

THE STYLE INVITATIONAL

REPORT FROM WEEK 848 In which we asked for rhopalic sentences, ones in which each successive word is one letter longer...



THE WINNER OF THE INKER

I do fun, cool stuff mostly: noogies, pantsing, spitballs, shoe-lacing, hand-buzzers, elbow-farting, towel-snapping, nipple-twisting, flower-squirting...

the winner of the three lollipops with various critters embedded in them: Dogs NEVER wonder whether burglars underwent mitigating, exculpating, early-boyhood, gender-related disappointment.

Go out! West, urged Taylor swiftly. Dopart, Washington

My bra fits lower, dammit, because gravity's heartless. Lois Douthitt, Arlington

STRETCHING IT: HONORABLE MENTIONS

We are agog after Tiger's wrecked Cadillac discloses infidelity, triple-bogey extramarital relationships.

The weak vegan senses: Sautéed reindeer satisfies completely!

King Midas dreamt, feeling gitless.

"Oh, lie once again, please!" lustily entreats Gabriella, Pinocchio's adventurous acquaintance.

Ice, salt, limes, shaker, tequila = blissful margarita perfection.

One word today equals "Salahis": "chutpah."

I am not with child — merely heavier. Imbecile.

Palin writes notably readable biography: Republican womanifesto.

Big-bank asset relief: nothing ventured, something shanghaied.

"Bo, you been fired!" Little Richard candidly announced.

"I do," she says. Groom silent.

To his wife, Woods needed ironing.

"I Am Sam, Play Again": Seuss's rhyming revision refreshes "Casablanca."

Tiger should endorse Fidelity.

"I am not King Fairy," Oberon growled.

Fly life cycle: larvae; maggots; pupation; emergence; Cronenberg.

U Nu, the only Burma leader elected, provides countless palindrome enthusiasts interminable entertainment.

"Oh, you heel!" cried direly injured Achilles.

Best two-wor-der: Snow blows.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

Week 852: Small, Let's get

This week's results are for rhopalic sentences, ones in which each successive word is one letter longer. Predictably, a lot of people found it hard to write a rhopalic sentence in something approaching natural English syntax...

Winner gets the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a necktie depicting some sculpture by a guy named Rodin that looks exactly like the Inker except that it is missing the paper bag over its head.

Other runners-up win their choice of a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or yearned-for Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Loser Magnets.

ON WASHINGTONPOST.COM Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers?



CAROLYN HAX

The in-law name game

Adapted from a recent online discussion:

Dear Carolyn: I just got married and my mother-in-law wants me to call her Mom. Calling her by her first name is not an option.

Talk to her. Your reason for not wanting to use Mom is perfectly reasonable and — this is the part you say to your mother-in-law openly — no reflection at all on your fondness for your mother-in-law. It's about your attachment to your mom, period.

My in-laws informed me after our marriage that it was disrespectful of me to call them by their first name, or Mr./Mrs. Lastname, and that I should call them Mommy and Daddy.

MUSIC

Dueling visions of balalaika repertory in area orchestras

BY ANNE MIDGETTE

The largest balalaika orchestra outside of Russia is based in Arlington. The balalaika orchestra that won the international competition "Music Vladivostok 2007" is also based in Arlington.

The balalaika is a triangular Russian folk instrument, like a three-stringed guitar. It's ubiquitous in Russia, rare here, and generally thought of in both countries as an emblem of ethnic music, even kitsch.

But in the late 19th century, an aristocrat named Vasily Andreyev decided that the instrument belonged in the concert hall, and as-

sembled a group of players to perform, among other things, the scherzo from Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony. (The Tchaikovsky family got a court injunction to prevent such desecration.) And there have been balalaika orchestras ever since: ensembles of 50 or more players on different sizes of balalaika and domra, the instrument's round cousin, complete with conductors and an assortment of other traditional wind and percussion instruments.

On Saturday, the American Balalaika Symphony will be featured at Strathmore as the winner of the "Great Strathmore Giveaway," a competition the center put on to help celebrate its 25th season.

Arlington's balalaika concentration is partly a matter of



WASHINGTON BALALAIKA SOCIETY

MORE TRADITIONAL: The Washington Balalaika Society plays about "75 percent Russian," says the group's Max McCullough.

chance. The Washington Balalaika Society, the city's older balalaika orchestra, was founded in 1988 when Max McCullough, an executive with IBM (since retired), moved here from Houston, where he had been a leader of the Houston Balalaika Society.

In 2001, there was a schism when Trofimenko, a balalaika soloist and sometime leader of the Washington Balalaika Society, had his own ideas about the direction in which the group should go.

The Washington Balalaika Society focuses on traditional instruments, traditional costumes and a repertory that is "75 per-

cent Russian," McCullough says, "because we think that's what audiences come to hear."

The American Balalaika Symphony seeks to move beyond the traditional ethnic repertory, to the point of including a full complement of symphonic wind instruments.

American conservatories generally don't include training on the balalaika. Most players in these largely amateur groups have no Eastern European background and come to the instrument relatively late, some with experience on the guitar or violin.

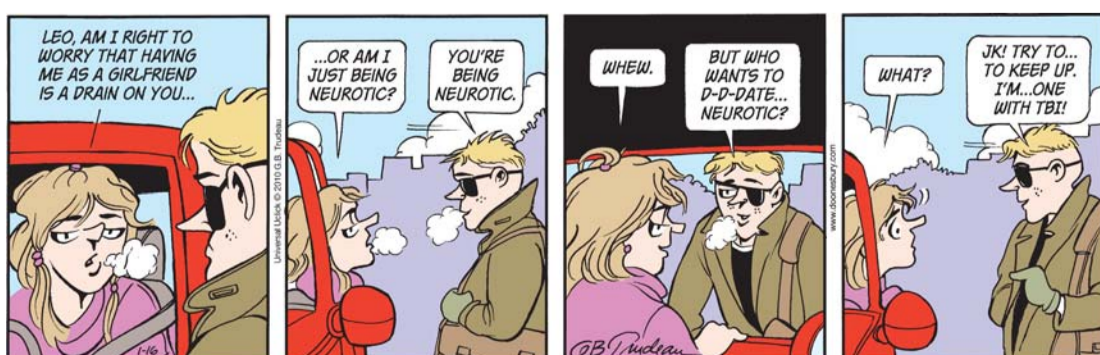
in full uniform. This orchestra's brass section is, however, mainly professional musicians.

Both orchestras include a couple of ringers from Russia who also give lessons, and each orchestra is led by a conductor who trained in Russian conservatories.

The distinctive timbre of a balalaika orchestra was certainly one of the things that caught the attention of Shelley Brown, Strathmore's vice president of programming, in selecting the American Balalaika Symphony as the winner.

In short, you can take the balalaika out of Russia, but the American Balalaika Symphony has a way to go before getting Russia out of the balalaika.

DOONESBURY BY GARRY TRUDEAU



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