

## he TRAVEL SKETCHES of Gerrit Hartland

### *A critique by Elliott Renzies*

In one of my recent escapades into fellow chess players' websites, I discovered Gerry Hartland's artistic talents and wrote the following...

*"I had the chance to look at the photos taken from the Captain's recent European holiday. They are not just pictures taken from a tourist's point of view. The whole collection reminds us of a photographic exhibition, where the artist allows us to see a lot of his soul through his work. Gerry Hartland has a very sharp eye of capturing his themes in a melancholic, yet powerfully original style by subtracting all unnecessary ornamental elements, and presenting a Dorian if not Laconic result, where mood and essence play the major role. There is motion, there is music there is poetry in his work. There is also that astute element of absolute frankness so much abundant in his overall personality. Please pay a visit to his website"*

More recently, I was trusted by Gerry to have a look at two complete volumes of his drawings, solely based upon his travels in various spots of the planet. I did and the result was a frank and objective collection of notes, which follow after this introduction. I do not claim to be an art critic; I am only a classically trained musician who looks at all forms of art from a musician's point of view. Also I do not plan to write flattering material so to please Captain[1] because he would certainly not be pleased by such approaches. After all, I had enough of suffering from his Danish Gambit opening variations. [2]

My method in writing about his drawings included in **VOLUME ONE and VOLUME TWO** consists of travelling with him, standing quietly aside as he reaches for his tools, and letting him narrate to us his own story in his own words of artistic creation. So let me introduce you to the drawings I have classified from interesting to fascinating starting with the miraculous church **Santa Maria de la Salute** who saved the Venetians from the plague – a lovely image reflected in water with a playful usage of watercolour.

I cannot claim that I am a student of Hartland's life and artistic work, since it has only been about three years since I met him for first time and only about six months since I became aware of his work.

However, I am sure that I am able to recognize his presence in his work in the form of a creative style.

A functional impetus to push for better and higher results. I fell in love from the first sight with Hartland's pencil drawings. I am talking about **Perugia** This old Etruscan city theatre of a plethora of ancient and more recent wars; hilly but approachable; with its Gothic fourteenth century cathedrals abundant with paintings by old masters, presented an ideal setting for Captain's imagination.

He enters the granite castles and looks from the inside – out, presenting us with moments of absolute serenity combined with the inexorable fighting movements of Lombardian and Byzantine knights, who have always haunted the place. We continue the journey reaching the historically strategic passages of **Chiavenna**, mellowed down by Hartland's rich water colour and pencil techniques, whereas

**Bayeux** a Bretagne city with a tradition for excellent tapestry, becomes tapestry itself in front of our eyes as it introduced to us by a very productive combination of sepia Ink and watercolour. Another wonderful study for pencil and watercolour is the depiction of **Beaune** a little fortified town pride and joy of Burgundy.

Sepia ink and watercolour make an impressive impact with **Argenton sur Creuse**, before we arrive at **Strasbourg** where the same media gives us an impressive picture of these celebrated

crossroads of Europe. One of the most interesting motions for the kind of the involved amateur as Gerry Hartland perceives himself to be, is the way he moves away from his own conception and draws independently without falling into subjective traps. He treats his work from an absolutely objective point of view. But let us continue with the marvellous **Le chateau Violet le Duc** in watercolour and pencil. In Chartres: **La Cathedral** Watercolour and Indian Ink work miracles again

to give us an impressionistic expression of this epitome of Gothic architecture, the construction of which begun in 1194, in the site of an already old Christian church had stood on the same site since the 4th century. St Jean de Colle, **The Water Mill**, with Hartland's imaginative use of the pencil. Classified as one of the most beautiful villages in France and definitely one of the most impressive pieces of the collection. followed by three **Halstads** (the **Village**, the **Shore** and **In the Hills**) depicted in an impressive pencil, watercolour and ink combination, Hartland's efforts are dedicated in a struggle to vindicate the dignity of the medium by avoiding demonstrations of some scientific accuracy or modernistic glorification. He simply, uses his media to draw what he believes is worth

drawing. One of the most impressive pieces of the collection is **Stonehenge** again created with masterful use of watercolour. Colours and style create a unique metaphor of the sacred solid stone structure as a temple of Fertility? Death? Rebirth? Powerful work! The collection ends peacefully with **Hidcote** and **Clipping Campden**, where watercolour and pencil define lovely images of life celebrating reflections of sun and water. Let me now proceed with **Volume II** of Gerry Hartland's work, where one can observe some signs of change in the approach not so much in terms of an artistic and/or philosophical interpretation, but by his willingness to express a bit of technical spirit of sympathy, some tendency to co-exist with nature; and that not through some sort of self-forgetful analysis of visual impressions, but by introducing another medium: The pastel! A powerful instrument particularly for the depiction of the hard, sunburnt motions of the American and the Australian earth. A harsh, unforgiving earth which almost deliberately heralds the arrival of a youthful approach, not so easily observed in **Volume 2** Apart from Palo Alto – the **Gardens**, a lovely watercolour composition, the completeness of an aesthetically pleasing improvement on the previous volume comes in the form of beautiful use of pastel in the Tasmanian drawings of **Freycinet** and the Vineyard as well as in the **Caloundra**, where the Australian earth in itself becomes a major protagonist and not just a background of the drawing. As in the case of the **Death Valley**, it simply makes one wonder why Hartland does not use more pastel for his work! Maybe the answer to this lies in the fact that down the very end of Volume 2 If one discovers **Victorian Tree** a real watercolour and pencil masterpiece and in my opinion one of the best of Hartland's drawings. Maybe, after all, watercolour and pen is the medium with which he feels more comfortable and more productive. Who knows? In Hartland's drawings the horizon never drops out of sight, he never loses his powerful perspective and he never adopts unusual and un-picturesque angles of vision. As in the case of the **Spirit Lake** – a wonderful example of Gerry Hartland's ability to visually talk to us in the local Tagish narrative (translated as Rainbow Trout Lake) rather than the equivalent *parlance* of a western intellectual; through this approach we feel more able to understand the meaning of his endless creative flight as he encircles the drawing from all angles and from all perspectives; he is simply in control