

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

Transitions, not retirement, ahead for Joyce Rolf

Only in America do people talk about "retirement." As if there came an appropriate time to unplug the battery and put the engine on the shelf.

While the word "retirement" most commonly refers to leaving a structured work setting, the connotation too often means "set out to pasture." Joyce Rolf, the outgoing public relations coordinator at Paint Creek Center for the Arts in Rochester, has a better word — transition. As in, life doesn't stop, it just moves in another direction.

Ten years ago, when Rolf answered a help-wanted ad for a part-time public relations job at the fledgling art center, she felt like she had needed was a chance to prove herself. Again.

At the time, Rolf of Birmingham was more than a half-century old — just barely. As good as any time to start anew.

Like many who make mid-life career changes, and watch their children's attention evolve (or devolve) from Sesame Street to Wall Street, Rolf realized that it was time to let her heart determine the next move. It led her to the Paint Creek.

"Some employers look down at a woman who hasn't been in the work place for years," she said. "I'm so grateful I was given the chance."

The talents Rolf developed during the 25 years spent at home rearing her three children, she feared, might not translate into the practical realities of the high-tech business world. "Then again, who's to say."

A new province

Secretary of State Madeline Albright has shown that years spent changing diapers of squirming infants might be good practice in dealing with temperamental bullies like Saddam Hussein, who is in desperate need of potty training and an adult-size spanking.

Motherhood is not just good experience for diplomacy. Rolf has shown that it's just the type of experience needed to promote the arts.

During the last 10 years of "getting the word out" about the happenings at Paint Creek — from class offerings to exhibits to the annual Art & Apples Festival — Rolf has been a tireless voice for artists.

She merely expanded her maternal province.

Since 1988, Paint Creek has moved beyond its one-time status as a neighborhood art club, largely through the efforts of Rolf, Executive Director Betty Ruedisueli, an active board and a healthy dose of financial support from the Chrysler Corp. Fund.

Not only has Art & Apples, held in mid-September, become one of the finest outdoor art festivals in the country, Paint Creek has gained legitimacy for exhibiting emerging local and national artists.

The word is out. For Rolf, it's time to take a deep breath. Mission accomplished.

Please see CONVERSATIONS, C2



Proved: Joyce Rolf worked behind-the-scenes for 10 years at Paint Creek.

MAKING ART MATTER

"Our challenge is to constantly reach into the community at large to build bridges so they can see what we can do to expand their horizons."

David DiChiera, general director, Michigan Opera Theatre



"We have a middle generation that's been turned off to the arts because they didn't have art classes in school."

Marloue Belanger, director of the Southfield Centre for the Arts

"People outside of Detroit perceive us better than we do. The first thing we have to do is change the way people feel."

Andrew Camden, trustee, Detroit Institute of Arts, and chair, Museum Trustee Association



"Our biggest drawback is that we're a decentralized region. We have to create an infrastructure to link all of us."

Gregory Wittkopp, director, Cranbrook Art Museum

"The bottom line for art is two or three generations from now. Will we have a civil and educated society? And will the arts play a role in bringing about that kind of society? ...We need to look collectively to increase participation, patronage and audience."

David Egner, president, Hudson-Webber Foundation



"Independent of bottom-line economics, many of us believe we have benefited by the faith and investments of those who've come before us...We need to find a way to successfully carry that faith forward into the future so it's not just economically driven, but about quality of life."

Maurice Porish, interim director, Detroit Institute of Arts

Roundtable cites challenges, renews faith in the future

STORY BY FRANK PROVENZANO • PHOTOS BY BRYAN MITCHELL

Anyone who has been around the arts for the last two decades must often wonder why the discourse about art and culture has been relegated to a ping-pong debate between conservatives and liberals.

There's a desperate need for perspective.

On Wednesday, the *Observer & Eccentric* held a roundtable discussion with Marloue Belanger, director of the Southfield Centre for the Arts; Andrew Camden, trustee, Detroit Institute of Arts; David DiChiera, general director, Michigan Opera Theatre; David Egner, president, Hudson-Webber Foundation; Maurice Porish, interim director, Detroit Institute of Arts; and Gregory Wittkopp, director, Cranbrook Art Museum.

The greatest challenge, according to the panel, is to convince patrons, politicians and parents about the essential role of art.

"We have a middle generation that's been turned off to the arts because they didn't have art classes

in school," said Belanger. "We've got to find ways to get people to see the arts."

The roundtable debate began as a search to understand the challenge of how to build a broader audience for the arts while also attracting patrons, corporate sponsors and foundation support.

In the final analysis, however, the discussion revealed that there was no separating the talk about art from quality of life issues, faith in our community and the challenge of building a better world.

The value of art

The \$98-million budget for the National Endowment for the Arts is nearly 60 percent less than what it was in the late 1980s.

The void in public funding has resulted in a fervent pursuit of other ways to generate revenue. Arts groups often sound more like entrepreneurs than an art collective.

Today, art survives because administrators are as good at balancing budgets, marketing and writing grant proposals as they are

at identifying compelling works of art.

The trend to incorporate business principles extends beyond running an efficient arts organization. There's an unmistakable effort to quantify the "value of art." That's a result of trying to convince corporate sponsors of a tangible "return on their investment."

But there's a rub. In art, there's no quantifiable bottom line.

"If we were producing cars, at the end of the day we could say we made 'x' number," said David Egner, president of the Hudson-Webber Foundation, one of the largest donors of money to nonprofit in Michigan.

"The bottom line for art is two or three generations from now," he said. "Will we have a civil and educated society? And will the arts play a role in bringing about that kind of society?"

Individual patrons, Fortune 100 corporate sponsors and private foundations want to see the practical value if they're going to "pay to

Please see ROUNDTABLE, C4

Concert salutes Duke Ellington

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

Duke Ellington took his music from outdoor festivals to college auditoriums, barrooms to churches, backwaters to Big Apples. His orchestra was on the road 62 weeks a year almost until the day he died in May 1974.

I have a memento of one of those trips to a small town. Not too long before his death, Ellington and his famous orchestra played an NAACP benefit at a high school in the town where I was working, and I had the chance to do a one-on-one interview. I have a photograph on my bookcase of us hunched together talking in a locker room.

"I would love to see that," said Mercedes Ellington, Duke's granddaughter. "You can't imagine how many stories like this I hear."

The band played everywhere in the hinterlands; no venue was too small... It was amazing and really unbelievable to people how intimate they got with the environs of this country."



Mercedes Ellington

Mercedes Ellington, a distinguished dancer and choreographer in her own right, will celebrate her grandfather and his landmark music in performances Feb. 5-8 with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Erich Kunzel.

Ellington has been hailed by some as America's greatest composer. He wrote unforgettable songs, dance numbers, musical tone poems, suites and Masses. His orchestra was itself a work of art, featuring numerous soloists who rank with the greatest names in the history of jazz. He was famous from his earliest days leading a band at New York's infamous Cotton Club in the 1920s.

Yet Mercedes Ellington was just barely aware as a child of how famous he was.

"The first time I realized I had a grandfather that played music like that was when I was in my teens, except for every once in a while they took me to places where he played," she said.

Ellington said she was raised by her maternal grandmother, a West Indian and very strict. Her disciplined environment was far from the jazz scene of her father, Mercer, and her grandfather.

When she was a teenager, she would go to the Apollo to watch the band perform between movies, kid with band members and join them after for steaks at Frank's Steak House on 155th Street.

Please see ELLINGTON, C2

A Salute to the Duke

What: Erich Kunzel conducts the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in a tribute to Duke Ellington featuring Ellington's granddaughter, dancer and choreographer Mercedes Ellington.

Where: Orchestra Hall, Detroit.

When: 10:45 a.m. and 8 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 5; 8:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Feb. 6-7; and 3 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 8.

Tickets: \$17-\$42. May be purchased at the Orchestra Hall box office or by calling the DSO at (313) 576-5111.

BALLET

Opera House new Midwest home for renowned dance company

What: American Ballet Theatre's "Giselle," part of the 1997-98 Chrysler Dance Series

When: 8 p.m. Thursday-Friday, Feb. 5-6; 2 & 8 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 7; 2 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 8.

Tickets: \$15-\$62; (313) 874-SING, or (248) 645-6666

Where: Detroit Opera House, at the corner of Madison Avenue and Broadway, one block east of Woodward Avenue, Detroit

By FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

Time to put aside the "what ifs" — those tiresome hypothetical projections about what it'd be like if there was actually a thriving dance scene in metro Detroit.

This week's performance of "Giselle" by the American Ballet Theatre (ABT) of New York not only features some of the finest dancers in the world but may signal the arrival of a long-awaited catalyst to elevate metro Detroit on to the international dancing stage.

"The Detroit Opera House will be the Midwest home of ABT," said Bradley Stroud of Birmingham, director of dance for the Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT).

The New York City-based ABT's new Midwestern home, according to Stroud, means that the legendary company — where Mikhail Baryshnikov once held the title of artistic director — will perform their large-

scale classic ballets over the next three seasons exclusively at the Detroit Opera House.

Sorry, Cleveland. Too bad, St. Louis. And to that Windy City on the other side of Lake Michigan, blow on, Motown has just danced its way on the map.

Building an audience

"We want to reach as wide of an audience as possible," said Kevin McKenzie, ABT artistic director. "That fantastic theater (is a reason for our decision) and our objectives meet hand and glove with MOT's."

Calling the Detroit Opera House "home" also means ABT will reach beyond the spotlights and into the community.

For instance, ABT will conduct master classes and an intensive four-week instructional program this summer in conjunction with Wayne State University.

Please see BALLET, C2



Ultimate romance: Amanda McKerron (above) as Giselle. ABT's upcoming production at the Detroit Opera House will mark the Midwest premiere of the ballet that opened at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City.