

Arts

John Luttman's Joke of the Week

Q. What did the digital watch say to his mom?

See answer page 22



CONTEST OF CHAMPIONS

For you armchair enthusiasts, this has to be the weekend to look forward to, with the long-awaited Super Bowl Sunday, pitting our undefeated New England Patriots against the New York Giants. But wait! There is another contest of champions preceding the football game, an event offering equivalent drama, excitement and suspense. It's the Seventh Annual AKC (American Kennel Club)/Eukanuba National Championship.

Simulcast this Saturday night, February 2, from 8:00-11:00pm, on the Animal Planet (63) and Discovery Channel (39), this premier dog show actually took place in Long Beach, California, last December. Referred to as "the complete canine extravaganza" by its sponsors, 2,444 dogs competed for a total of \$225,000 in cash prizes.

For many of us, including me, in real time the AKC/Eukanuba event slipped under the radar, so Saturday I will view it as a totally new experience. Of course, if you want to take a shortcut, the results are readily available on the AKC/Eukanuba website, but it's much more fun to watch the contest with fresh eyes and see how your favorites measure up. Many of these same dogs will be competing at the Westminster show, so you will have the latest scoop right before Westminster airs live on February 11 and 12.

The AKC, the oldest and largest

registry of dog breeds in this country, now recognizes 169 breeds, divided into seven major groups according to that breed's general purpose or type: Sporting, Herding, Terrier, Toy, Working, Non-Working and Hound.

Obtaining AKC status is a long process for a breed. The AKC will not consider a breed for registration unless there is an organized American breed club with a registry of at least 300 dogs and three generations of breeding pedigrees in place. This can take a long time for those breeds that are little known or have only regional popularity. For the breeders, having AKC sanction means that their records will be kept by a prestigious national organization as well as providing a venue for national exposure of their breed through event participation.

Let's take a quick look at the four breeds the AKC admitted during 2007 so that we will be a little familiar with them when they parade around the ring on Saturday night.

The Plott is fascinating to me because it is considered one of the truly American breeds, having been bred and refined on this soil for over 200 years. In 1750, a young German immigrating to Bute County, North Carolina, brought along five Hanoverian Hounds, a revered hunting breed from his homeland. Through the



generations, the Plott men bred their dogs for hunting big game such as bear, boar and mountain lion, and the dog's fame spread, both as fearless hunters and for their treeing instinct which also

made them popular with coon hunters. The official state dog of North Carolina, the Plott is a medium-sized dog that uses its strong nose and aggressive hunting instinct to track, bring to bay or tree big game and raccoons.

References to the Beauceron appeared in a Renaissance manuscript dated 1578. Developed solely in France for herding, in the late 1800s, a distinction was made between the sheep dog with a long coat, Berger de Brie (Briard) and the short coated Berger de Beauce (Beauceron). Used to move herds of 200-300 sheep distances of up to 50 miles without showing signs of exhaustion, this breed fell out of favor as France became more industrialized. To rally support for the breed, fanciers have emphasized its versatility with use in law enforcement and as military guard dogs.

The Swedish Vallhund is an ancient breed, believed to be indigenous to that country back to the days of the Vikings more than 1,000 years ago. Similar to the Welsh Corgi, the Swedish Vallhund is taller, shorter and slimmer than the Corgi, but, similarly, they are bred to

work as herders of livestock. Unknown in this country until 1985, the Swedish Vallhund is intelligent, friendly and a good companion dog.

The Tibetan Mastiff is also an ancient breed, but since few Westerners were allowed into Tibet prior to the 1800s, little is known about the early history of this dog. Traditional defenders of flocks along with the women, children and belongings of their masters against predators, both animal and human, these dogs have a long association of working with man. In the late 1950s two Tibetan Mastiffs were sent from Tibet to President Eisenhower, although they were relocated to the Midwest and obscurity. The American Tibetan Mastiff Society was formed in 1974. These large, full coated dogs have a protective instinct, strength, initiative, patience and gentleness.

Seeing these new inductees to the AKC is just one more reason to tune into the canine equivalents of the Super Bowl. ■

Jan Jaeger is owner of Geronimo's, Ltd., Nantucket's pet supply and gift shop and is a member of Dog and Cat Writer's Associations of America (DWAA and CWA).. Her pets at home are Junior, a Chesapeake Bay Retriever and three cats. At the shop are the cats, Messrs. Fish and Chips, Flower Bunny, Millie guinea pig and two budgies. Send e-mail to jan@geronimos.com.

DUO

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Robert Behrman began playing piano at the age of six and never stopped. He came to Nantucket two years ago when hired as the music director at the First Congregational Church. Prior to that he was in St. Louis, playing organ and piano for a church and bringing together musical groups such as the St. Louis New Music Ensemble. Both Behrman and Ghazaryan are faculty members of the NCMC/Nantucket School of Music.

A year ago the duo came together like two lost pieces of a sonata when Behrman needed a violin accompaniment for a program.

"As time passed, we played more together, and we've learned a lot from each other," said Behrman, who called Ghazaryan, "one of the hardest working players I've ever known."

"Unfortunately, 95% of the result that a musician has is work, not the talent," Ghazaryan said. Do not let his humbleness fool you. The talent possessed by both him and Behrman is only matched by a very few world class musicians.

"We have great ensemble," Behrman said. "We know what the other person is doing — not before and not after but in the moment. We're two people who can play as one."

This is evident even when talking to the two. They finish each other's sentences, seamlessly follow each other's thoughts and make a third person listening have to sprint to keep up.

The duo will perform a concert in three sonatas, by Handel, Beethoven and Franck. The emotions of each piece are accentuated by the superb handling of



PHOTO BY LUCRETIA VOIGT

The duo rehearsed Monday at the Congregational Church.

Behrman and Ghazaryan. Listening to them play you get lost in the wave of the music.

"It's an interesting program," said Ghazaryan, "because we start from Handel, which is 18th century."

"1732, was the date," interrupts Behrman. "The Beethoven sonata is 1802."

"And finally . . ." interjects Ghazaryan.

"Franck is 1886 . . ." continues Behrman.

"More modern, and we'll end up . . ." comments Ghazaryan.

"It's a secret, but we're playing a little Broadway for the encore," finishes Behrman.

Both Behrman and Ghazaryan have fallen in love with Nantucket. Armen considers it his "home away from home."

"I always call Nantucket my first love," Ghazaryan said. "For an artist, it's a very inspiring, special environment. . . . Pablo Casals, a Spanish cel-

list, moved to Puerto Rico because he thought that a small island is the right place for his inspiration to create music, to be by himself. Probably, that is the same situation with me here."

Behrman is equally as enchanted. "I love playing for audiences here. I've never played for better audiences anywhere else in America," Behrman said. "Nantucket audiences tend to be more intelligent; they have a combination of East Coast smarts with real appreciation of what performers go through to make something meaningful for their audiences. That combination of intelligence and kindness makes for a really warm feeling."

Tickets for all concerts are \$20 for Nantucket Arts Council members and \$25 for non-members and can be purchased at Mitchell's Book Corner, Nantucket Bookworks, Dan's Pharmacy and at the door. Students in high school and younger are admitted free. Series tickets are also available at a discounted price. The event begins at 4 p.m. and take place at the Coffin School, 4 Winter Street.

"The concert will definitely be over by Super Bowl time," laughed Behrman.

"Definitely," concurred Ghazaryan, a smile in his eyes. Even superhero musicians have to take some time to relax. ■

— Armen Ghazaryan and Robert Behrman will perform on Sunday, February 3, 2008 at 4:00 p.m. at The Coffin School, 4 Winter Street. Tickets are \$20 for Nantucket Arts Council members and \$25 for non-members. Tickets can be purchased at Mitchell's Book Corner, Nantucket Bookworks, Dan's Pharmacy and at the door. Students in high school and younger are admitted free.