

NEW AND NOTABLE

By Anne Stephenson
Arizona Republic

Orchestrated entanglements

Boulder author sets music to words in first novel

By Wes Blomster
Camera Classical Music Critic

"Limestone Concerto" — at the outset — seems a happily sophisticated companion piece to "Mozart in the Jungle," Blair Tindall's 2005 tell-all account of life backstage on America's classical-music scene.

In this, his first novel, Boulder's Wallace Westfeldt takes an in-depth look at the Indianapolis Symphony, which in the '60s was one of the 10 best orchestras in the nation, thanks — as Westfeldt tells it — to fictional conductor Leon Zellingari.

But not far into the story Westfeldt turns into a master of narrative counterpoint, weaving violent events of that era into a story that ends with the attempted murder of an attractive Czech cellist, a refugee from her communist homeland.

Along the way a score is stolen; there's a corpse in a quarry; and JFK is assassinated. Westfeldt dishes himself up a full plate and then manages this heap of incidents with impressive agility. And although the book is officially a work of fiction, the real-life counterparts of many of his characters are easily identified by readers who know the author.

The real-life Zellingari was St. Paul-born Izler Solomon (1910-1987), an early director of the Aspen Music Festival and from 1956 to 1976 conductor of the Indianapolis Symphony. Solomon was then married to Betty Weems, a prominent patron of music in Boulder throughout her life here.

As a teenager, Westfeldt, Weems' son, lived in the Solomon home in Indianapolis. His experiences of that time are the seed from which "Limestone Concerto" grew.

"I was surrounded by world-class musicians, often our house guests," says the former high-tech marketing manager. "And I went along on the trip to Carnegie Hall that contributed much to the Symphony's reputation."

An account of the New York visit is included in the novel.

The Russian pianist who performs with Zellingari in Indianapolis was Vladimir Ashkenazy, who did indeed arrive in

this country with a huge KGB escort. (Later in the year the pianist defected and settled in Iceland.)

Westfeldt began work on the book two years ago, moved to do so by parallels between the '60s and today.

"There was a lot of violence then — just as there is now," he says. "But there is a difference."

"In the midst of the assassinations, Vietnam and church bombings, there was an intense desire not to be violent. I'm not sure we have that desire today."

"We had our Martin Luther Kings and we had hope. Civilization was more than a marketing tool. I look at the world today and I question our ability to be civilized."

Westfeldt remembers Indianapolis' Campbell Hall, home of the orchestra, as "a sanctuary of civilization," violated in the story by an act of political violence.

"It was the beginning of our loss of innocence," he says, recalling the '60s as a period that began with great liberal optimism versus conservative paranoia and ended with conservative optimism weakly countered by liberal paranoia.

Although first drafts of "Limestone Concerto" were titled "Maestro," Westfeldt stresses that Zellingari, although the central figure in the story, is not its protagonist.

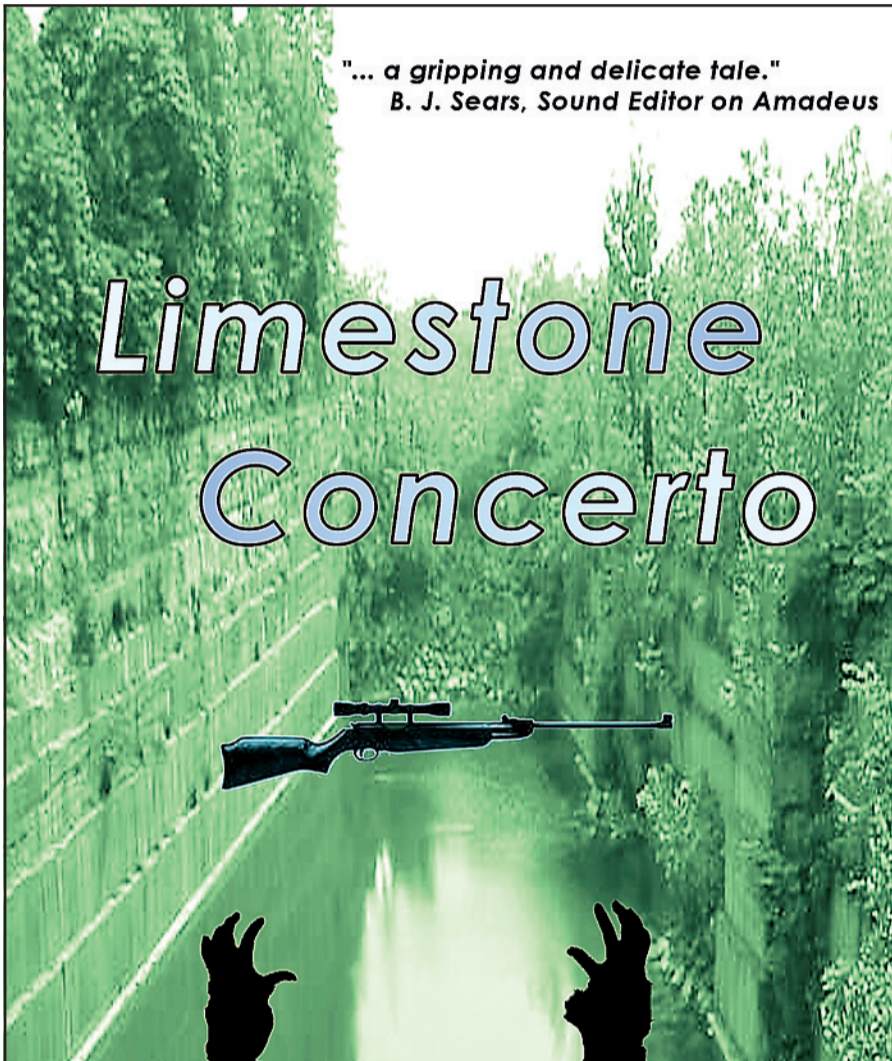
That role goes to Jed Norton, a violist from southern Indiana and an American innocent entangled in the machinations of the John Birch Society.

Each section of the novel opens with a reference to a particular work of music, which — ideally — would be assigned listening while reading the book.

"I listened to music 90 percent of the time that I was writing," Westfeldt says, noting that he has considered producing a CD to go with the book. Rights, however, make this an overly complex project.

Westfeldt writes with ease, and "Limestone Concerto" is engaging reading, made compelling by its contemporary relevance.

Yet, it must be stressed that the book is clearly a work of fiction, for a music critic in it is named Blomster.



Limestone Concerto by Wallace Westfeldt. MudBug Press, 272 pp. \$17.95.

"Literacy and Longing in L.A."

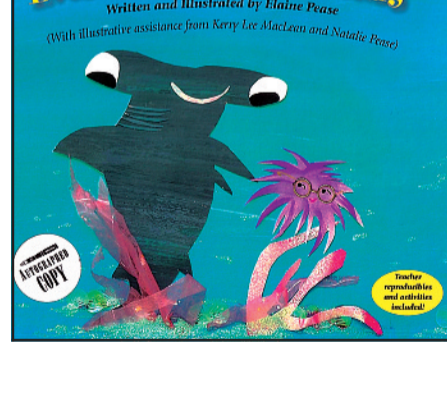
By Jennifer Kaufman and Karen Mack (Delacorte, \$22)

What a pleasing combination: books and romance. And later, after the romance has cooled, books and unselfish love. Pre-publication reviews put this novel into the "chick lit" category, which doesn't seem entirely fair given the fact that its narrator, a voracious reader, mentions John O'Hara, Shirley Hazzard, Dorothy Parker, Evelyn Waugh, Mark Twain, Robert Frost and Gustave Flaubert, all before the end of the first chapter. What's more, the narrator's literary-minded mother named her Dora, after the great Southern writer Eudora Welty. Dora is 35 and has been married twice, and is now reduced to slinking around the shelves of her favorite bookstore, eavesdropping on the conversations of a disheveled but handsome clerk named Fred. Fred is possibly the only person in the world who has read more books than Dora has, and he's good at sweet talk, too. The first 100 pages are a bit chatty, but when the action begins the story is funny and charming. Mack is a film and television producer and Kaufman is a former writer for the "Los Angeles Times."

"The True Story of Stellina"

By Matteo Pericoli (Knopf, \$14.95)

In publishing, as in raising baby birds, timing is important. Pericoli's first book was "Manhattan Unfurled," a 22-foot line drawing of the Manhattan skyline (East Side on the front, West Side on the back, folded accordion-style into a slipcase). Because he'd worked on it for more than two years the drawing included the World Trade towers, so the book was especially poignant when it was released in October 2001. Now, as we emerge from the season when little birds fall from their nests before they're ready to fly, comes this book for kids. Pericoli's wife, Holly, found a baby finch on a Manhattan corner, and when she could not find its mother, she took it home and named it Stellina. Holly fed Stellina until she could eat by herself, and later took her to places around the city (she traveled in a little box). Stellina even learned to fly in the Pericolis' small apartment, where she lived for eight years before she died. This sweet, simple story is for kids 5 and up, and for adults who feel helpless at the sight of a baby bird fallen into a dangerous world.



IF YOU GO

WHO • Elaine Pease reads from and signs "Even Sharks Need Friends"
WHEN • 11 a.m. today
WHERE • Borders Books and Music, 1101 S. Hover St., Longmont
CALL • (303) 684-6446

Boulder kids' author charms again with 'Even Sharks Need Friends'



Even Sharks Need Friends by Elaine Pease, with Kerry Lee MacLean and Natalie Pease. PeasePod Books, 42 pp. \$15.95.

By Anna Stewart
For the Camera

It won't take long for readers to dive into this book and engage all the senses. Each page of textured collage will make you want to touch the glittery coral, listen closely as the Swimmy Buffet and the Coral Waver Band plays, and admire the stick-on cloth-

ing the sharks wear. And that's just the pictures.

Then you'll meet Hammy, the lonely hammerhead shark, and learn of his quest for a friend. Hammy is not very good at being a friend, and the other hammerheads make fun of his large size. He eats to feel better — a theme more adults will relate to than kids, but it's handled tactfully.

Hammy meets the near-sighted sea

urchin Gloompa but rejects her for the same reasons he is rejected: size (she's too small), differences (she wears glasses), and his own lack of social skills. He tries to join the Coral Waver Band but he can't play conch. Gloompa can, though, and he finally sees she has more to offer than he thought. He makes a kind and generous offer to her and they slowly become friends.

While the story is both entertaining and thought-provoking, the story behind the book is also worth telling. Elaine Pease, a Boulder resident, worked with the popular Boulder children's book illustrator and author Kerry Lee MacLean (author of the delightful "Pigs Over Boulder" series and spin-offs) and Pease's 10-year-old daughter Natalie, who painted the ocean backgrounds. In the back pages, they explain the process of making the book.

From their stories of fact-checking with a marine biologist to sharing that much of the paper came from Boulder's own Two-Hands Paperie, the team makes bookmaking seem not only possible, but encouraged. Their enthusiasm bubbles from every page of the story and in the extra pages of activities and the detailed information of how they made the book. It's a great example of self-publishing that works.

"Even Sharks Needs Friends" mirrors the challenges for young and old to be and find real friends. It does it with grace, boldness and a charming cast of undersea characters.