A museum or archive can be locked up as tight as Fort Knox, but it will always have one seemingly unavoidable weakness in its defenses: a traitorous employee. In the unfortunate case of the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh, this employee happened to be the man in charge himself—Greg Priore, the longtime manager of the library’s rare books and archives room. In a surreptitious, protracted heist that took place from 1992 to 2017, Priore and an accomplice made off with a treasure trove of rare texts, in many cases irreparably damaging them in the process. Although stomach-turning to read, Travis McDade’s riveting retelling of Priore’s crimes for the *Smithsonian Magazine* will, one hopes, serve as a reminder to (worthy) curators and librarians to keep on high alert.

“Donizetti: The Dickens of opera”
Roger Parker, *The Times Literary Supplement*

For all their willingness to experiment with changes in staging, costume, gender, etc., few major opera companies are ever inclined to risk their budgets on revivals of obscure selections from the back catalog of lesser-known composers. It’s no great task to rescue, say, a piano sonata from the dustbin of history. The space and expense required to stage operas, however, ensure that the majority of those that languish in obscurity will remain unheard. That’s a shame, as there are many that deserve an airing, at least for curiosity and music history’s sake. In an article for *The Times Literary Supplement*, Roger Parker sings the praises of Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti, who today is best known almost exclusively for the operas *L’elisir d’amore*, a comedy, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*, a tragedy. Parker tracks Donizetti’s development from a composer of derivative comedies in the shadow of Rossini to a daring innovator in comic and serious opera, willing to break structural convention in *Il Paria* and tackle an ambitious (and politically risky) series of four historical operas on the secret love lives of the Tudors. Parker is himself one of the creative forces behind *Opera Rara*, a society dedicated to the revival of worthy operas that have
fallen by the wayside.

“The Disaster Poet”
Matthew Sherrill, Lapham’s Quarterly

An elegiac chronicler of human tragedy, William McGonagall holds the rare distinction of being famous by virtue of writing horrendously bad poetry—see, for example, his best known poem, on the Tay Bridge Disaster, a railway accident that took place in 1871. The poetaster’s lines actually found a small amount of success in contemporaneous publications, in what seems to be a poetical equivalent to “soprano” Florence Foster Jenkins’s popular society singing recitals a few decades later in New York City. Just like Jenkins, McGonagall remained blissfully unaware of the ridicule, somehow even managing to construe it as the critical discourse deserved of a successful modern poet. For anyone who has ever made an amateur stab at writing poetry, McGonagall’s story and verses, cast in a humorous but equitable light in Matthew Sherrill’s article for Lapham’s Quarterly, can perhaps hit a little too close to home.

Podcasts:

“A classical illness”
James Panero, the Executive Editor of The New Criterion, discusses the pathology of recent protests.

Dispatch:


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