

Arts & Entertainment

Marine Kopelman Visits Library To Recount Wartime Rescue of Dog

By MARYLOU MORANO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD – The war-torn city of Fallujah might seem like an unlikely place for a relationship to form between a U.S. Marine and a dog, but according to Lieutenant Colonel Jay Kopelman, not only was he in the right place, he was there at the right time as well.

He narrated the story of his discovery of a five-month-old puppy in an abandoned home in his *New York Times* best-selling book, "From Baghdad with Love: A Marine, the War, and a Dog Named Lava."

Lt. Kopelman recently visited the Westfield Memorial Library (WML),

where he described how his unit, First Battalion-Third Marines, also known as the "Lava Dogs," found the shepherd-husky mix and cared for him.

A Fallujahan family fleeing the Iraqi War had most likely left Lava behind. Taking the dog in their care, the Marines fed him Meals Ready to Eat (MRE) and bathed him in kerosene to rid him of fleas.

Since the Marines were violating military regulations by having a pet, they kept their relationship with the dog secret.

Over time, Lava became an emotional refuge for the battle-weary soldiers.

"[Lava] became a symbol of hope,"

said Lt. Kopelman. "He helped a lot of people make it through Iraq."

The author also explained the orchestration of the nearly superhuman effort to transport Lava from Iraq to safety in the United States. The endeavor involved more secrecy and the assistance of many people, including several journalists covering the Iraqi War.

"I promised [the other Marines] that I would get Lava to safety," Lt. Kopelman told the WML audience. "Once I made the promise, I had to keep it."

He said people often ask him why he went to so much trouble for a dog. "Sometimes you have to do the right thing simply because it is the right thing to do," he told them.

Lt. Kopelman joined the Navy in 1985 and transferred to the Marine Corps in 1992. He earned his gold naval parachutist wings while assigned to 1st Air/Naval Gunfire Liaison Company.

In 1996, he left active duty to pursue a career in financial services, but remained in the Marine Corps Reserve. He was recalled to active duty after 9/11.

At the time he discovered Lava, Lt. Kopelman was assisting with the training of the Iraqi Special Forces.

He returned to the United States in 2005, and Lava followed 10 days later. Since then, man and dog have been inseparable.

Lt. Kopelman and Lava live in La Jolla, Calif., with the lieutenant's wife, stepson, infant son and two additional pets, dog Koda and cat Cheddar.

"From Baghdad with Love" is co-authored by Melinda Roth and is available in all area bookstores.

For more information on Lt. Kopelman and Lava, visit jaykopelman.com



LAVA DOG DAYS...Marine Lieutenant Colonel Jay Kopelman rescued a dog from the war-torn city of Fallujah. At the Westfield Memorial Library, he described how his "Lava Dog" unit found the shepherd-husky mix and cared for him.

Triumphant Presentation Captures Journey of Beethoven's Fifth

By VICTORIA McCABE
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

They are the most famous four notes in history.

"Dun dun dunnnnnnnnnnn" – read it with an ominous voice in your head, and no musical snippet is required. You know the notes.

The opening melody of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony has become the melodic synonym for "uh oh – I'm in trouble," a foreboding sign of danger or drama that has probably at some point or another been uttered by every single person who has ever watched a cartoon chase, anticipated the approach of a mother-in-law or bravely told mom and dad he's failing English, waiting for the hammer to fall.

The challenge, then, in performing the Fifth is how to present a symphony about universal conflict, and ultimately triumph, that really has become a universal symbol for struggle and strife.

Last Friday, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra tackled that challenge the only way that musicians who really understand the work can approach it. They used those opening four notes as the beginning of the symphony's journey, not its point.

Beethoven's Fifth isn't just an instantly recognizable sign of trouble – it's the universal heroic journey, it's about facing that trouble, wrestling with it and ultimately triumphing over it. So those four notes cannot be, as a "Simpsons" episode once suggested, the only ones that matter.

To that end, the NJSO didn't give everything away in the first movement's exposition. They attacked the opening theme, but they left room to grow and explore the music. They began to open up the work in the movement's development, slowly and deftly unraveling the melody; each incarnation had a different color and shape to it, each suggested that there was more to be done before the music could find resolution.

The musicians played with Beethoven's early romanticism in the

delicate corners of the second movement; gentle wind echoes closed cadences like a soft breath, and the cello section in particular moved with an acute sensibility of the movement's introspective character. Stately full orchestra sections framed the more thoughtful passages, and the ending string chords were sublime.

One character in a 1910 novel hears goblins in the third movement – a "panic and emptiness" overcomes her as she senses the nearly insurmountable plight that Beethoven writes into the symphony. It's magnificent insight into the foreboding movement, unsettling in its restraint. Guest conductor Andrew Litton keenly recognized that the drama intensifies as the music gets softer, and he hushed the orchestra, to eerie effect.

Some sloppiness in the cello section muddied their first pass at low grumbings that boldly interject, but the violas took their handoff solidly and set things back on track.

The real glory of the Fifth is the transition from the third to the fourth movement. The wild, triumphant burst of life that begins the symphony's final movement means so much more because of the depths of despair that precede it.

The NJSO surged into the fourth movement with confidence, their performance strong enough for the audience to believe that they had chased all goblins away. Later, when that ghostly third-movement melody tried to come back, the orchestra rallied with Beethoven to persevere.

The evening's program began with

a different Symphony No. 5 – William Schuman's *Symphony for Strings*. With the future of the NJSO's prized Golden Age Collection of Strings in doubt, the all-string piece seemed more significant. And under Litton's baton, the chamber orchestra delivered a lyrical, multi-textured interpretation of the 20th-century American composer's three-movement symphony.

The piece's final movement, a *pizzicato*-driven jaunt, was delightful. The NJSO musicians gelled to pass a rising and falling melody through each string section as if doing the wave – plucked-string rhythms are always exciting, and this performance was fun. The cello-first violin interplay, compelling throughout, was at its best; the violin melodies really danced.

Celebrated pianist André Watts gave what became one of the year's best performances. In his hands, Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 2 in C minor was impassioned and stirring. All the profound beauty and sadness of the Romantic era found life in his interpretation with the NJSO.

Watts was graceful in his virtuosity, from the work's opening chords, which start softly and grow darker, to more overt displays of dexterity in the concerto's cadenzas.

His support from the orchestra was wonderful, especially in the lyrical cadences of the first movement and the swirling motion of the third.

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ON THE HUNT...Members of the Watchung Junior Hunt Club (WJHC) spent a crisp spring afternoon cleaning up a section of bridle trail in Union County's Watchung Reservation in Mountainside. Under the guidance of trail steward Nick Cioppettini, volunteers raked debris, moved rocks and stones and edged the trail with fallen tree limbs, which they dragged or carried into place. The WJHC is made up of Watchung Stable horseback riders between the ages of 9 and 17. Trail clean-up participants, from left to right, are: Phoebe Weiman of Cranford, WJHC president Nina Cioppettini of Summit, Meghan Foley of Clark, Candice Mason of Clark, Monica Cioppettini of Summit and Janine Puhak of Cranford.

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