



March Madness at APSS Belonged to Delightfully Zany Songwriter John Forster

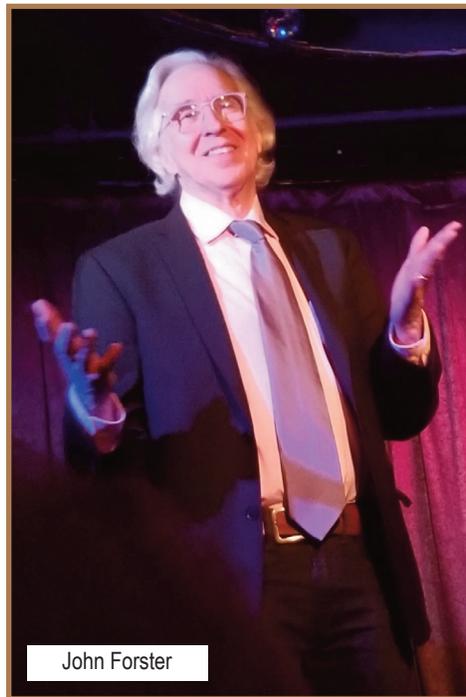
By Marilyn Lester

While the title March Madness is mostly all about basketball, we at APSS had our own brand of it with a delightful program produced by Board Members Michael Lavine and Tom Toce. *An Afternoon with John Forster* was all about this multi-award-winning satirist, songwriter, composer, lyricist, record producer and cabaret denizen, in an interview style format conducted by Toce and with magnificent performers to sing prime Forster works.

For a taste of what was to come, with music director Lavine at the piano, Jim Caruso began the program with what he called a Forster masterpiece, “Tone Deaf.” This hilarious tune alone illustrated why, on his retirement, the master of song satire, Tom Lehrer said: “You don’t need me anymore. Now you’ve got John Forster to kick around” and why Stephen Ide in the Massachusetts *Patriot Ledger* said: “John Forster is a one-man musical comedy, a self-contained Capitol Steps, yet with a delightful quiriness all his own...painfully truthful and filled with fun.”

How did this genius of musical madness get his start? As he related to Toce, demonstrating humor from the start, Forster allowed he was a Unitarian growing up in Pennsylvania who was a “musical mercenary” by singing in the local Episcopal Church choir. Over several years in that circumstance, he spontaneously learned to read music and became interested in writing it. After college, he arrived in New York City, as he noted with tongue in cheek, “to seek my fortune.” He worked for ASCAP and had the good fortune to be at a Hal Prince party, where his “Classical Music Is

Cool” song was played and heard and thus inspired Prince to put together a revue. This event was a turning point, leading Forster to commit to the path of professional songwriting.



John Forster

As Toce noted during the program, Forster is versatile. Over a decades-long career, he’s not only written stand-alone and thematic songs, but has collaborated on theater pieces and in various other media. Notorious in the annals of Broadway, was a property called *Into the Light*, whose book he rewrote when the original writer was fired on opening night. Music for the show was written by Lee Holdridge. *Into the Light* opened and closed in the space of several days in October 1986. Sarah Rice, whose part was cut from the show, sang the lovely “The Rose and I,” a song originally meant for her but ultimately given to another character.

Asked about his process, Forster, who writes both music and lyrics, allowed that the work is harder when he’s “just a lyricist.” He also said that although he’s capable of it, as he grew older he found he likes to take more time with his work rather than dashing something out quickly. He also noted that with technology, songwriters have to become producers as well—for instance in making and editing videos. No longer will a mere demo tape work.

Forster’s collaborations have, however, been brilliant ones. Demonstrating the wide range of topics tackled by Forster, was, with Dennis Predovic, “Article Nine,” which is about Article Nine of the Japanese Constitution, implemented following Japan’s loss in World War II, outlawing war as a means to settle international disputes. With Mary Rodgers (book writer) he wrote the music and lyrics for a musical adaptation of the film *Freaky Friday*. A collaboration with Tom Chapin yielded a Grammy for his work producing Chapin’s 1998 album *My Hometown*. Forster collaborated with Chapin on *Broadsides: A Miscellany of Musical Opinion, Some Assembly Required, Family Tree, Billy The Squid* and more. Their song “This Pretty Planet,” (used by NASA to awaken astronaut John Glenn) was sung by his wife Vicky, with APSS audience participation encouraged. Forster’s love of writing children’s music has yielded four Grammy Awards total and has expanded into the publishing world with the children’s book, *The Backwards Birthday Party*, based on the Forster-Chapin song of the same name.

Continued on page 3



President's Message...

Linda Amiel Burns, President

Dear APSS Members, Friends & Fans,

Can you believe that Winter is over and Spring has finally sprung? This has been a terrific season at our new home at Don't Tell Mama, and we are very proud of this

accomplishment.

Many thanks to Producers Michael Lavine and Tom Toce for their extraordinary March Program presenting "The Songs of John Forster" with a brilliant cast featuring Carole. J. Bufford, Jim Caruso, Vicky Forster, Eric Michael Gillet, Paul Kreppel, and Sarah Rice. Despite the bad weather we had a good turnout; if you missed this remarkable show, you can watch the video on our website www.apssinc.org. Also, Marilyn Lester, our Co-Editor, has written the lead story on the amazing and charming John Forster, who gave us one of the best afternoon programs ever!

April is Jazz Month and we have a spectacular program planned, produced by Marilyn Lester with Bobby Sanabria and his quartet, featuring Afro-Cuban Latin rhythms. Don't miss this one! Then in May, Sandi Durell will be presenting her Award-Winning 20th Annual Songwriter Series, always one of our most popular shows.

This June, we are doing something entirely different. Instead of the regular Saturday afternoon Program, we are holding our first Fund Raising Gala, a Benefit for APSS, on Sunday, June 12th at The Cutting Room. Beginning at 5:00, we will have cocktails, canapes, and lots of fun and schmoozing. Then at 6:00-7:30 there will be a Star-Studded Show produced by Sandi Durell and Marilyn Lester honoring the great Lee Roy Reams with a Lifetime Achievement Award. The talented (and APSS Board Member) Michael Lavine will be the Musical Director. A "SAVE THE DATE" email has been sent out, and we would like you to spread the word, donate to this wonderful organization, and, of course, attend this special event. This is our first GALA Fund Raising Benefit Evening, and we are very excited about it. More info to follow.

See you on Saturday, April 9th. I know that you will be dancing in your seats as we are not allowed to do that in the aisles!

Best Wishes and Happy Springtime.

Linda



Linda Amiel Burns addressing the Society at a meeting at Local 802 (Photo from the archives).

MEETING LOCATION: starting with 2021 - 2022 Season



(343 W. 46th St.)
12:00pm - 2:00pm

Come early to look thru Sheet Music & CD's & stuff, all FREE.

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John Forster... cont...

Sarah Rice, John Forster, Tom Toce, Carole J. Bufford, Paul Kreppel

Forster got his start with children's songs, though, with *How to Eat Like a Child—And Other Lessons in Not Being a Grown-up*, one of the most widely produced children's stage shows in the USA. The show began as an original television special on NBC in 1981, based on Delia Ephron's book of the same name. It was a one-hour program starring Dick Van Dyke and 15 children aged seven to 13, comprised of almost two dozen "how to" lessons. Moving to the piano Forster delivered from that score, "How to Ride in a Car."

Throughout the program, Forster's songs were sung by several other cabaret performers. A new song, hot off the press and never performed in public before (other than by Forster himself) was a charmer, sung by Carole J. Bufford, beginning with the proposition of a person having come out of a rough divorce wondering about the secret of a long marriage. He/she consults grandma, who's been married to grandpa for 60 years. Advice is given, but the closing statement says it all: "pick someone who can stand you." Actor-director and long-time Forster friend Paul Kreppel used a red balloon to illustrate and deliver "Helium," about the "last safe

recreational drug." On a more serious note, Eric Michael Gillet sensitively delivered a new song, "The Slow Ticking of Time." Forster noted that he'd written



Eric Michael Gillet

many free-standing tunes that would soon be released on a new cabaret album.

Several years ago, at the suggestion of the late Metropolitan Room's Bernie Furshpan, Toce formed the New York Songwriters Alliance, which includes Forster; it's a community offering support and exposure to the work of its members. Within this community especially, Forster has developed a cabaret presence, winning four MAC awards—a process Toce explained has many moving parts. One of his latest works is part of a body of "impossible songs" (think of patter songs and Tom

Lehrer's "The Elements," for instance). Newly composed, Forster at the piano sang his "This Sentence Is False," describing in lyric the impossible loop of logic of truth versus falsehood.

Ending 90 minutes of pure enjoyment combining a fascinating interview with hilarious songs, Forster ended singing and playing "Entering Marion," a somewhat mildly risqué and largely humorous tune inspired by a family joke. It's a novelty song that pays tribute to Massachusetts and the signage located at the entrance to every town and hamlet in the state. The song earned an Indie Award HM (given by the organization of independent record labels) and was one of radio host Dr. Demento's "50 Greatest Novelty Songs of All Time."

It should be noted that on the day of the March APSS meeting, weather madness prevailed. Not only was the thermometer in the Arctic region, but wind and mixed snow, sleet and rain prevailed. Those brave enough to venture out and attend were rewarded handsomely by producers Lavine and Toce in the presentation of a terrific program about and starring John Forster—and the wonderful vocalists who paid tribute to his work. 🎵

Remembering The Oak Room – The Crown Jewel of Cabaret

By Marilyn Lester

The Algonquin Hotel's history is rich, stretching back to 1902. It was the home of the illustrious and celebrated literary Round Table, aka "The Vicious Circle," for one thing. But sadly, the Algonquin's glory days are largely over. In 2012 the legendary Oak



Andrea Marcovicci in the Oak Room

Room closed, its memory fading into the hotel's fabled past and recently another renovation modernized the lobby into a shadow of its rich past.

The Algonquin Hotel opened with an intent to curry culture. Its location on West 44th Street was chosen for its proximity to the Hippodrome, the theatre on Sixth Avenue, as well as the Metropolitan Opera, and other entertainment venues for vaudeville and legitimate theatre. The first owners of the hotel were Albert T. and Ann Stetson Foster of Buffalo, NY, whose involvement was short-lived. Algonquin manager Frank Case took over the lease in 1907, eventually buying the hotel in 1927. Under Case's leadership, the Algonquin Hotel accrued more connections to the arts than any other hotel in the history of New York City. Case attracted writers, editors, actors, artists, singers, musicians and other cultural and show business luminaries, fostering the establishment of the Round Table in the Pergola Room in 1919. In 1939 the Round Table moved to the Rose Room and the Pergola Room became the Oak Room Supper Club, with European chanteuse Greta Keller headlining. Almost immediately the cabaret became a premier hot spot, only to be shuttered during World War II, bringing the Oak Room Supper Club's potential for early greatness and distinction to an abrupt end.

In 1946, the now legendary, culturally enterprising Ben and Mary Bodne bought the hotel – but still the Oak Room remained dark. It wasn't until 1980, after five years of

pitching the idea, that Donald Smith, a publicist and promoter (and later founder of the Mabel Mercer Foundation) persuaded the Bodnes and their son-in-law, hotel manager Andrew Anspach, to reconsider. With Steve Ross at an upright piano under a single spotlight, the Oak Room finally made its debut and was an immediate success.

The Oak Room was perfect for cabaret – small and intimate and cozy. With its dark oak paneling the room could have passed for a library or music room in an English country estate. Since the stage was at the center of one of the two long walls, achieving audience rapport could be a challenge. With the success of the room's reopening, a grand piano was soon installed, signaling the start of successful appearances by A-listers such as Michael Feinstein, Harry Connick, Jr., Jamie Cullum and Diana Krall. Many entertainers were propelled to fame by their appearances at the Algonquin, and a new



Barbara Carroll in the Oak Room

home was made for a clutch of cabaret stars, such as Julie Wilson, Andrea Marcovicci, Barbara Carroll, Karen Akers, and KT Sullivan, to name a few. Through a three-decade run, the Oak Room glistened and glimmered in high style and distinction. Its one dark moment was the demise of 74-year-old Sylvia Syms, who died in 1992 during a performance, collapsing at the feet of composer Cy Coleman.

At the end of the Bodne era in 1987, ownership of the Algonquin Hotel passed through several hands, all of whom kept the Oak Room going. Succeeding the Bodnes, the Aoki Corporation purchased the hotel, selling it in 1997 to a partnership between Olympus Real Estate Corporation and Camberley Hotels. In June 2002, Miller

Global Properties bought the hotel, partnering with Marriott International in 2010. Miller Global sold its stake to Cornerstone Real Estate Advisers in 2011, a sale which signaled the beginning of the end for the Oak Room. In January 2012 the Oak Room and Blue Bar were closed for renovation, and on February 2, 2012 it was announced that the Oak Room would not reopen. Part of it was taken to enlarge the hotel's Blue Bar, while the rest was slated to be "repurposed" as a breakfast space for Marriott Reward Elite travelers.

The end of the Oak Room was greeted with much sadness and chagrin. On Monday, October 1, 2012 jazz journalist, writer and historian, Will Friedwald, with TV personality Bill Boggs, produced *Remembering the Oak Room: A Musical Tribute by Its Headliners* at New York's Friars Club. The 90-minute program featured performers associated with the Oak Room (such as Andrea Marcovicci, Karen Akers, Barbara Carroll, KT Sullivan, Steve Ross, and others). The tribute was a heartfelt response to the closing of the room, an evening when both mourning and celebration could be freely expressed—for another nightlife institution had fallen. The Oak Room was now a memory along with other hallowed venues of entertainment—Rainbow and Stars, the Copacabana, the Latin Quarter, the Stork Club, El Morocco, the Embers, and hotel rooms such as the Plaza's Persian Room, the Waldorf-Astoria's Hideaway and Empire Rooms, the Stanhope's Rembrandt Room, the Biltmore's Palm Court and Feinstein's at the Loews Regency. Yet, among them, it's the Oak Room that's the crown jewel of cabaret, shining radiantly as the best and the brightest of them all.



The Algonquin Oak Room

This article is adapted from an article that originally appeared in *NiteLife Exchange*, with thanks to publisher Scott Barbarino.



Bringing Latin Music to America: The Brilliant Pioneers

By *Jerry Osterberg*

We all remember Antonio Carlos Jobim, the primary force behind the creation of the bossa nova style. Although many of his songs are securely within the repertoires of countless performers, there are others who have made strong contributions to the Great American Songbook. This is about four individuals who came to America from Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, during the formative years of jazz in the first half of the twentieth century and left an indelible impression.

Juan Tizol: Born in 1900, he was a Puerto Rican jazz trombonist and composer; best known as a member of the Duke Ellington Band and co-writer of the jazz standards “Caravan,” “Pyramid,” and “Perdido.”

Although his original instrument was the violin, he switched to the valve trombone, which he played throughout his career. He trained under his Uncle Manuel Tizol, the director of the municipal band and symphony in San Juan. Juan Tizol also gained experience playing in local operas, ballets, and dance bands. At the age of twenty, he joined a band that was traveling to the United States to work in Washington, D.C. Ultimately, they took up residence in the Howard Theater, where they played for traveling shows and silent movies. Many of the players were also hired to perform in small jazz or dance groups, which is how Tizol came to the attention of Duke Ellington. Tizol joined Ellington’s band in 1929, becoming the second trombonist, opening new possibilities for Ellington’s writing. Tizol made many contributions to the band throughout the 1930s and 1940s, including composing. He was largely responsible for bringing Latin influences into the Ellington band. After joining Harry James for a brief period, he went back to Ellington. Later, he played sporadically with James, Nelson Riddle, Louis Belson, and on Nat King Cole’s short-lived television show in the mid-1950s.

Maria Grever (de la Portilla Torres): She wrote her first song, a Christmas carol, at the age of four. Her first published song, written when she was eighteen, “A Una Ola,” sold three million copies. Grever moved with her father to his city of birth, Sevilla, from Mexico City, when she had just turned six. She studied music in France with Claude Debussy and Franz Lenhard. During her lifetime, Grever wrote 1,000 songs, most of them boleros, and she became popular in Europe, Latin America, and the United States. In addition to having several international hits, she contributed music to an Esther Williams film and a song recorded by the Andrew Sisters “Ti-Pi-Tin. Grever is best known for “Cuando Vuelva a tu Lado,” recorded by Dinah Washington in 1959 as “What a Difference a Day Made.” Other versions were covered by Andy Russell, a Mexican American singer, Vaughn Monroe, Dean Martin, Ben E. King, Little Anthony & the Imperials, Bobby Darin, Natalie Cole, Diana Ross, Barry Manilow, Rod Stewart, and Eydie Gorme.

Consuelo Velazquez: Having been born in Mexico City in 1916, she was known as a concert pianist and composer of many well-known Mexican ballads such as “Amar y vivir,” “Cachito,” and “Besame Mucho.” At the age of four, she showed an aptitude for music; she began studies in music and piano at the age of six, and by eleven, Velazquez was well on her way to a degree in teaching music and concert piano at the National Conservatory of Music. Her first public concert was held in the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City, and soon after she began as a composer of popular music. She also appeared as a concert pianist soloist. Her most well-known success is “Besame Mucho,” composed in the Cuban music genre bolero when she was sixteen. In 1944, Nat King Cole made the first adaptation of the song in English.

It’s been recorded and performed by hundreds of artists since then, among them: The Beatles, Placido Domingo,

Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr, Xavier Cugat, Vera Lynn, Andrea Bocelli, and Diana Krall.

Mario Bauza: He was an Afro-Cuban jazz, Latin, and jazz musician, who was born in 1911. Among the first to introduce Cuban music to the United States, Bauza’s composition “Tanga” was the first piece to blend jazz harmony and arranging technique with jazz soloists and Afro-Cuban rhythms. As a child he studied clarinet, becoming recognized as a prodigy, and was featured with the Havana Symphony at the age of eleven. The symphony came to New York City to record in 1926 and Bauza stayed with a relative for a time. He witnessed a performance of George Gershwin’s “Rhapsody in Blue” and was inspired by the saxophonist Frankie Trumbauer’s solos. Although he returned to Cuba, he came back to New York in 1930 and learned to play the alto saxophone while maintaining his clarinet technique. Three years later, Bauza was hired by the Chick Webb Orchestra as lead trumpeter and musical director after learning to play the trumpet in a period of two weeks to replace another musician for a recording session. It was during this time that he met his fellow trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, and allegedly discovered and recruited Ella Fitzgerald for the Webb band. In 1938, Bauza joined the Cab Calloway band, leaving two years later to form his own band with his vocalist brother-in-law, but not before persuading Calloway to hire Gillespie. It was during this time that Bauza’s band, Machito and his Afro-Cubans, made their first recording and brought in a timbalero named Tito Puente.

Some will have read this and recognized the names of the songs, if not the history behind them.

These four people represent only a handful of the many who helped build the vast catalog of music that has made our lives richer. They have left behind a legacy we can all be grateful for.



My Favorite Husband Radio Show



My Favorite Husband was a radio show on CBS from 1948 to 1951 and then on television from 1953 to 1955. The show was based on the 1942 movie, *Are Husbands Necessary?*. The movie, the radio show, and the television show are all based on the book, *Mr. and Mrs. Cugat: The Record of a Happy Marriage* by Isabel Scott Rorick.

The radio show starred Lucille Ball and Richard Denning as the happily married Mr. and Mrs. Cugat. Later the couple's name changed to Cooper because of confusion between the fictional Mr. and Mrs. Cugat and the real bandleader, Xavier Cugat.

The show aired 124 episodes during its run and was sponsored by Jell-O. The show always signed on with Lucille Ball calling "Jell-O, everybody!" after the announcer, Bob Lemond, started the show. There were at least three plugs for Jell-O in every show.

When the show first started, it revolved around well-to-do, happily married couple Liz and George Cugat, later changed to Cooper. Liz and George lived in Sheridan Falls at 321 Bundy Drive. They were billed as "Two people who live together and like it."

The changes after the first few shows were initiated by new writers Bob Carroll, Jr., Madelyn Pugh, and Jess Oppenheimer, names you might recognize from a little show called *I Love Lucy*—there was a radio show version too! The changes were made to make the couple more accessible to the listeners. In addition to the name change, the couple's life style changed from a well-to-do banker and his social butterfly wife to a middle-class couple. The new writers thought that most listeners did not identify with a rich banker couple.

Many of the plots revolve around Liz trying to get one over on George or George doing something to make Liz crazy. For example, in the first episode, instead of taking Liz out to celebrate their 10th wedding anniversary in style, George takes Liz to a party to see his old girlfriend which doesn't go over very well.

Gale Gordon played George's banker boss, Rudolph Atterbury, and Bea



Ball & Richard Denning.

Benaderet was Atterbury's wife and Liz's best friend, Iris. There were several wives versus husbands plots during the show's run often with hilarious results. For example, In one of the episodes from 1950, the Atterbury's get a new car but Rudolph refuses to teach Iris how to drive. Ever so helpful, Liz offers to teach Iris how to drive and you can imagine how the story goes from there.

There were many domestic comedies on the radio at the time such as *My Good Wife*, *Burns and Allen*, *Father Knows Best*, and *Fibber McGee and Molly*. Many of the shows were very popular like *Fibber McGee and Molly* but there were critics who thought that there were too many of the shows that were a pale reflection of shows like *My Favorite Husband* or *Fibber McGee and Molly*.

My Favorite Husband was a popular and funny show with a great writing team and great actors. It remained popular until the end of its run on radio.

It Was On TV?

In 1953, *My Favorite Husband* made the move to television, a relatively new medium at the time. Television executives wanted Lucille Ball and Richard Denning to reprise their radio show characters but Lucille Ball refused unless her husband, Desi Arnaz, could play the husband's part. Executives thought the switch from Richard Denning, an American, to Desi Arnaz, a Cuban with an accent, would be too confusing.

When Ball refused, Denning dropped out or was let go—that part is unclear—Barry Nelson and Joan Caulfield were hired to play the parts of George and Liz Cooper. The series went back to the Coopers being a well-to-do couple and storylines that dealt with their society life. For the first two seasons, the Atterbury's were replaced with the wealthy next door neighbors, Gilmore and Myra Cobb with Myra as an obvious social climber. In the final season the Cobbs were replaced by Oliver and Myra Shepard though Myra was played by the same actress as Myra Cobb.

In a twist of irony, the final season was filmed at the Desilu Studios, owned by Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball.

Ball and Arnaz went on to fame in a little show called *I Love Lucy*.

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