



# Creative Living

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(F1E)

## Highways paved the way to successful art career

By Corinne Abatt  
staff writer

**E**LIZBETH Yorgen's career as an artist is a twist on the old "if they give you lemons" adage. In her case, fate gave her highways and roads to look at and she created "The American Road Series."

This artist, now 75, went back to study fine arts at Wayne State University in the '50s. Before that she had been engrossed in raising twin daughters, Jackie and Suzanne, and taking an occasional art course in high school night school.

One night school art teacher in her hometown of Berkeley, Cy Wiseman, helped her focus on what she wanted and provided a strong sense of direction.

She and her late husband had always done a lot of traveling by car, both for his business and for pleasure.

"He liked to do the driving (at least until he hit the big cities when she was asked to take over) so I'm sitting there with nothing to do but take pictures," she said.

She wrote in a statement about the series, "The work is not intended to be a record of any specific place, nor express any opinion of our road system. It is, in fact, one facet of landscape from urban or wilderness as we see it today."

While the artist means for her paintings to be generic rather than specific as to place, there is an immediacy to them that puts the viewer at what seems to be a familiar place on the road.

As she puts her paintings and chooses to be geometric perspective, linear perspective and/or atmospheric perspective, she said, "I always try to make it look as if we're actually on the road."

**SHE LIES TO WORK** with acrylic paint in large format and often builds layers of paint to get a translucency to bring depth and sort of glaze she wants for a three-dimensional look.

"When I went back to Wayne State in the '60s, I just had a fine time. I didn't get a degree, but I have more credits than I need for one. I majored in sculpture — that's my first love. That may be why I'm always pushing the canvas back."

She sells the logistics of sculpture (material, casting, transporting) were the reason she took up acrylic painting. She had done about a half dozen smaller paintings before she did the 5 1/2-foot canvases of the interchange of I-75 and I-96 that won her the purchase prize award at the Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, Ohio.

She said that was when she knew "This subject requires large format."

She said of three of her large paintings from the road series to



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Elizabeth Yorgen began to study art in earnest at 50. In the ensuing years she developed a highly refined style of painting roads and highways that has brought her many honors.

McDonald Corp. is its headquarters in Southfield. "Is the biggest sale I've ever made."

She has worked in the show of Michigan artists currently at the Kruse Art Gallery, East Lansing and she is represented in the collections of K mart Corp. of Troy, SM Co. of St. Paul, Minn., Central Bank of Denver, Colo. and Good-year Tire and Rubber of Akron, Ohio, as well as in many private collections throughout the country.

She was recipient of a Michigan Council of the Arts grant in 1985 and won best of show in 1985 in the Michigan Fine Arts Competition.

**YORGEN SAID SHE** had one year of college at Michigan State University in 1932 during the Depression. "That was when people went to school on a shoestring but there wasn't even a shoestring."

She said art would have been interested in if she had had enough shoestring to continue her studies in the '30s. "I was an intellectual of the first water."

She continues to have a carefully planned, somewhat intellectual approach to her work. "I think about what I want to do and may have been through the area many times before I paint it. It is my feeling about the area and not especially recognizable as a place."

It is a way of expressing what is fundamental to Americans — to get out and move."

She agreed that there are strong elements of architecture and de-



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

At McDonald's headquarters in Southfield, Emmalene Walker, left, and Rhonda Bobcean are in work in front of Elizabeth Yorgen's large painting from her American Road series. It is one of three of hers in McDonald's collection.

sign in her work. "If I had my choice, I'd have been an architect. The visualization of plane and three-dimensional space is challenging."

But equally challenging is her mental list of paintings she plans to do, she doesn't think she'll ever run out of ideas.

## State honors choir The most thrilling part was the sound

By Mary Jane Doerr  
special writer

While many students were up north skiing on their three-day weekend, Birmingham Seaholm High School played host to 99 of the best women high school singers in Michigan.

This highly select group, the State Honors Choir, chosen from hundreds who auditioned last fall, was preparing to sing Saturday evening at Hill Auditorium for the final event of the Midwest Conference on Music. "I had this was the elite singing group in Michigan and I wanted to sing with them," said Seaholm student Amy Friedman, 17, of Birmingham. The soprano wants to study vocal music in college and eventually opera.

Amy wasn't alone this weekend in the long hours of rehearsal. Staying with her were Sara Stapleton, 17, of Tasha Mayo, 15, of East Lansing High School and Melissa Martin, 18, of Cooperville.

"For me this is a chance to sing with a serious group," said Melissa.

For others this is an opportunity to meet new friends also interested in music. Nikki Lumetta, 18, of Chipewaukee Valley High School, didn't know anyone here and asked her to join the three others already staying with her.

"This is an honor to sing in this choir," said

Nikki who has sung in the group before. "I received a letter congratulating me from my state senator last year."

Sheela, who wants to major in vocal music in college, immediately added, "I received a letter from the vocal department of the University of Michigan. Now if I apply at the University of Michigan they will already know me."

The State Honors Choir is sponsored by the Michigan State Vocal Association. Each October, 600 students are chosen and given a packet of music to memorize. In December, the group is narrowed to 300 — 100 each for the mixed choir, women's choir and men's choir.

If it is an honor for the young women, it is also an honor for Bruce Snyder to direct the ensemble. Snyder, director of vocal music at Andover High School and choir director at the West Bloomfield Covenant Baptist Church, was elected to the position by his MSVA colleagues.

Snyder had help from Randy VanWingerden of Calvin Christian School in Grand Rapids and Tom Westcott, choir director at Seaholm. Ronald Houser, organist at Covenant Baptist, is the group's accompanist.

"We pick singers for their voice quality, singing ability and their ability to memorize parts from the music given to them," said Snyder. It was Snyder's job to select the eight numbers in the 25-minute program, a variety of selections

*"When we first started rehearsing it was the sound that I was not used to. The sound produced by this large group is so much better because of the calibre of singers. That's the best part."*

— Amy Friedman

In Latin and English from the early 1800s to the Michigan premiere of a piece composed for the Toronto Children's Choir.

Even though there are benefits of new friendships and the thrill of singing before professionals at the University of Michigan, it is still the music itself that makes these young women want to sing in this choir.

"When we first started rehearsing it was the sound that I was not used to," said Amy Friedman. "The sound produced by this large group is so much better because of the calibre of singers. That's the best part."

*"Once when I came in with Pepsi-Cola bottles, Ehrling told me that they wouldn't do, that the score called for Coca-Cola bottles."*

— Mischa Kottler



## Turning 90 and still in demand

By Julia Shiller  
special writer

Every day at 8 a.m. Mischa Kottler, a rosy-cheeked, white-haired man, known to many as Detroit's pianist laureate, drives in his maroon 1983 Riviera to McDonald's on Nine Mile and Woodward in Ferndale for breakfast.

"For \$1.09, I can get scrambled eggs, an English muffin and coffee," said Kottler, who always manages to get some food on his Pucci ties. "Why should I pay \$8 for a breakfast I can get at McDonald's for \$1.09?"

McDonald's may be his choice for breakfast, but when it comes to lunch and dinner, this energetic, gifted man of 89 years puts on his best Capper & Capper suit and shies his shoes for an afternoon at Peabody's in Birmingham and an evening at Carl's Chop House in Detroit.

"I don't go there all the time, but when I do, I like to enjoy myself," Kottler said.

**THESE DAYS**, however, Kottler said his trips to the restaurants are fewer than usual. He will play in the piano festivals at Orchestra Hall on Feb. 5 and 12, give a Cranbrook Music Guild recital on March 13 and perform the Tchaikovsky B-flat minor piano concerto with the Grosse Pointe Symphony Orchestra at Temple Beth El on April 9. Kottler spends most of his days and evenings at the piano.

All four concerts mark Kottler's 90th birthday celebration.

He was born Michail Salganik in Kiev, Russia, on Sept. 20, 1899. He looks forward to his concerts enthusiastically, he said. And understandably so, his passion for music goes back a long way.

**BACK IN 1919** in New York, when the young pianist was accompanist to the students of the great violinist and conductor Leopold Stokowski, it was his playing that won him an invitation to play for Rachmaninoff. That helped inspire his career in music, Kottler said.

"After just took me aside one day and told me that I was going to be playing for Rachmaninoff tomorrow," he said.

Kottler played a Bach prelude and fugue, one movement from a Beethoven sonata and a few Chopin pieces for Rachmaninoff, who Kottler said, liked his playing.

"He told me that I have good temperament and then asked if I played anything of his. When I told him that I knew his second piano concerto, he had me play the whole thing."

**RACHMANINOFF WAS** too busy to take on another student, Kottler said, but he was impressed with his playing and suggested he go to Europe to study.

In Europe, a new dimension opened up for Kottler. He studied with Alfred Cortot in Paris, and then with Ernő von Saenger in Vienna. "Saenger was a pupil of Franz Liszt, who was pupil of Carl Czerny, who studied for three years with Beethoven himself," said Kottler, beaming with pride.

Kottler attributes his knowledge and appreciation of music to these great masters.

"Even though Saenger was a bad composer, he was a great teacher and pianist. He gave you fingering that one would never think of," he said. "Liszt wrote great works and played terrifically. Czerny was a foundation master. At times he wrote too much of the same thing, but his finger exercises were an education. In the old days, finger technique was the schooling."

As for Beethoven, Kottler said he doesn't have enough words to describe how his music has affected his life.

"Every work of his was a masterpiece. The 32 sonatas, the five con-

certos, the nine symphonies, the trios they were all great. No one can compare to Beethoven," he said.

**KOTTLER HAS** applied everything he had learned from the "greats" in his own teaching and much more — sometimes too much, according to some students.

Known as a strict disciplinarian, Kottler's standards for mastery are usually so high that many students often end up in tears because they can't meet his demands in the music they are studying.

"He's pretty demanding, but I'm glad that he's demanding because he forces his students to do their best," said David Strickland, 26, one of Kottler's former star pupils.

Strickland, a 1986 Wayne State University graduate and 1985 Grosse Pointe Piano Competition winner, said that Kottler used to intimidate him during his lessons.

"When I first came to study with Mr. Kottler at Wayne State, I almost started crying during a lesson. But I stood up to him, and after that, I no longer felt intimidated," he said. Kottler almost made him cry about a year ago, Strickland later said.

"I just wasn't playing well," he said.

"**MR. KOTTLER** always has some interesting anecdotes about some of the worst students he's had in the past," said Avigdor Zaronip, music critic for The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

"Sometimes he makes me feel like I'm the worst student he's ever had. I've been wanting to study the Rachmaninoff second piano concerto, and he always tells me, 'It's too difficult for you. It's going to take you 50 years to learn that.' I tell him, 'Good, I'm patient. We have a deal.'"

Despite Kottler's critical, often sarcastic approach, students flock to him because he is one of the finest piano teachers/concert pianists around. He has helped produce such great names in music as Nell Laredo, Cynthia Raim, Neil Stulberg, Margaret Barthel and Seymour Lipkin.

As a performer, he has impressed not only teachers but audiences alike since childhood.

"When I was 7 1/2 years old, I gave a successful piano recital at the Conservatory of Music," Kottler said. "At the age of 9, I already had 25-30 concerts in the Ukraine."

**WITH THE** culmination of his studies in Europe, Kottler came back to America in 1929. In 1932 he made his Detroit Symphony Orchestra debut playing the Tchaikovsky B-flat minor piano concerto. A year later, he became musical director of WTV Radio.

"Back then, it was all radio. I was responsible for a studio orchestra that performed for as many as eight programs a day," Kottler said.

Along with holding the director's post, Kottler performed live chamber music recitals with musicians such as Joseph Gingold and Mischa Mischakoff, and gave piano recitals. It was a high-pressure job, but according to Kottler, it still wasn't as difficult as that of DSO's official pianist, a post he had held from 1932-70.

"**WHEN SIXTEN** Ehrling became conductor, he was very contemporary," Kottler said. "We did a lot of modern works with very complex rhythms. We had to count like hell. I practically played a new instrument; each week I had to play with mallets, tool-hammers, nail files. I used to use Coca-Cola bottles for special effects."

Never without an anecdote, Kottler said, "Once when I came in with Pepsi-Cola bottles, Ehrling told me that they wouldn't do, that the score called for Coca-Cola bottles."