

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

For Laurie Eisenhower, the dancing never stops

Somewhere between teaching dance technique classes at Oakland University and coordinating rehearsal among six of her company's dancers, Laurie Eisenhower manages to take a breath.

A dancer's reprieve, however, doesn't last long.

It's mid-afternoon, then the next stop on her schedule is an elementary school to pick up her daughter, Kealey, born eight years ago on St. Patrick's Day.

Throughout her busy day balancing her role as associate professor of dance, artistic director of the ensemble that bears her name and the demands of motherhood, Eisenhower gives a whole new meaning to "rushing around."

On most days, it's all a dance. Different tempo. Change of scenery. But all of it somehow fitting into the choreography that goes well beyond the stage.

Handle with care

While many dancers' careers end long before their 40th birthday, Eisenhower, who freely admits to being on the other side of the slippery hill, continues to thrive as a teacher, performer, choreographer and artistic director for the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble.

For years, Eisenhower thought that learning dance was strictly an exercise in physical training and mental discipline. But it really wasn't until she became a mother that she realized that "there's no right or wrong in dance."

Some of the dancing details that the highly focused Eisenhower used to worry about didn't have the same importance.

"Being a mother has given me a different perspective on teaching," she said. "No matter how important you think some things are, the most important is a child's self-esteem."

These days, it's not unusual for Eisenhower's daughter to camp out in her office, while EDE rehearses down the hallway at Warner Hall on the OU campus.

Of course, that depends on the day. While Eisenhower's days appear as hectic as trying to choreograph a riot (or an Italian wedding), she isn't looking for sympathy.

She dials the melo-drama, too. She'd prefer to focus on what's "real."

No different from many mothers trying to balance career aspirations with maternal longings.

Apparently, what's "real" is what keeps Eisenhower's dancing feet firmly planted on the ground.

The dance instructions are quite simple: "Child growing. Fragile, handle with care."

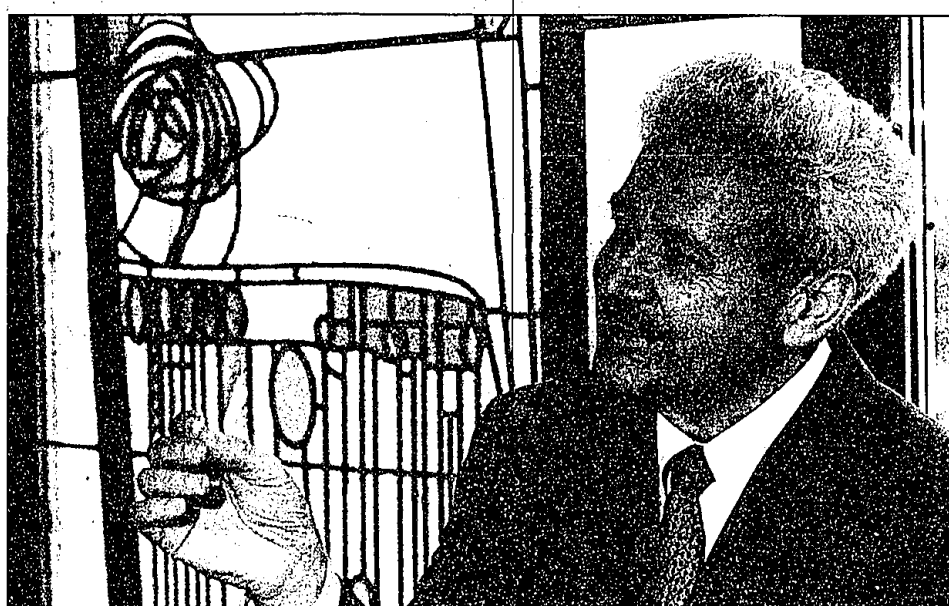
EDE's new home & season

For an art form suffering from dwindling audiences and fewer touring opportunities, EDE shows signs of resiliency. "Each year we take a risk," she said.

This year's "risk" was a move from their downtown Pontiac studio to Rochester Hills. Their new home along an industrial strip on Hamlin Road features 3,000-square feet including two studios and plenty of storage space. The facility provides extended room for EDE's dancing classes.

With the more versatile space,

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STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACQUEL

Cultural ambassador: David DiChiera, general director of the Michigan Opera Theatre, has provided vision, fortitude and a deep faith in the renaissance of downtown Detroit.

IN TUNE WITH THE TIMES

New MOT season builds on success

Michigan Opera Theatre's 1997-98 Season

■ **"Aida"** - 4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 20; 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 21; 8 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 24; 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Sept. 26-27; 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 28; 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 4; 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 5.

■ **"The Magic Flute"** - 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 18; 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 19; 8 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 22; 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Oct. 24-25; 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 26.

■ **"Hecate"** - 8 p.m. Saturday, April 18; 2 p.m. Sunday, April 19; 8 p.m. Wednesday, April 22; 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, April 24-25; 2 p.m. Sunday, April 26.

■ **"The Tale of Love"** - 8 p.m. Saturday, May 17; 2 p.m. Sunday, May 18; 8 p.m. Wednesday, May 21; 8 p.m. Friday-Saturday, May 23-24; 2 p.m. Sunday, May 24.

■ **"Porgy and Bess"** - 8 p.m. Saturday, May 30; 2 p.m. Sunday, May 31; 8 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, June 3-6; 2 & 7:30 p.m. Sunday, June 7; 8 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, June 10-13; 2 & 7:30 p.m. Sunday, June 14.

Where: Detroit Opera House, 1526 Broadway, Detroit.

Tickets: (313) 874-SING (7454) or (810) 645-6666

BY FRANK PROVENZANO STAFF WRITER

David DiChiera stands against the wall-sized glass windows on the second-floor lounge at the Detroit Opera House in Motown's original theater district, Grand Circus Park. His gentle demeanor and soft raspy voice are a stark contrast to the melodramatic opulence of the art form he has nearly single-handedly sustained in Michigan for the last quarter century.

After last year's unprecedented popular and critical success, DiChiera, founder and general director of the Michigan Opera Theatre, is hardly sitting back admiring the company's recent accomplishments with the opening of the 1997-98 season less than two weeks away.

"Every season the challenge is to come up with something new, exciting and different," he said.

Perhaps that's a truism for most production companies, but remember, this is opera where "change" happens about as regularly as Luciano Pavarotti staying on a diet. Today's opera companies do not play

the pop music game of "race up the charts," nor sprint like Broadway producers to take the pulse of theatersgoers before planning another revival.

Yet for DiChiera, the appeal of opera is strangely in tune with the times.

"Opera is in sync with the multimedia phenomenon of our time; it's what you see on MTV - action, imagery and music," said DiChiera, who noted that MOT's fastest-growing audience segment is 25-40-year-olds.

Ironically, the growing popular appeal of the MOT occurs as attendance at symphony concerts across the country is declining. Further, MOT's success confounds the findings of the 1996 President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities study which indicated a "decline in the notion of stewardship and civic culture."

Last year's success, according to DiChiera, isn't so much a benchmark for MOT as a springboard to wider international recognition and broader appeal to 1990s audiences

looking for the ultimate dramatic, multimedia entertainment.

"Probably no other art form combines scenery, dance, music, choruses, singers and orchestra," he said. "When you come to opera, you're constantly engaged. Other art forms are more one-dimensional."

In the retro 1990s where even disco has "suffered" a comeback, it seems that one of the most high-brow art forms has been reborn in a metro area known more for automobiles than arias.

While not exactly avant garde - as last year's conventionally staged "The Flying Dutchman" proved - the MOT has made significant strides into becoming an undisputed world-class company. That transformation, said DiChiera, began with creating an opera house with the acoustics and stage dimensions that accommodate both large-scale and intimate productions.

The upcoming "Aida" production designed for the San Francisco Opera Company, he said, couldn't

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EXHIBITION

Paws for a cause: Art goes to the dogs

BY LINDA ANN CHOMEN STAFF WRITER

If you're an animal lover, better start counting your bucks. Students at Center for Creative Studies spent the summer concocting canine creations for an auction to benefit the Michigan Humane Society. The auction takes place during a gala event at Neiman Marcus to celebrate the 120th anniversary of the non-profit organization, which operates shelters in Westland, Rochester and Detroit.

Ed McMahon is master of ceremonies for the Saturday, Sept. 13, extravaganza.

The evening includes a strolling dinner featuring 20 Metro Detroit restaurants, entertainment by Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, the art auction and a fashion show spotlighting the country's top designers including Pam McMahon, Ed's wife.

Over the summer, CCS students participated in a course designed exclusively for the development and fabrication of the art works by Tom Molyneux, an associate professor and director of the foundation program at CCS. An animal welfare advocate, Molyneux brings his cat, Moon Dog-

Paws for Celebration

■ **What:** A gala event to celebrate the 120th anniversary of the Michigan Humane Society. Evening includes strolling dinner, featuring 20 Metro Detroit restaurants, entertainment by Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, art auction, and fashion show.

■ **When:** Saturday, Sept. 13. Festivities begin 8 p.m. for Benefactors and Patrons, 8:30 p.m. for Friends.

■ **Where:** Neiman Marcus, Somerset Collection South, Troy.

■ **Admission:** \$75 for Friends, \$175 Patrons, \$300 Benefactors (includes cocktail reception with Ed McMahon). For tickets or more information, call (313) 873-3400, ext. 317.

gie, to class daily. In his spare time, he sculpts animals for the garden. So it seems only natural that he was chosen to head up the project, plus the fact Molyneux was director of the Belle Isle Nature Center for seven years before coming to CCS.

"This is the most gratifying project I've ever taught in my 27 years here," said Molyneux, who donated his teaching time and art work.

After Molyneux came up with a basic concept for the project, the students' mission was to create a work of

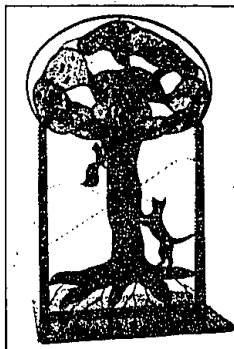
art based on the theme: "man shepherding animals." Then Molyneux went looking for students with an empathy toward animals. To entice students, CCS offered them credit for the project.

"I wanted students to create works of art that expressed the nurturing of a caring connection between our planet's animals and all humans," said Molyneux, who grew up in Redford, "a caring connection that expresses the natural beauty, inherent morality, awe-some wonder, simple serenity, fragile delicacy, and the need for humans to work on learning to live in harmony with animals as caretakers of our planet's life forms."

After selecting the students and touring the MHS shelter in Detroit, the work began. In June, students submitted maquettes for approval by MHS representatives. The completed works are on display at Neiman Marcus through Sept. 13. All proceeds from the auction go to the Michigan Humane Society.

While students were creating so was Molyneux. "We are Part of the Earth," a steel and bronze garden screen is

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Delicate balance: Patte Vandenberg created a colorful garden gate for the auction. The bronze and stained glass work depicts a human tree with a cat about to scamper up one side of the trunk as a squirrel clings desperately to the opposite side.