



Flavor Forecast
A Progress Report

Operacon

with Somtow Sucharitkul

March 12–15, 2015, Milwaukee, Wis.

Memberships

Membership rates through Dec. 31:

Full attending:	\$100
No opera:	\$55
Supporting:	\$25

Full attending memberships include tickets for the best seats in the house for “The Snow Dragon” (regularly \$77 plus service fees), post-show party with the cast, transport to the theater for the opera, talks by the director and composer, a fabulous con suite, a signed limited-edition libretto and many other treats.

Opera tickets are limited and we cannot guarantee tickets after Dec. 31!

No-opera memberships are for folks who want to hang out with us for the weekend, but don’t care to go to the show.

Supporting membership gets you the pleasure of supporting the arts plus copies of our publications (including the signed, limited-edition libretto), and act as a “layaway plan” — you can upgrade to attending in installments at today’s rate, even after rates go up. (However, ***to get an opera ticket, payments must total at least \$50 by Dec. 31.***

Supporting memberships are not transferable. To send installments via PayPal, please use the “Send money to friends or family” option with email address operacon@fjagdh.com.)

Buy memberships online at fjagdh.com/operacon or mail a check payable to Richard Smith to Operacon, 2337 N. Lefebber Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53213.

Operacon Members

- **Somtow Sucharitkul**, Bangkok, Thailand.
- **Leah Zeldes Smith**, Chicago / Milwaukee.
- **Dick Smith**, Chicago / Milwaukee.
- **Tom Veal**, Chicago.
- **R-Laurraine Tutihasi**, Oracle, Ariz.
- **Georgie Schnobrich**, Milwaukee.
- **Gregory Rihn**, Milwaukee.
- **Alexa Hollywood**, Milwaukee.
- **Joey Shoji**, Berkeley, Calif.
- **Alan Rosenthal**, Glen Ellen, Calif.
- **Jeanne Bowman**, Glen Ellen, Calif.
- **Felicia Herman**, New York.
- **Seth Breidbart**, New York.
- **Leah Fisher**, Milwaukee.
- **Trinlay Khadro**, West Allis, Wis. [S].
- **Mary Prince**, Brown Deer, Wis.
- **Angelica Dawn**, Milwaukee.
- **Deirdre Murphy**, Milwaukee.
- **Deborah Schamber**, Milwaukee.
- **Martin Morse Wooster**, Silver Spring, Md.
- **Michael Proudfoot**, Reading, Berkshire, U.K.
- **Sarah Prince**, Keene Valley, N.Y. [S].
- **Tom Page**, Lansing, Mich.
- **Sue Finkle**, Mount Prospect, Ill.
- **Joel Finkle**, Mount Prospect, Ill.
- **Charles S. Tritt**, Mequon, Wis.
- **Julianne Hunter**, Mequon, Wis.
- **‘Orange Mike’ Lowrey**, Milwaukee.
- **Cicatrice**, Milwaukee.
- **Alex Sinclair**, Louisville, Ky.
- **Christa Sinclair**, Louisville, Ky.
- **Don Ayres**, Lyons, Ill. [S].
- **Neil Rest**, Chicago.
- **Matthew Strait**, Chicago [S].
- **Barbara Ann Cohan**, Chicago.
- **Lawrence Cohan**, Chicago.
- **Amy Wenshe**, Plainfield, Ill. [S].
- **Robert Weissinger**, Racine, Wis.
- **Terresa Roden**, Milwaukee.

Operacon

with Somtow Sucharitkul

March 12–15, 2015, Milwaukee, Wis.

A four-day relaxacon in conjunction with the Milwaukee world premiere of “The Snow Dragon,” the latest opera by award-winning sf, fantasy and horror writer Somtow Sucharitkul (aka S.P. Somtow).

Table of Contents

About ‘The Snow Dragon’	2
Quick Facts	
BY SKYLIGHT MUSIC THEATRE	2
Occasionally Asked Questions	3
From Thailand to Texas to Wisconsin	
BY VISWA SUBBARAMAN.....	5
‘What’s Opera, Doc?’	
Deconstructed for the Layman	
BY SOMTOW SUCHARITKUL	6
Milwaukee Fandom:	
One Man’s Memories	
BY GREGORY G.H. RIHN	9
Hotel Information	11
Five Sweet Things About Milwaukee	
BY LEAH ZELDES SMITH.....	12

Contact Us

Web: fijagdh.com/operacon
Facebook: tinyurl.com/operacon
Twitter: @operasf
Email: operacon@fijagdh.com
Postal: Operacon
2337 N. Lefebber Ave.
Wauwatosa, WI 53213
Phone: (414) 856-5525

Concom

You, perhaps? *Volunteers sought.*
Composer: Somtow Sucharitkul.
Hotel Liaison: Dina Krause.
Factotums: Jeanne Bowman,
Greg Rihn, Alan Rosenthal,
Georgie Schnobrich,
Christa Sinclair.
Everything else: Dick & Leah Smith.

Cover art courtesy Skylight Opera Theater.
Progress report edited by Leah Zeldes Smith.
Copyright © 2014 by FEN for the contributors

Operacon is sponsored by the Fannish Educational Network.

The Snow Dragon



About 'The Snow Dragon'

Premiering Friday, March 13, 2015, at the Skylight Music Theatre in Milwaukee, Wis., “The Snow Dragon” is a chamber opera in English with music and libretto by Somtow Sucharitkul, based on his 1982 short story, “The Fallen Country.” (Originally published in the Ace Books anthology “Elsewhere,” the story was also adapted into a young-adult novel with the same name, published by Bantam in 1986.) After its Milwaukee world premiere, the opera will head to Thailand for a special performance in honor of King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

Quick Facts

BY SKYLIGHT MUSIC THEATRE

What's 'The Snow Dragon' about? “The Snow Dragon” is the fantastical tale about a boy named Billy Binder who often escapes to an imaginary world of eternal snow, where he rides a dragon, fights monsters and rescues princesses. Unfortunately, it's also ruled by the evil and omnipresent “Ringmaster” and his whip. Billy feels no pain in this magical universe, unlike the real world he faces at home. “The Snow Dragon” is a classic tale of good vs. evil.

About Somtow Sucharitkul. Somtow Sucharitkul is an interesting fellow. Very interesting. Read all about him at somtowmusic.com.

What is a world premiere? A world-premiere opera is an opera that has never been performed before. Ever. Somtow wrote this opera for Skylight Music

Theatre and is allowing the production team, selected by Viswa Subbaraman, to design the sets and costumes for his story.

Why should I be excited about ‘The Snow Dragon’?

- World premiere — history in the making.
- Based on a popular science-fiction novel that is being re-released in conjunction with the opera.
- Opera companies all around the country are coming to see Skylight's production.
- A modern tonal opera. (What's tonal? It's music written using conventional harmonies. In other words, it's not that weird super-modern stuff.)
- There's a **DRAGON! ON STAGE!**

Occasionally Asked Questions

Why is the opera's premiere in Milwaukee, of all places? As Skylight Music Theatre's artistic and music director Viswa Subbaraman explains it, he'd commissioned Somtow to write an opera while at his last gig, in Texas, and it was wildly successful and made him look good. So now Subbaraman has a new job here, and he's confident Somtow can make him look good again.

What language is the opera sung in? English.

I hate opera! Why should I come to Operacon? “The Snow Dragon” isn't an ordinary opera. It's a fantasy that connects opera and fantastic literature. Its hummable tunes bring in the eerie tropes of fantasy and horror-film music, making the score very accessible to an audience new to opera.

The opera is just one night of four, and you don't have to go (or drag your opera-loathing spouse) — we have discounted “no-opera” memberships.

What's a relaxacon? A relaxacon is a low-key science-fiction convention, basically a weekend-long party with little or no formal programming and an emphasis on conversation and collegiality. When we heard that Somtow's opera was premiering in Milwaukee, we thought it was a great excuse to throw one.

How long do I have to make up my mind to come? We can't guarantee opera seats after Dec. 31, so if you want a ticket, buy a membership soon. The hotel block closes Feb. 1; if you want a hotel room, make reservations earlier.

That's a lot of money! What do I get? Prices are very reasonable for a four-day convention with everything your membership includes:

- Orchestra-seat tickets to opening night of the world premiere of “The Snow Dragon” on Friday, March 13 (currently retailing for \$77 plus fees).
- Opening-night party with the cast.
- Transportation to the theater from the Hilton.

- Talks by Somtow and the director and other exciting events.
- A special-edition, autographed libretto.
- A fabulous consuite with yummy things to eat and drink, space for conversation, needlework and what have you, with Somtow and other fun fans to talk and play with.
- Screenings of interesting videos.
- Surprises and excursions.
- We are open to your ideas, too. This is a relaxacon. The opera itself is the only nonparticipatory event with a ticket. Like most fan-run science-fiction conventions, we invite you to pay for membership, not buy tickets to observe, as we join together for a mutual celebration of our ~~way of life~~ hobby and our friend Somtow's new opera.

Can you make me a deal? We know that \$100 is a chunk of money to come up with all at once, so we are offering a “layaway plan”: Buy a \$25 supporting membership now and we will hold the current attending rate for you, and you can pay the rest off in installments.

Will there be programming? It's a relaxacon, so there won't be panels and speeches, but we will have lots of things to do, including close-up time with Somtow and Viswa Subbaraman, explorations of Milwaukee and food and drink tastings in the con suite.

How about movies? We plan to screen a few special videos.

Will there be gaming? If you want there to be. Feel free to bring along your favorite games, be they playing cards, board games or whatever you like. It's a relaxacon -- there will be plenty of time and space to play. Or, you can just hang in the con suite for that great game of fansmanship.

What should I wear? For opera night, we're encouraging folks to dress up, for whatever your personal value of “dressing up” is — steampunk finery, medieval garb, black tie, jeans with no holes in them — but that's entirely optional. Shoes and shirt are required.

For the rest of the weekend, your usual con wear is fine, but do look at weather forecasts before you pack. Spring weather in this part of the world is highly unpredictable. March highs in Milwaukee average in the low to mid-40s, with lows typically in the mid- to high 30s. (That's Fahrenheit, for those of you from metric countries.) However, in 2014, the tail end of a dreadful winter, some nights got below zero, while in 2012, the warmest March on record saw days up in the 80s. Snow boots will likely be a better bet than flip flops, but you never know.

Why is the con four days long? See above. With opening night on Friday, we wanted to be sure everyone can get there despite unpredictable weather and possible travel delays. Starting the con on Thursday will give us some time to meet and mingle beforehand, then get to the theater in a relaxed way. You don't have to arrive on Thursday, but if you don't, you might miss something.

Doesn't Wisconsin have terrible government? Shouldn't I boycott? Well, yes, and no. If you stop going to cons in places with bad politicians, you'll run out of cons to go to pretty quick. On the other hand, Wisconsin did ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, so if you didn't come to Wisconsin in 1978, you can cut the state some slack.

What can I do to help? We'd really appreciate your help spreading the word about the con. This is a pretty special, one-time event, and we'd hate for people who might have wanted to come to find out about it too late. We're also looking for volunteers to do things like help in the consuite and pick people up at the airport, and we will refund their membership fees if we should have any surplus.



From Thailand to Texas to Wisconsin

BY VISWA SUBBARAMAN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, SKYLIGHT MUSIC THEATRE

We are very excited to be producing the world premiere of Somtow Sucharitkul's "The Snow Dragon." I first came to know Somtow's music when I was artistic director and music director of Opera Vista in Houston, Texas. At the time, I was looking for a new opera that would deal with some sort of Indian folk tale, came across Somtow online. Somtow wrote his opera about the Buddha, "The Silent Prince," for us.

I knew I had found a composer of note when "The Silent Prince" brought the entire theater's audience to their feet at the last note. It was a resounding, crowd-pleasing success.

The Skylight has always had a history of boldness and creativity, so when I approached Somtow about writing an opera for our "Fairy Tale and Fantasy" season, I was truly excited when he proposed writing an opera based on his own story "The Fallen Country." "The Fallen Country" explores a sadly still relevant topic of child abuse, but it does it in a way that allows the protagonist the opportunity for healing.

Musically, Somtow's operas are accessible but without pandering to an audience. His music is beautiful, diaphanous, and sophisticated, but with a populist bent. I could not be prouder that the Skylight is bringing this highly meaningful and beautiful show to Milwaukee.

‘What’s Opera, Doc?’ Deconstructed for the Layman

BY SOMTOW SUCHARITKUL

Many, many years ago, I sat down to write a funny guide to opera for the uninitiated which I was sure would be a big hit. As usually happens when I think of some sure-fire idea, nobody believes me, and it was a decade later

before all those idiot’s guides started coming out. And indeed I couldn’t get anyone to publish it; the only person who wanted to do so was my friend (and father of my godson) Hank Stine, who was working for a New Age publisher at the time ... but before he could do anything about it, he got sucked into the sex-change world.

Recently I discovered part of the ms. on an old hard drive and one of the chapters was an analysis of that great Chuck Jones cartoon, “What’s Opera, Doc?” So, for those of you who simply have to know which Wagner opera is quoted from at every moment of this cartoon’s soundtrack, I’m sharing the chapter....

Now on to “What’s Opera, Doc?” in which the war between Elmer Fudd and Bugs Bunny — the timeless dance of the hunter and the prey — is transported into that most exotic of realms, the world of Wagner’s monumental four-opera cycle, “The Ring of the Nibelung.” The plot of this thing, pretty familiar to those who have read Tolkien’s “Lord of the Rings,” much of which is ripped off from Wagner’s masterpiece of Teutonic overstatement, concerns a magic ring, dwarves, dragons, dumb jocks with big swords, and the like. It also features Wotan (the German name for the god Odin, familiar to all fans of Marvel Comics’ “Mighty Thor” series) a god whose career as Lord of Valhalla pretty much parallels the real-life career of President Richard Nixon.

I’m sure you’re all familiar with the Bugs Bunny cartoon version. You have all enjoyed Elmer Fudd’s rousing rendition of the “Kill the wabbit” theme and been aroused by the spectacle of Bugs Bunny sliding down a horse’s steatopygous derriere whilst wearing a brass brassiere.



But how many of you realize how many Wagnerian musical themes are used in this cartoon? How many understand the many levels of irony implicit in the musical subtext? After you have examined the chart which follows, I am sure you will be convinced that director Chuck Jones's complexity of vision is every bit the equal of, say, Ingmar Bergman's.

I don't believe anyone has provided such a chart before, but here it is. What I've done is provide a key to every musical motif used in the cartoon, along with some notes which, I am sure, will be of great use to you should you find yourself at a loss for words at cocktail parties.

'What's Opera, Doc?' A listener's guide

Each segment describes briefly what we see in the cartoon, then discusses the music that we hear accompanying the visuals.

(1) Opening credits.

Orchestra tuning up. Trombone solo: "Flying Dutchman" theme. Clarinet solo: "Venusberg" music from "Tannhäuser." Trumpet solo: "Valkyrie" theme from "The Ring."

(2) Thunder and wild weather.

"Flying Dutchman theme" — climaxes in huge chords, which are a theme from "The Ring" that represents, believe it or not, bondage.

(3) 'Be vewwy vewwy quiet I'm hunting wabbit.'

Just singing — not a theme from "The Ring."

Elmer stalking: "Valkyrie" theme played by a muted trumpet accompanied by pizzicato strings. "Wabbit twacks! Kill the wabbit!": Full blown "Valkyrie" theme as played in "The Ride of the Valkyries," Act III of "Die Walküre."

"Ho-yo-to-ho!": "Brünnhilde's War Cry," first heard in Act II of "Die

Walküre."

(4) Bugs Bunny appears.

"O Mighty warrior of great fighting stock / Might I inquire to ask, eh, What's up, Doc?": "Siegfried's Horn Call," first heard in "Siegfried," the third part of "The Ring."

(5) Elmer Fudd describes his Magic Helmet.

What's this? There is a magic helmet theme in "The Ring," but for some reason it doesn't appear at this juncture in the cartoon. Could Chuck Jones be telling us it's the wrong magic helmet?

(6) Elmer Fudd demonstrates his Magic Helmet.

We start off with a weird, distorted brass version of the "Song of Woodbird" theme from "Siegfried," then we launch into a reprise of the "Flying Dutchman" theme. Of course, this theme doesn't appear in "The Ring," and it is perfectly okay for you

to put on a huffy purist attitude at this point and become indignant at Mr. Jones's ignorance.

(7) **Elmer Fudd sees Bugs Bunny, attired as a woman, riding a horse.**

He thinks Bugs is the beautiful Valkyrie Brünnhilde. "The Pilgrim's Chorus" from the opera "Tannhäuser" is heard at this point. This is appropriate, since the pious Fudd, who has been doing his proper huntsman's duty, is about to fall victim to his repressed libidinous desires.

(8) **Bugs, still impersonating a female, leads Elmer on a wild goose chase.**

Both characters execute a number of tricky ballet steps, such as the fiendishly difficult fouetté and arabesque, to the "Venusberg" music from "Tannhäuser." Wildly appropriate. This ballet music was added to the opera "Tannhäuser" to appease a Paris audience's demand for a ballet in every opera's second act. The crowd rioted when the ballet appeared the wrong act. Wagner never went down well with the French after that. It is supposed to represent uninhibited and decadent sexual excess, and the spectacle of a little bald midget trying to get it on with a

transvestite certainly qualifies as sexual excess in my book.

(9) **Love duet .**

Ironically, we are back to the "Pilgrim's Crusader" theme.

(10) **Helmet falls off — Bugs Bunny's gender deception is revealed.**

Falling scale theme — could be a reference to the theme of Wotan's spear in "The Ring." The spear represents the sacredness of pacts and treaties and the fact that we hear it here could imply the breaking off of the relationship between Elmer and Bugs due to Bugs's abrupt gender reversal.

(11) **'Kill the wabbit!'**

A reprise of the "Valkyrie" theme.

(12) **Bugs Bunny's death.**

Once more, a return to the "Pilgrim's Chorus." Elmer Fudd's tragic repentance at his thoughtless slaying of Bugs Bunny is quite touching. One recalls that in "The Ring Cycle" it is rather the opposite that takes place — the beautiful Brünnhilde, in a fit of jealous pique, causes the tragic death of Siegfried. The gender reversal is followed by a role reversal. Fairy, fairy interestink!

Now it can clearly be seen from all this that "What's Opera, Doc?" doesn't just condense everything in the fifteen-hour "Ring Cycle" into a mere seven minutes.. A lot of other Wagner operas are referred to as well, often with an irony that demands considerable knowledge on the part of the audience. "Tannhäuser" and "The Flying Dutchman" are Wagner operas that bear no thematic relation to "The Ring of the Nibelung," but Chuck Jones has managed to tie them all in anyway.



Milwaukee Fandom: One Man's Memories

BY GREGORY G.H. RIHN

I first encountered Milwaukee fandom in 1978, coming over from Madison for X-Con 2, which had the great Anne McCaffrey as guest. I particularly remember the play they put on to honor The Dragon Lady, “The Littlest Dragonboy,” which was really quite charming and featured what was for those days a very impressive dragon costume. I attended the next couple of X-Cons as an out-of-towner, enjoying the very good-humored ambiance.

I moved to Milwaukee to work in 1980. I was wondering how to contact local fandom, when I decided on a whim to attend a P.D.Q. Bach concert at the Performing Arts Center (now the Marcus Center). I had just taken my seat when a group of about 15 people in SCA garb came trooping in and sat down beside me. This was Milwaukee fandom, out for the evening. Their leader was Judy Voros, who was, for many years, the doyenne, head hostess, and (in her persona as “The Ghodhobbit”) chief instigator of mischief for the Milwaukee fan group. She recognized me as an ‘out-of-town’ fan and asked what I was doing there. I explained that I had just moved to town, and was looking to connect with local fans. I was greeted with open arms.

I soon became an official member of Milwaukee Science Fiction Services, the local sf club; part of the X-Con committee; part of several role-playing games; and a regular hanger-out at those ‘homely houses’: Lytheria, Lee Schneider’s rooming house/commune/clubhouse/slanshack on the East Side, and STI Central, *chez* Voros. I also acquired nodding acquaintances with the local branches of the Society for Creative Anachronism; International Fantasy Gaming Society;

Somtow in Milwaukee

Somtow Sucharitkul's long-lasting connection with Milwaukee began when he was a guest of honor at Milwaukee's erstwhile science fiction convention, X-Con. He is one of its most fondly remembered and spoken-of guests, among a roster that included Gordon Dickson, Anne McCaffrey, and Marion Zimmer Bradley.

Somtow is remembered for his remarkable charm and personality, as well as his boundless creativity. He was equally at home enjoying "big drinks" with the cigar-smoking gentlemen (and ladies) of Milwaukee fandom, and reaching out to the youngest members of the fannish community, a fact that earned him the nickname, "Uncle Somtow."

Well, what else can be expected from a multi-talented man who has written an episode of "Chip'n'Dale Rescue Rangers" — in addition to his many works of fantasy, horror, and science fiction; and who's a noted composer and conductor of opera and classical music? Whether you know Somtow through his literature, or through his music or both, you will know him as a thoroughly fascinating gentleman.

—GREGORY G.H. RIHN



Somtow Sucharitkul

reenactors; and the Renegade Time Lords, the then Doctor Who/media-interest group in town, which had a substantial overlap with the MSFS. Wednesday night was weekly meeting night at the UW-Milwaukee union, and it wasn't unusual to have forty or more people getting together to chat, play games and smof.

One of the major recreations of the fans of those days was staging "mischief," which usually meant some sort of light-hearted prank or demonstration done for someone's birthday or another occasion. Most often Judy Voros was chief plotter, except when she herself was the target. I knew that I was truly part of the group in 1983, when I arrived at Lytheria for a game, and found myself playing an elaborate live-action scenario set up for my birthday. At the end, I was crogged to find Georgie Schnobrich, the woman I'd been dating, there as well. I hadn't known that she knew or was known by any of the Milwaukee fans, and indeed

she hadn't been, but Judy had tracked her down and driven her to Milwaukee from Madison as a surprise for me.

In 1984, Georgie and I were married. Milwaukee fandom sat on the bride's side, she having fewer relatives in attendance than I did, and entertained themselves by working out their speculative relationships to Georgie. This foreshadowed the "already part-of-the-family" welcome she got in her new hometown.

'84 was a watershed year in a number of ways. The Burrahobbits, the local group of the Mythopoeic Society, began their book discussion group, and that October MilwAPA was founded — two enterprises, along with Lytheria, that are still going on.

Milwaukee has had an active if sometimes turbulent history of organized fan activity. X-Con was followed by two successor conventions, First Contact and CremeCon. Today, the Milwaukee School of Engineering hosts the annual Concinnity in March, and Anime Milwaukee occurs on the UW-Milwaukee campus in February. Milwaukee has hosted two MythCons (Mythopoeic conferences) and a CostumeCon, all of which were well regarded. The Milwaukee Steampunk Society is a hotbed of social and cultural activity, and some of its members have launched the upcoming first Geneva Steam Convention, to be held at Lake Geneva in the spring as well.



Hotel Information

Our hotel is the luxurious Hilton Milwaukee City Center, 509 W. Wisconsin Ave., in downtown Milwaukee. A classic art-deco structure built in 1927, the newly renovated hotel boasts a AAA Four Diamond rating.

It's close to many shopping and dining options, and a short walk from Intermodal Station (the Amtrak and bus station), as well as the Milwaukee Public Museum, one of the nation's largest natural-history museums.

Room rates are just \$100 for double-double or king rooms. We have a limited block at this rate, so please make reservations as soon as possible! ***The room block closes Feb. 1.***

Guest rooms have free high-speed internet access, and every Operacon members staying in the hotel will get a \$10 food and beverage voucher for use in the hotel's three restaurants. Our discount self-parking rate for hotel guests is \$18 per day. (There are also less expensive lots nearby.)

Reserve at tinyurl.com/operacon-hotel or call (414) 935-5940 and be sure to say you're with Operacon.

Five Sweet Things About Milwaukee

BY LEAH ZELDES SMITH

Bring your sweet tooth when you come to Milwaukee, because it's definitely a dessert lovers' town.

1. Frozen custard.

Wisconsin's dairy industry stars at frozen-custard stands all over Milwaukee, where rich, egg-laced, frozen desserts are the main attraction. I haven't tracked down just when frozen custard became so ubiquitous, but the oldest extant stand, Gilles, opened in 1938.

Chocolate and vanilla are typically supplemented by a flavor of the day with mix-ins such as fruit or candy. Golden Gyros & Frozen Custard packs in add-ons

so generously there's almost not enough custard in between. Most custard shops entice customers with large signs promoting the flavor *du jour*, and many publish a monthly "flavor forecast" so you can plan ahead.

Custard is soft serve because its high butterfat content keeps it from freezing hard, and because it's made and served fresh daily. Like ice cream, frozen custard must be at least 10 percent butterfat by law, but typical Milwaukee custard is well above 14 percent. It also must contain egg yolks (at least 1.4 percent by weight) and has much less air mixed into it than ice cream.

Milwaukeeans are fiercely partisan about their favorite custard shops, but it's all good. However, nowhere serves a richer custard than our top pick, Kopp's, established in 1950 and still family owned. Kopp's three locations offer two specialty flavors daily. If you visit only one custard stand while in greater Milwaukee, make it this one.

If you want some dinner with your dessert, there's usually a grill menu of burgers and such. For example, Leon's, a neon-lit drive-in that's been serving its basic custard and a long list of sundaes since 1942, offers an odd loose-meat sandwich it calls a "Spanish hamburger."



Bakers at the Wisconsin State Fair make hundreds of thousands of these cream puffs every year. (Photo by Leah Zeldes Smith.)

2. Cream puffs.

By far the most popular attraction at the Wisconsin State Fair is the Cream Puff Pavilion, where thousands of fairgoers line up daily for fresh whipped cream sandwiched in *paté de choux*, a tradition going back to 1924. The fair sells nearly 400,000 puffs in 10 days each year, on the fairgrounds in suburban West Allis and at a drive-through operation just outside.

Fair bakers whip up 1,200 to 1,500 gallons of cream every day in the barn-like building while hungry patrons watch through a glass window as the long queue snakes around the building.

Outside the fair, you don't see cream puffs everywhere, but some Milwaukee restaurants and bakeries offer them. They won't have quite the freshness of the state fair's, but how could a cream puff be bad?

One of our favorites is a bit out of town. The Pine Cone Restaurant, a diner attached to a truck stop near the outlet mall in Johnson Creek, Wis., halfway to Madison, sells cream puffs easily three times the size of the state fair's, as big around as a dinner plate. If you're in a hurry, you can get one to go in the adjoining gas station.

The Wisconsin Senate voted cream puffs as the official dessert of Wisconsin in 2011, but apparently House reps preferred *kringle*, which was named the official state pastry in 2013.

4. Kringle.

Strictly speaking, *kringle* is a specialty of Racine, Wis., about 40 miles south of Milwaukee — but, hey, the U.S. Census Bureau combines the two places into one big Metropolitan Statistical Area, so who are we to quibble?

Racine *kringles* are flaky, buttery, extremely flat coffee cakes. In their very labor-intensive construction, bakers roll, fold and twist yeast dough into layers of delicate pastry. Lehmann's Bakery, Racine's oldest, claims theirs have more than 140 layers, made in a three-day process. The usual number bruited is 32, but I haven't counted. Spread with nuts, fruits, cheese, caramel or other toppings, the *kringles* are baked in an oval ring shape, thus distinguishing them from their pretzle-shaped forebears in Denmark, where they're one of many pastries called *Wienerbrød* ("Viennese bread").

The pastry came to Wisconsin with immigrant Danes in the early 20th century, and has since been Wisconsinized with extra butter, but the method of making and folding the dough arrived in Denmark with German scabs imported from Austria to break an 1850 Copenhagen bakers' strike. (Maybe that's what's behind notoriously anti-union Badger legislators picking *kringles* over cream puffs as the official state pastry?)

3. **Schaumtorte.**

Schaumtorte is a staple of Milwaukee's supper-club culture. I haven't space to really describe Wisconsin supper clubs here, but they're legendary, classic restaurants serving the kind of food your grandmother liked to eat — especially if your grandmother was a Midwesterner of German descent.

Wisconsin home cooks make Schaumtortes, too, I'm told, and have since at least the 1870s, but not anyone who's invited me for dinner. Some say it came from Germany, Prussia or Austria, but my admittedly sketchy research didn't turn up any evidence that it really originated in the Old Country rather with some with some inventive immigrant in Wisconsin.

The name *Schaumtorte*, which means "foam cake" in German, refers to the base of baked meringue, typically served topped with ice cream, fruit and loads and loads of whipped cream. Some have a crisp exterior with a softer center, while others are crunchy all the way through. In theory, Schaumtorte can be made with any fruit, but the supper clubs all seem to make it with a compote of strawberries.

5. **Chocolate.**

Milwaukee is surprisingly full of independent chocolatiers, small shops tucked away in out-of-the-way neighborhoods. Some of them are *very* independent, like Jim Fetzer of Northern Chocolate, whose regular customers love him despite his propensity for tossing patrons he deems not properly appreciative out of the store.

Some have quite a history, such as Niemann's Candies in Wauwatosa, where my husband's mother loved the chocolate ice cream as a school girl, and whose chocolate-cranberry clusters on a stick were one of the highlights of my state fair. Kehr's Kandy Kitchen, established in 1931, still hand dips a variety of classic chocolates along with hard-to-find specialties such as chocolate-covered crunchy sponge candy, which they must have been making for quite a while, or they would never have dubbed it Fairy Food.

On the newer side, Dan Bieser of Tabal Chocolate started out making chocolate in his home kitchen, building his own equipment in his garage. Red Elephant Chocolate, in the Third Ward not far from the Skylight Music Theatre, makes brilliantly colored truffles in flavors such as Exotic Spice, Bittersweet Orange, Chai, Caramelized Banana and Lemon Meringue.

And that's just a small taste.

Join us for a sweet weekend this March!