

Congratulations to the winners of the **TOWN TOPICS**[®] READERS' CHOICE AWARDS!

Thank you for voting for your favorite local businesses and services! Town Topics is happy to announce this year's Readers' Choice Awards winners.

The top vote-getters in each category are named in alphabetical order below. Some are listed here, and the others were featured in last week's issue.

HOME

Furniture Store

Arhaus
Homestead Princeton
Rider Furniture

Home Remodeler/Design

Freda Howard
Interiors
Homestead Princeton
Princeton Design Guild

HVAC

Ice Man
K&M
Stellitano

Interior Designer

Deborah Leamann
Interior Design
Eastridge Design
Karin Eckerson Interiors

Kitchen/Bath Designer

Deborah Leamann
Interior Design
Jefferson Bath & Kitchen
Tobias Design

Landscape Designer

Amato's
Cedar Creek Landscapes
Ronni Hock Garden & Landscape

Nursery/Garden Designer

Amato's
Kale's
Paul Browne Landscape
Design & Masonry
Peterson's Nursery



Outdoor Furnishing Store

Homestead Princeton
Rider Furniture
Ski Barn

Realtor

Beatrice Bloom
Jennifer Dionne
Ingela Kostenbader

Roofing

Flesch's Roofing & Sheet
Metal Co., Inc.
Stearn Brothers
Trenton Roofing & Siding

Senior Living

Akin Care
Brandywine Living
Morris Hall

CHILDREN

Child Care/Preschool

Arts Council of Princeton
The Burke Foundation
Early Childhood Center
at YWCA Princeton
Cherry Hill Nursery School
Princeton Montessori

Children's Gym

Arts Council of Princeton
Princeton Playspace
YWCA

Children's Dance Lessons

Arts Council of Princeton
Knecht's Danceworks
The Pennington Studio

Children's Party Place

Arts Council of Princeton
Art Sparks
Pinot's Palette Princeton

Driving Through Stevie Nicks Country with Simon Morrison

For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams

Of the beautiful Annabelle Lee

—Edgar Allan Poe

Like a heartbeat drives you mad

In the stillness of remembering what you had...

—Stevie Nicks, from “Dreams”

Asked in a publisher’s Q&A what inspired him to write *Mirror in the Sky: The Life and Music of Stevie Nicks* (University of California Press 2022), Princeton professor Simon Morrison, a scholar of Russian music and dance, says he got the idea about six years ago while talking with people who love her song “Dreams” — “just because they do, without needing or wanting to explain the love.” Morrison says that while he feels the same way, writing about the song and the singer “meant thinking about that love” rather than “leaving it be.” His plan was to write about Nicks by “exploring her creativity and immense power as a performer” while “focusing on her process, her sources of inspiration, and the bond she has created with her audience as a truth-teller.”

“Poe, Edgar Allan”

The Irish singer-songwriter Sinéad O’Connor briefly channels “Dreams” in her memoir *Rememberings* (2021), writing, “I’m like Stevie Nicks. She keeps her visions to herself.” After reading O’Connor’s response to the death of Elvis Presley in 1977 (she was 11: “I need a new father now that Elvis is gone”), I searched for Presley in the index to *Mirror in the Sky*, where I found “Poe, Edgar Allan” and discovered that when Nicks’s Senior English teacher at Menlo-Atherton High asked the class to analyze Poe’s “Annabelle Lee,” Stevie turned the poem into a song that she, in Morrison’s words, “held close for decades,” finally recording it “once she had exorcised the demons of the past, the bad loves, the toxic habits.” Composed when Nicks was 17, “Annabelle Lee” rises gloriously from the undead almost half a century later in her solo album *In Your Dreams* (2011).

Having heard the wonders Nicks and producer Dave Stewart achieve in “Annabelle Lee,” — Morrison quotes Stewart on “Stevie’s obsession” with Poe — I’d like to think that Vladimir Nabokov’s “Divine Edgar” would be entranced by Nicks’s rapturous singing and the majestic orchestration. Nabokov shares her obsession with Poe, having based the first incarnation of Lolita on “Annabelle Lee.” As someone

who once claimed he was “as American as April in Arizona,” Nabokov would no doubt have been delighted to know that Nicks was born in Phoenix and that as a child paid frequent visits to a grandmother who lived in a town called Ajo.

Tender and Fierce

An example of what Morrison means by focusing on Nicks’s process is his discussion of “Lady,” the song I celebrated in last week’s column. Like “Annabelle Lee,” it had two lives, having been first composed and performed in 1971. Referring to the 2014 recording in the album *24 Karat Gold*, the version I heard, Morrison finds that it “benefits from the richer lower-range timbre of her present-day voice.” In the seventies and eighties, Nicks sang the song in a mezzo-soprano register, able to “navigate the octave a half above and a half below middle C” — which is the sort of terminology that benighted laymen like myself find hard to fathom; when, however, Morrison refers to the way she keeps “her trademark fierceness and tenderness intact,” he’s describing what I heard the first time “Dreams” came over the car radio.

What I find especially moving about “Lady” — the “what is to become of me” cry in the night — goes deeper than fierceness and tenderness. As Morrison says, it’s the “breakout moment at the heart of the song.” When he mentions the line “knockin’ on doors when there’s nobody there,” however, it’s without reference to the breath she takes before singing the final “there.” What struck me the first time I heard the song is the lonely distance Nicks puts between “nobody” and “there.” As sung when she first performed the song at 23, the pause might have seemed performative; at 66, sung with all the power of “her present-day voice,” she sounds not only “worn,” as Morrison puts it, but on the verge of a life-or-death moment, as “she gives a final push before the lights go out.”

The First Time

I received a review copy of *Mirror in the Sky* in early September and have been living with it ever since, reading it from the beginning as well as prowling around in it (and in the music), a tourist in Stevie Nicks country, which is located somewhere north of Ajo, Arizona, in Nabokov’s America. Now I’m in the car again, as I was the first time I heard her voice, somewhere in the seventies, the radio turned up high, she’s singing “Dreams,” and it’s love at first listen, even though I don’t know who she is or where she’s coming from. I’m on the New Jersey Turnpike and the voice on the car radio is singing “remember what you had and what you lost” and I’m thinking “just keep your eyes on the road.”

Fleetwood Mac

The girl singing “Dreams” in the car was a visitation, about which the DJ offered no details. I didn’t know the Buckingham-Nicks Fleetwood Mac, although I’d enjoyed the previous incarnation in albums like *Future Games* and *Bare Trees*. The last five years of the 1970s, it was “Be Careful There’s a Baby in the House” (as Loudon Wainwright Jr. was singing at the time), and I wasn’t buying records.

“Rhiannon”

Last month I ducked into the Record Exchange to buy CDs of Nicks’s first two albums with Fleetwood Mac, *Rumours* (1977) and the so-called “white album” (1975), which begins with two tracks of good solid rock and roll, nothing particularly noteworthy, and then suddenly a new world of music happens, a new sound, a new voice, so fresh, so strange, so immediately addictive, all the more when you’re driving (yes, I’m in the car again, on I-295). “Rhiannon rings like a bell through the night and wouldn’t you love to love her?” It’s an early October afternoon, suddenly Poe’s on board, and

this woman “taken by the wind” is like a cat in the dark, then she is the darkness, everyone’s singing *Rhiannon Rhiannon Rhiannon* “taken by the sky,” as I pull off the big road into a suburb of Trenton, park, and listen and listen. The singer is both storyteller and title character, the siren, the femme fatale, the Welsh witch she mentions in an interview on inherownwords.com.

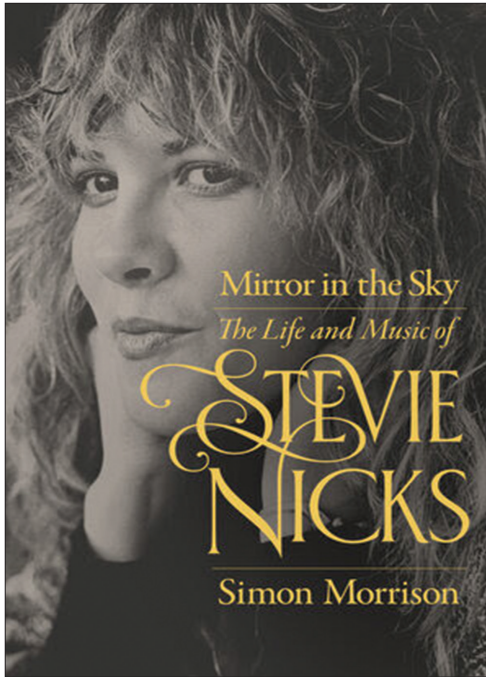
“Landslide”

Half an hour later, I’m still parked, listening again and again to “Landslide,” the song that gives Simon Morrison his title (“O mirror in the sky, what is love?”) as well as inspiring one of his most appealingly open, non-musicologically appreciative passages: “The song is easy to sing, because the melody forgives imprecision and encourages adaptation, as we would hope of life itself. Its status as a classic reflects how far and wide it has circulated.” Earlier in the paragraph, he describes how he words “conceal and reveal, as does snow, blanketing specific details while revealing overall shapes. The tune outlines things buried below the surface.”

Quoted on inherownwords.com, Stevie Nicks says “the legend of Rhiannon is about the song of the birds that take away pain and relieve suffering. That’s what music is to me.” As for what music is to her alter ego and early guide, Edgar Allan Poe: “Shadows of Shadows passing ... It is now 1831... and as always, I am absorbed with a delicate thought. It is how poetry has indefinite sensations to which end, music is an essential, since the comprehension of sweet sound is our most indefinite conception. Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry. Music without the idea is simply music. Without music or an intriguing idea, color becomes pallor, man becomes carcass, home becomes catacomb, and the dead are but for a moment motionless.”

—Stuart Mitchner

Simon Morrison will be reading from *Mirror in the Sky* and talking about Stevie Nicks at Labyrinth Books on Thursday, November 10 at 6 p.m. On Friday November 4, in the library’s Community Room, there will be a Stevie Nicks tribute, produced by Rob Freeman. The special after hours event (7-9 p.m.) will include 16 of her greatest songs and feature local vocalists and musicians. The show is presented by Labyrinth Books in partnership with the Einstein Alley Musicians Collaborative.



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