

Photographer's odyssey loaded with danger, 'cats'

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

Axel Fisser thrives on taking risks and confronting danger. On a four-week safari to Botswana in November, the 28-year-old Plymouth resident was bold enough to photograph one of the park police, AK47 in hand, whose orders were to shoot anyone carrying a gun.

More than a dozen of the photographs of elephants, zebra, and lions from Fisser's trip to Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia are on display at the Animal Odyssey in Plymouth.

"Because poachers keep shooting elephants, I took a risk to photograph him," said Fisser. "It was a challenge."

Born in Germany, Fisser took his first photograph when he was 11 after purchasing a camera from his uncle for \$150. He then set up a darkroom and went to work. In high school, he taught other students how to develop and print film.

Fisser moved to the United States in 1995. This is his first time exhibiting art works although he's photographed the animals in Africa on each of his eight trips. On his 1996 safari to Zimbabwe, Botswana and

Namibia, Fisser found no scarcity of "cats" when he took photographs in the Serengeti National Park without a zoom lens. He was about 12 feet away from a lion family but in the relative safety of a truck.

"You see hippos and giraffes but it's very rare to see cats," said Fisser. "The Serengeti in Tanzania, I was lucky because I went there in March when grass was dry and low. If the grass is high you can't see the lions. At the Ngongoro Crater, the lions lie in the mud since there is no shade. So you can say that the lions in the crater are the dirtiest lions in Africa."

Fisser's job as a chemist takes him to Germany, the United States and Mexico, so traveling is something that he does often. His birthday was a highlight of the recent trip when in the middle of nowhere he was surprised with a cake, dancers and warm African beer.

Traveling with 18 people, a deer and a cook permitted plenty of time for side excursions. One night, Fisser and a fellow traveler swam across the river amidst crocodiles to enter Angola illegally.

"It's pretty cheap to travel to Africa from Germany," said Fisser.

Animals on the Move

What: An ongoing exhibit of African wildlife photographs by Axel Fisser.

Where: Exhibit hours are 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday and Friday until 7 p.m. Wednesday; and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday. Closed Sunday and Monday.

Where: Animal Odyssey, 621 South Main Street, south of Wing, Plymouth. (734) 414-MEOW or www.animalodyssey.com

er. "It's a camping trip, 125 degrees in Botswana, you must be in good health. I went to Namibia to climb sand dunes. You get up at 4 a.m. so you get there before sunrise. There's a small window of opportunity to take photographs."

The first trip Fisser ever took was to Egypt for scuba diving. On his first trip to Africa, he decided he liked wildlife safaris more. Fisser shares the photographs and lively story of his March 1996 African trip on the Internet at <http://www.ismi.net/rieherttuning/ax>.

Animal Odyssey owners' Sharon and Celia Atma have a track record of supporting wildlife and animal causes since opening their shop in Old Village in November of 1996. The mother

and daughter team moved the animal gallery and gift shop to a new location on Main Street Feb. 10.

"We'll show anything animal," said Sharon Atma of Livonia. "Our goal is to educate about animals and give artists a break."

From the moment visitors enter the shop in a 100-year-old home, animals are all they see. But what else would you expect when one of the owners (Sharon) was married at Potter Park, a small animal zoo in Lansing in June. A new gallery in the back room of the shop features porcelain tiles by Diane Dunn of Livonia; whimsical animal sculptures by Trina Riordan, Farmington Hills; stained glass panels and sun catchers, Jenn, Plymouth;

Bob Perriash, cold cast bronze ducks, Livonia; watercolors and reproductions, Phyllis Hochlow-ski, Plymouth; Cool Cat Creations earrings and pins, Jeanette Pugliese, Lathrup Village; painted animal rocks, Cathy Petta, Dearborn; limited-edition prints, Janna Congor, Brooklyn; pottery, Karen Donleavy, California; cat dolls with porcelain heads by Donna Bragg of Chicago; photography, and ceramic tableware handcrafted in Zimbabwe. Future plans call for artists like Fisser to discuss and demonstrate their work.

"We're always looking for new artists," said Celia Atma of Bloomfield Hills.

The Animal Odyssey is well stocked with merchandise bound to make the hardest of hearts smile. Penguin purses, stuffed ferrets, orange and white stripe shirts embroidered with frogs, jewelry, T-shirts, figurines, mirrors, puzzles, nature CDs, and educational activity sets for kids, are a few of the hundreds of items on hand.

"We try to emphasize items with a little humor so people come to have a good time," said Celia.

Lack of space and foot traffic forced the move to a new loca-

tion. "It's tough making a go of it but the gift shop and gallery is filling a niche," said Sharon. "We try to make it an experience."

In addition to greeting cards featuring masters paintings (Munch, Picasso) with an animal twist, Animal Odyssey offers informational brochures on animals ranging from pets to wildlife.

Both Sharon and Celia are animal lovers. Sharon, a member of Attorneys for Animals and the Legal Defense Fund, volunteered at the Michigan Animal Rescue League in Pontiac for several years. She owns three cats. Celia admits only to having "a lot of cats."

It's no wonder sales from a number of items benefit various nonprofit animal and nature organizations including Animal Crafters, which finances spaying/neutering of pets for low income and unemployed persons, senior citizens, students, and persons fostering strays for adoption.

All proceeds from the sales of hand-made pet beds and heart-shaped dog pillows go directly to Animal Crafters in Farmington Hills.

The Animal Odyssey takes no commission.

Plymouth Symphony scores with families

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

The Plymouth Symphony Orchestra believes the family that plays together stays together. Besides tailoring their Saturday-Sunday, Feb. 21-22 concerts

to please moms, dads and kids, the orchestra in cooperation with the Plymouth Whalers, is offering two tickets for the price of one.

The first 250 people to purchase symphony tickets will receive one free ticket to see the

Whalers take on the Sarnia Sting at Compuware Arena Tuesday, March 3. Last year's promotion was so popular, curtain time had to be delayed, proving once again, hockey and symphony music fans can coexist in the same family.

The music of Gemini will appeal to the kid in all of us. Promises Laszlo Slomovitz, twin brother of Sandor. The two comprise the talent behind Gemini, guest artists on the "Mischief in Music" program along with Stephen Goto, first-place winner in the PSO's Youth Artist Competition.

"They're folk songs we've written about childhood and growing up, topics kids of all ages can relate to and we all, to some

degree, have grown up," quipped Laszlo. "We're going to be playing what we call our greatest hits from our recordings and we really want the audience to be involved, singing along."

Born in Budapest nearly 50 years ago, Sandor and Laszlo emigrated to Israel after the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. They moved to Kingston, New York, three years later and, for the last 25 years, have called Ann Arbor their home.

"Our dad was a cantor in the synagogue, so we grew up singing with him as little kids," said Laszlo. "Since we lived in three different cultures we want to acknowledge the diversity that is so much a part of American culture by adding an international flavor with a Hungarian folk tale and Israeli folk songs in addition to our own original songs. At the beginning of one, we sing hellos in eight different languages with the audience responding to us."

Family plays an important role as well in Goto's life. The 17-year-old Canton violinist and his mother, Keiko, frequently team up to play competitions and concerts at their place of worship, Newburgh Baptist Church in Westland. Goto will perform the selection with which he won the PSO's Youth Artist



In the stars:
Twin brothers
Sandor and
Laszlo Slomovitz
perform two
concerts with the
Plymouth
Symphony
Orchestra
Feb. 21-22.

Mischief in Music

What: The Plymouth Symphony Orchestra presents two family concerts featuring Gemini and the first place winner of the orchestra's Youth Artist Competition, Stephen Goto of Canton. When: 3 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Feb. 21-22 at two different locations.

■ Saturday, Feb. 21, Belleville High School Auditorium, 601 West Columbia, Belleville. Afterglow (cost \$5) follows the concert at Prudential Pickering Real Estate, 381 Main Street, Belleville.

■ Sunday, Feb. 22, Plymouth-Salem High School Auditorium, 46181 Joy Road (at Canton Center Road), Canton. Cost: \$8 adults, \$5 children. Tickets can be purchased in advance by calling (734) 461-2112. The first 250 people to purchase a ticket to the concert will receive a free ticket to the Plymouth Whalers Tuesday, March 3, game against the Sarnia Sting at Compuware Arena, Plymouth, limit four free tickets.

Competition, Khachatourian's "Violin Concerto."

"I've never played with an orchestra before so I'm excited

about it," said Goto. "I like to visualize myself playing with an orchestra. The piece I'm playing is very difficult."

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Hours: Tuesday-Sunday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$3 for adults and \$2 children 12 and under.

For more information call (313) 494-5800.



by Stuart M. Feldheim
Attorney at Law

ADDING INSULT TO INJURY

The Supreme Court recently ruled that the Internal Revenue Service can sue punitive damage awards received by people harmed by faulty products or medical malpractice. The ruling bolsters a statute passed by Congress in August of 1996 that makes it clear that punitive awards can be taxed. The ruling, coupled with the law, puts an end to years of uncertainty on the issue. Punitive damages are designed to punish the defendant and to deter others from engaging in similar conduct that is deemed to be particularly outrageous. In such cases, the plaintiff may ask the jury to direct the defendant to pay punitive damages in addition to compensatory damages. Now, it is possible for the IRS to take a share of these punitive awards after a judge or jury finds it appropriate to direct defendants to pay them.

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