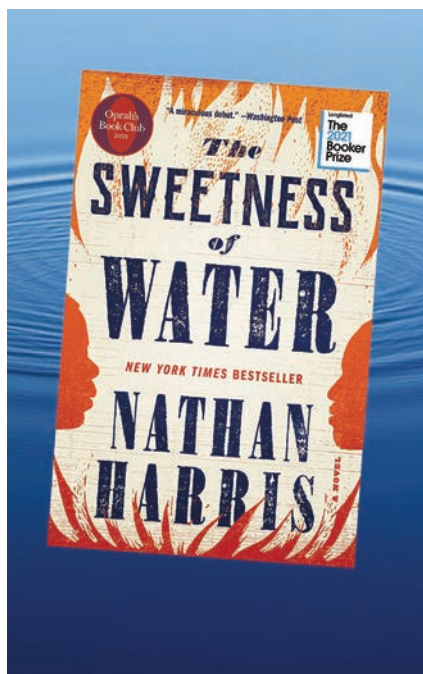
by **FRAN WITHROW**

**PICKED UP “THE SWEETNESS** of Water” because of the exquisite title, then became spellbound by the beauty of the writing. Lyrical and haunting, Nathan Harris has written a tale about the South just after the Emancipation Proclamation with understated power, pulling the reader into the story with an accomplished hand.

George and Isabelle Walker are transplanted northerners who live on a farm in Georgia. They recently heard that their only son, Caleb, died fighting in the War Between the States. Grieving, George wanders often through the woods of his land, where one day he finds two newly freed Black brothers, Landry and Prentiss, who were enslaved on the adjacent farm prior to being freed. The brothers have been struggling to survive in the forest, hoping to go north. Noticing that these two young men are the same age as his beloved son Caleb, George invites them to live in his barn and help him work his land, a proposition they accept.

When Caleb surprises everyone by returning home alive, he inadvertently sets in motion a cataclysm of events. Meeting his lover in the woods for a tryst one day leads to the murder of a witness. Caleb bravely confesses all to his parents, and the whole family ends up calling for justice, despite resistance from many of the townspeople. Prentiss, devastated by what has happened, stands up to the white sheriff, and the Walker family rallies around him with true courage and integrity. Isabelle, in particular, turns grief into action. Instead of fading into the woodwork, she cleverly finds ways around obstacles, ending up transforming her sorrow into something poignant and meaningful.

This is Harris’ first novel, and his writing is utterly compelling. He brings to life the struggles of Blacks during this turbulent period, as well as the confusion, fear, and anger simmering among the Whites. There is a muted, restrained tone to his prose, a sparseness to the way conversations are written, that actually lends an air of reality to the events of the story. Descriptions



of newly emancipated men and women hiding in woods or huddled in alleys is never maudlin. Even violent events, like the hardships and suffering experienced by Prentiss and Landry before they were freed, are written in a matter of fact way that somehow makes them even more powerful.

The ending of this noteworthy novel is stirring, as Isabelle and George give unstintingly for the cause they champion. All this leads up to a satisfying, heartwarming finale, one as sweet as water.

I love reading the author biographies and looking at their photos on the dust jackets of my books. Harris seems impossibly young to have written such a standout. Though there is a plethora of historical fiction about the Civil War and its aftermath, this one is worth your time. Harris writes with keen insight about the thoughts, motivations, and intentions of both Blacks and Whites during this unsettled era. I expect we have not heard the last from this talented author. **NB**

*The Sweetness of Water*  
By Nathan Harris  
Little, Brown, and Company  
363 pages  
\$28.00

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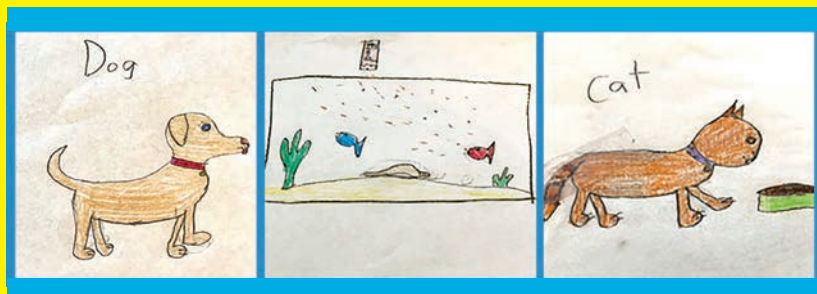
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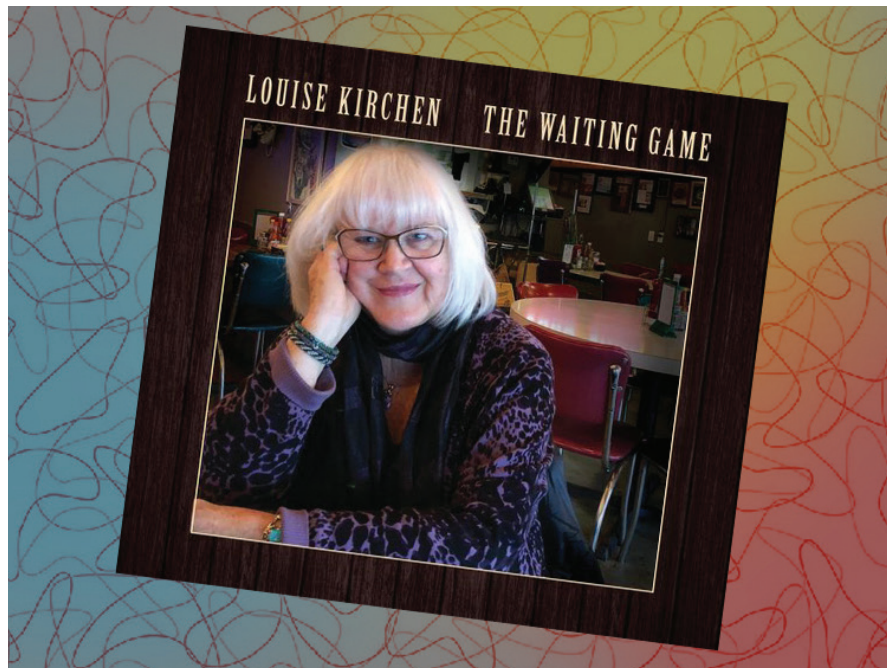
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## MUSIC

# The Waiting Game

## Louise Kirchen's Debut CD

by ANNE JONES



**E**VEN THOUGH IT TOOK Louise Kirchen a lifetime to come out with her first cd, "The Waiting Game", it would be all wrong to call her a late bloomer. She's been writing and singing good old country songs since her early days at 1960's Berkeley, smack dab in the center of the Summer of Love and witness to the many watershed musical events that defined a generation. Louise explains it: "We anxiously awaited the next Bob Dylan or Beatles album, as if they were keys to decoding a secret message that was unfolding every day. Somehow I landed in the right place at the perfect time to witness an incredible musical phenomenon going on all around me, culminating with getting Lost in the Ozone with Commander Cody and meeting Bill Kirchen." She has contributed material to many of Bill's albums, has played and sung in her own bands, had her song "Why Wyoming" featured in a Sam Shepard movie, and in the last few years has won song-writing awards as an integral part of the Austin music scene.

So it's no surprise that "The Waiting Game" has the feel of an old country classic. Louise Kirchen has the heart-felt, bona fide, old-school country chops to create an album of 13 original songs that, at first listen, feel achingly familiar and brand new all at once. Take "Consolation Prize," written by Louise and Bill

Kirchen, and Sarah Brown, and one of two co-writes on the CD. It's your typical Louise lyrics —poignant and clear, like her pretty voice, and capturing perfectly the heartache of being someone's second choice. Louise is a clever word-smith. Her songs have great hooks and catchy phrasing that ring deep and true with feeling. "Big Hat, No Cattle" has always been a favorite Bill Kirchen song, and it's fun to hear Louise do it her way, still in true western swing style. There's even what Louise labels a "noir blues" cut—a slinky, sultry "Trade Winds" that meanders slowly along with Bill Kirchen on his Heritage hollow body guitar, producer Rich Brotherton on drums and acoustic guitar, and David Carroll on upright bass. The backing musicians on "The Waiting Game" are as good as it gets - all virtuosos in their own right: Rick Richards on drums, Floyd Domino on piano, Marty Muse on pedal steel, Warren Hood on fiddle, Dan Torosian on clarinet, and Paul Glasse on electric mandolin (plus Brotherton, Kirchen and Carroll listed above).

I once talked to Louise about a comedy act I had seen on the music cruise we were on. The schtick was a singing couple who lampooned the sordid messes and drama often chronicled by country musicians, and I had laughed hard all the way through. Not Louise. She looked at me seriously and said she didn't like the act; she just loved country music too much. I get it now.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION by DOUG DOBEY



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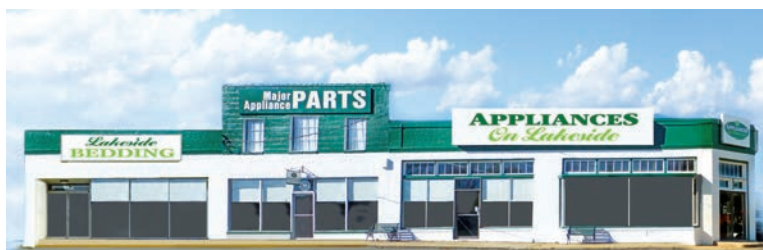


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