Dracula *from page D1*

classes offered during the run of the performances.

With the recent success of "Stomp," "Riverdance" and "Lord of the Dance," Stroud is optimistic about the growing appeal of dance and ballet – an art form with origins in the 16th-century court of Catherine de' Medici.

"Dance in America is at a watershed," he said. "We're all looking around to see what has to be done to get people back (to attend ballet)."

Apparently, the age-old story of a decadent Count with an infamous – and infectious – overbite is as good a starting place as any.

Taking flight

Since opening in March at Houston's Wortham Center for the Performing Arts, the neo-Romantic "Dracula" has earned plaudits for elevating the appeal of ballet to the level of a major Broadway musical.

For about $1 million, the ballet's creator, Ben Stevenson of the Houston Ballet, has adapted Bram Stoker's 100-year-old gothic tale into what some critics claim is a future ballet classic. The typically parsimonious dance critics in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles have praised "Dracula" as a stunning production.

Typically, ballet sets are sparse and modest. But with an unprecedented budget, Stevenson has created an elaborate design along with impressive pyrotechnics and special effects, including vampires who literally take flight across the stage.

The story has been streamlined and modified for the stage. Unlike Stoker's original version where the Count travels to London, the ballet takes place solely in Dracula's castle and a village in Transylvania. In addition to the creepy Count, the other principal roles are Flora, a village girl; Svetlana, the innkeeper's daughter; and Fredrick, Svetlana's suitor.

Although the ballet wallows in the Count's depraved chambers, Stevenson's adaptation offers a resolution whereby "good" triumphs over evil without compromising the integrity or passion of Stoker's horrific fantasy.

Dance critic Jennifer Dunning of *The New York Times* noted the production "is a spectacle of an order ballet audiences seldom see...not just lavish but exquisitely beautiful and atmospheric...a ballet for the mind as well as the eye."

Opening for a weekend run at the Detroit Opera House on Thursday, "Dracula" will be performed by the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, which recently completed a weekend of concerts at the Benedum Center for Performing Arts in Pittsburgh.

Pushing the limits

The performance will be a welcome-home trip for former Orchard Lake resident Lisa Carroll, a member of the Pittsburgh Ballet. Carroll portrays one of Dracula's 18 brides in Act One and one of eight peasants in Act Three.

"The actual steps aren't that difficult," said Carroll. "But it's demanding in terms of drama and the amount of dancing that's required."

Six years ago, at the age of 14, Carroll packed up for Pittsburgh to study dance. Since then, she's performed in a range of ballets, including "Nutcracker," "Don Quixote," and "Sleeping Beauty."

This will be Carroll's first professional trip back to Michigan in four years, since she performed "Nutcracker" at the Midland Center for the Performing Arts.

The appeal of "Dracula," according to Carroll, is quite simple: audiences know the story and likely will be overwhelmed by the spectacle of the live performance.

"So much in dance is focused on criticism and looking at what you have to do to improve," she said. "For 'Dracula,' we've just tried to express the joy and fun of dance."

Gaining mainstream popularity, however, isn't the paramount objective of "Dracula." In fact, for ballet purists, productions like "Dracula" and last spring's "Blue Suede Shoes" could diminish the prestige of the art form.

Yet Terrence Orr, artistic director at Pittsburgh Ballet, would prefer to think that he's walking a delicate line leading to the future of ballet.

"It takes more than just changing the color of a tutu to attract audiences," said Orr, who danced with the prestigious San Francisco Ballet and the American Ballet Theatre.

"We definitely don't want 'Dracula' to look like a Broadway show," he said. "We're trying to perpetuate (ballet) while pushing it to the limits."

Of course, that all depends on whether "Dracula" can suck in all the right places.

Conversations *from page D1*

tagious. Whales are some of God's greatest creatures. Why not worship whales."

Call it building awareness, fostering familiarity. It's hard to look away from a mural of life-size whales without realizing their immensity and sensing that they have a human-like awareness.

By 2011, Wyland expects his murals will cover more than 100 walls. He hopes that even those who've never been to an ocean will still grasp the wonders of the deep.

What's in a name

Anyone who prefers to be referred to by a single name might need the entire ocean to fit their ego. Madonna, Cher, Prince (before he didn't have a name) and Oprah come to mind.

But for Wyland, there seems to be an unusual humility and respect, especially when considering that the newly opened Wyland Galleries in Birmingham is his 38th.

He hasn't forgotten those who supported him along the way.

The franchise for his Birmingham gallery is owned by his former high school football coach George Jesko, and an assistant principal at his alma mater Jim McCann.

"He saved the Michigan (franchise) for them because everything they've done for him," said Janice Settlemoir, gallery director and a former classmate. Settlemoir is on a yearlong leave of absence from her job as assistant principal at Heritage Junior High in Utica.

Like other gallery franchises, there's a gift shop environment at Wyland Galleries. Caps, T-shirts, mugs, puzzles along with lithographs and several bronze sculptures that could be straight from Sea World.

What: Wyland Galleries Grand Opening
When: Week of Oct. 7 - 11, featuring an Artist Reception 7 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 11
Where: 280 Merrill Street, Birmingham; (248) 723-9220
Event: Mural painting at Joe Louis Arena, downtown Detroit
When: Tuesday, Oct. 7 through Monday, Oct. 13

That type of retail atmosphere can undermine the impression of a serious artists.

But for Settlemoir, the art of Wyland isn't just about paintings and sculpture, but an educational mission to preserve the natural waters.

"Once you've seen dolphins or whales close up, this art touches your soul."

Sure, Wyland has earned plenty of money. An original cost about $300,000 – and they keep selling.

But he doesn't have to come to Michigan to paint his mural. Or he could ask for a stipend.

He doesn't. He not only donates his time to paint murals, but he's a major contributor to preservation funds around the world.

A single name like "Wyland" has served him and his noble cause quite well. It might be time for Wyland to be called by another name. How about: "Michelangelo of Marine Art."

Frank Provenzano is an arts reporter for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. Call him at (248) 901-2557, or send information to 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, 48009.

Poet *from page D1*

performs his brand of poetry with his group, the Magical Poetry Band, throughout the Midwest and east coast.

Poetic discoveries

In style and tone, Hooper's verse follows traditional English and American poetry, rather than the multi-meanings and obfuscations of modernism. Her neatly structured poetry sets out to clarify and whisper, rather than muddle and shout.

As noted by a critic reviewing her first poetry collection, Hooper's language "transforms ordinary events into startling revelations without making them seem implausible."

In a recent poem, "The Power Failure," Hooper balances an intimate tone with the rush of stark images. She writes: 'Earlier my anger/ripped across the room/hitting you, the only/object in its path./But when the lights went out/I called to you,/and you had lit a match/so I could find you/at the bottom of the stair.

"I like to discover something when I'm writing," said Hooper. "I follow where the language is leading, a place where the natural language just takes over."

The language seems to take Hooper to the world of gardens, natural occurrences and a unique place where a mother, wife and friend watches all that passes her door: a hawk lifting a squirrel up into the sky; a dinner guest; rainy afternoons; and her son's baggy sweatshirt.

A native of Saginaw, Hooper was inspired by another poet from the mid-Michigan town who was captivated by nature's mysteries, Theodore Roethke. She recalled meeting Roethke after he gave a lecture at the University of Michigan. Considered one of the 20th century's greatest poets, Roethke's tense, anxious questioning of his poetry written in the 1950s foreshadowed the self-confessional poets of the 1960s and 1970s.

Like Roethke who probed his childhood experiences growing up in a family who owned greenhouses and nurseries, Hooper plans to explore her youthful days in Saginaw in her next collection of poetry.

Perhaps what Roethke and Hooper best reveal in their poetic visions is not only the way of nature, but also the nature of the self.