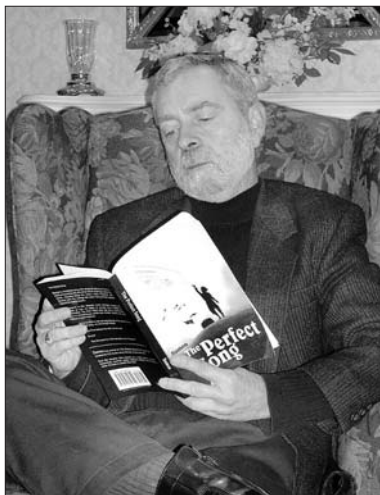


## New York author turns long commute to work into opportunity to write novel



By MARYELLEN HILL  
Sun-Gazette Staff

**MANSFIELD** — On a long commute to and from work, many drivers turn to books-on-tape for a two-fold purpose — to enjoy good literature and unwind from a busy day.

Dennis Miller is not one of those drivers. Instead, he used the commuting time to write a novel as he developed his own story.

After a quarter-century of long drives from Mansfield University, where he is the director of public relations, to his home in Big Flats, N.Y., some 50 miles away, Miller finally has finished his first novel: "The Perfect Song."

And, between the time he first began to craft his story and the completion of the final chapter, many changes in technology occurred. From the writing side, Miller said he wrote the first draft on a Smith-Corona portable, manual typewriter. "Computers certainly weren't in widespread use then," he said.

Miller graduated to an electric typewriter and in the 1980s progressed to a computer. By this time he could store a draft on a 5 1/4 inch floppy disc, then a 3 1/2-inch disc and finally a compact disc. His last draft was completed on a laptop computer.

E-mail wasn't even a concept when he began, yet by the time he had polished his story it was the major way of communicating with editors. Even the typesetting and editing process was all completed in a "paperless" chain of events.

Not only did progress manage to make the whole process easier, but progress also forced Miller to revamp passages of his work. The Web wasn't used widely in the earlier years and by the time the story was complete, Miller had to add passages about Web sites to make the story part of today's culture.

He used the nom de plume Damon thinking it would help him separate his professional career from his personal career as a freelance writer. Further, he's frequently confused as the comedian with the same name and wanted to end that problem with this work.

While the author said he isn't really sure from where he pulled his new pen name, a friend pointed out that Damon is actually "no-mad" spelled backward and a subliminal message about the book's central character, Mendel.

Bits of Miller's own life are intertwined with the characters in "The Perfect Song."

A musician since the age of 14, Miller understands the struggle true artisans face in the creation process. Mendel is just such a person as he strives to create the perfect song.

MARYELLEN HILL/Sun-Gazette  
Author of novel, "Perfect Song," Dennis Miller, Big Flats, N.Y., relaxes while reviewing a copy of his book. Miller is the director of public relations at Mansfield University and wrote the novel while enduring the long commute to and from work each day.

## 'Perfect Song' takes deep look at creation process, desire to be best at one's passion

By MARYELLEN HILL  
Sun-Gazette Staff

**MANSFIELD** — "The Perfect Song" is a fictional work dealing with the creation process and the desire to be the best at one's passion.

Author Dennis Miller, a.k.a. "Damon," creates a musician, simply known as Mendel, who is so obsessed with composing the perfect piece of music that he blocks out most of society. He travels the countryside hoping a literal change of scenery will spark the creative process.

As Mendel continues to observe nature and his surroundings, he attempts to transform them into music. Never satisfied with his work, Mendel tosses his creations into the wind — only to have them literally collected by Poul, a "ne'er-do-well" looking for a get-rich-quick scheme.

A New York Publisher, J.W. Beasley, takes the works presented by Poul and gives birth to new world phenomena of iconic proportions similar to the Beatles or Elvis Presley. The story weaves Poul and Mendel together in such a fashion that Poul learns a great deal about Mendel, but Mendel never knows about Poul.

Because Mendel manages to remain a recluse, he never knows the impact he's had on society in an impact that's lasted for decades. Miller said Beasley, Poul and Mendel have their lives intertwined in a "continental" cat-and-mouse game.

### Toy train get-together scheduled at Radisson

A toy train get-together, sponsored by Alexander Nissan and the Whistle Stop Train Show will be held from 6 to 9 tonight at the Radisson.

It is an opportunity to learn the history of Ives, Lionel, American Flyer and Marx Electric Trains operating layout. Admission is free.

The Whistle Stop Train Show will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Dec. 5 at the Genetti.

### Junior birthday

Chead Austin Helminiak, son of Vicki and Gary Helminiak, Jersey Shore, 9 years old today, Nov. 4, 2004.

All junior birthdays, which are printed only up to 12 years of age, must be written, signed and received by the Sun-Gazette Lifestyle editor at least five days in advance of the day of publication.

The book has many sub-story lines including riots, murder and a love tryst as Mendel finally finds his muse. Miller leaves many of the story lines open-ended leaving the reader to their own creative devices. "Less is more," notes Miller, adding it's more fun when the reader interjects their own imagination into the story also.

While the central character's obsession is music, Miller said, "There's a creative process in all of us and we all look to complete our own perfect song, be it to: raise a better child, sew a better quilt or write a better report."

He points to Pablo Picasso as an example of a modern day artist who kept painting, always striving to create the perfect picture. "If you study his work, he kept creating simpler works," Miller observed. "Simplicity is the book's strength

that pulls the reader in."

All three men strive to find their own perfect song in the book and each manages to do so in their own way. But, when Poul finally stumbles upon life's truth it's too late — or is it?

The book is sure to spark several debates among readers the first being ethical questions in area's such as copyright infringement. And, there are overtures somewhat religious in nature that deal with the struggle of good versus evil. Miller said he unconsciously incorporated them into the work, but had several folks who read the book point them out to him.

Miller will sign copies of his novel from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Wednesday at Criss Natural Foods, 41 E. Wellsboro St.

The book also is available through Amazon and Barnes and Noble.

During Miller's lifetime he's worked as a farm hand, news reporter, tobaccoist, freelance writer and public relations director. All elements assert themselves through out the tale.

In order to understand how a vagabond might live and how certain details play out as Mendel ultimately casts his creations to the wind as he moves from place to place, Miller took a cross-country road trip to observe firsthand how his main character survived.

Of the experience Miller said, "Everywhere I went, I took papers and tossed them on the ground (the way Mendel did) and took pictures to visually represent what's in the book."

"I took pictures of 'rejected songs' in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, California, as well as Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York." Miller said the most challenging shots were: standing on a 3-foot wide hiking path in Mesa Verde overlooking a 2,000 foot drop; walking to the top of Pike's Peak taking shots as the clouds rolled in and trying to get a seagull on Coronado Beach to pick up a paper."

The book is published by iUniverse and is available through both Amazon and Barnes and Nobles Web sites. Miller said a portion of the proceeds from the sales will establish a scholarship at Mansfield University for students who desire to become writers.

—Hill may be reached at mhill@sungazette.com



*As a retired physician, I appreciated the convenience and peace of mind that came with having my cataract surgery at the Eye Center at Muncy Valley Hospital. After treating my own patients for 50 years, I understand the importance of making things easy for patients and instilling in them a sense of confidence. The staff at the Eye Center could not have been nicer or more professional, and having my surgery close to home made things as uncomplicated as possible. And just in case there were any complications, I was right there in the hospital. Best of all, my outcome has been excellent.*

—Robert S. Yasui, M.D.,  
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