

Herb Couf: Still swinging in bohemian style

In the years before World War II, Herb Couf was playing with the house band at the Steel Pier in Atlantic City when a very unhip-looking guy carrying his clarinet strolled in.

"Cool" may have been invented to describe Brando, James Dean and Elvis. But the guy with the clarinet knew the sound of swinging c-o-o-l.

After all, he invented it. Couf of Farmington Hills recalls matter-of-factly playing his saxophone alongside the legendary king of swing, Benny Goodman.

Apparently, coolness rubs off. These days, Couf, 78, performs only occasionally. And then, it's within the confines of his house.

But like a jazz musician finding a key outside of music, Couf has found another way to sharpen his chops.

Bohemian tradition

Two years ago, he became president of the Bohemian Club of Greater Detroit, the 75-year-old organization of musicians, music teachers and aficionados had grown stagnant.

And in Couf's words, it was time to "activate it."

The result was the formation of the Bohemian Solo Concert Competition for students ages 16-22 who play an orchestra instrument.

Couf contacted more than 300 school districts. Financial need along with level of musicianship were the deciding factors of the criterion.

When the time came to pick the top three applicants, this past April the Bohemian Club decided to hand out two first-place awards at the first annual competition because "how can you say one musician is better than the other," said Couf.

Sympathy and gratitude are part of the Bohemian Club's tradition. Initially, they were formed to help older musicians with financial problems. And then, frankly, they became a social club, meeting at the Scorn Club, near the Detroit Institute of Arts.

"Many of the members have been in music all their lives," said Couf. "Those of us who've made it feel like we owe something to the younger students coming up."

Socializing has always been high on the agenda. With a name like Bohemian Club you wouldn't expect members to flinch in the face of a party.

Meetings begin with an hour of socializing, followed by the official tapping of the keg of beer, and an impromptu musical program of irrepressible musicians, playing anything from Coltrane to Mozart.

Of course, sometimes when they're waiting to tap the next keg, there are semblances of a business meeting.

For the bohemians, the paramount objective isn't necessarily competitive but celebratory.

Now, that's swinging.

Coolness rubs off

Couf's breathy voice and distinctive articulation are vestiges of the years spent blowing through the mouthpiece of his sax and clarinet.

And he's blown through some impressive gigs — youngest band member in the Marine Corps, Pittsburgh Symphony and the Detroit Symphony, where he was principal clarinetist.

And of course, after the war there was the offer to join one of the hottest big bands of the day, the Harry James Band.

Tired of traveling, Couf declined. And settled in.

For 30 years, beginning in the late 1950s, Couf was an ambassador and merchant of music. He owned Royal Oak Music Center, carrying a line of instruments that he designed for amateurs and professionals, including jazz saxophonist Grover Washington.

At one time, Couf estimated that more than 500 students were attending lessons at Royal Oak Music.

Recently, on a trip to New York, he ran into a former student, who divulged the nickname given to him by his pupils — "Herb the Horrible."

Couf laughed, definitely considering the nickname as a compliment.

"Most people don't understand what it means to play an instrument as well as it can be played," he said. "I'm talking about first-class, not just going through the motions."

Discipline, said Couf, is the prerequisite for any musician. And for success.

The life of a bohemian is anything but an endless party. But if you play it right, it sure looks that way.

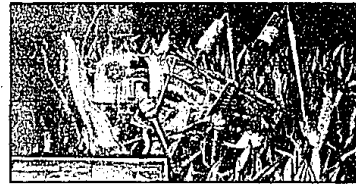
Coolness rubs off.

Cranbrook Institute of Science opens expanded space, new exhibits

Where all things are related



Virtual zoo: An affable robotic graffe is one of the eight high-tech creatures in "Robotic Zoo." Elaine Gurian, acting director of the Cranbrook Institute of Science, (left), and Laurence Hutchinson, curator of exhibits, stand in the newly opened annex.



Tall grass: The grasshopper in "Robot Zoo" combines an intricate design and an imposing post-modern sculpture.

Call it the Theory of Ooh and Ahh. And no, those aren't the names of the Norwegian scientists credited with discovering the phenomena currently on display at the Cranbrook Institute of Science.

Actually, the current exhibit, "Robot Zoo," might take some time to get used to for traditional scientists. The general public, however, won't have any trouble catching on.

Inside the newly opened annex at the institute of science are sights and sounds familiar to anyone who's ever made the pilgrimage to that American cultural mecca Disney World.

Flashing lights beating to a hypnotic impulse. Incessant computer beeps and digitized voices. Animated animals moving with state-of-the-art robotic proficiency.

The amusement-park motif might look familiar, but this isn't the home-away-from-home for that soprano, big-eared mouse and his daffy Celluloid sidekicks.

In an about-face to those tiresome natural history display cases of rocks, fossils and skeletons, the Cranbrook Institute of Science has created an atmosphere of "serious fun" with a high-tech, interactive exhibit that takes an engaging, albeit mechanical, look at animals most often seen at zoos, aquariums and entomology labs.

With "Robot Zoo," a traveling exhibit opening Saturday, Cranbrook marks the opening of the newly expanded 68-year-old institute, which has increased its total size by one-third with a \$20.6 million.

Please see RELATED, C2

WHAT: "The Robot Zoo," an interactive exhibit featuring eight large-scale robotic creatures designed by FANUC Robotics of Rochester Hills

WHEN: Saturday, June 13 through Monday, Sept. 7

WHERE: Cranbrook Institute of Science, 1221 Woodward Avenue, Bloomfield Hills

HOURS: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Thursday; 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday-Saturday; noon to 5 p.m. Sunday.

ADMISSION: Adults — \$7; children (3-17) and seniors (60 and older) \$4; Children under 3 and members free.

CRANBROOK INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE

Major features

- All new exhibits
- Four new exhibit halls
- Light laboratory
- Upgraded herbarium
- Multi-media science information center
- Science garden
- Water exhibits
- Terrace cafe overlooking reflecting pool
- Children's theater and demonstration theater
- Large museum shop

Time Line

- June-Sept. — Installation of permanent exhibits: "Tyrannosaurus Rex Skeleton," "Dinosaur: How Dinosaurs Evolved into Birds," "Tides of Ice," "Mystery of the Mastodons," "Water Gallery," and "Connections theater"
- Mid-October — Opening of new traveling show, "Beyond Numbers"
- Fall of 1999 — Installation of remaining permanent exhibits

Tower emerges from the background

WHAT: The Music of Joan Tower, composer-in-residence of the Fifth Annual Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival.

WHEN: 7 p.m. Sunday, June 14

WHERE: Temple Beth El Chapel, 7400 Telegraph Road

FEATURED PERFORMERS: Paul Katz, James Tocco, Eighth Blackbird, Curato de Cuerdas America

PROGRAM: "Petroushakes," "Winds," "Night Fields," "Tres Lent," "Or Like A... An Engine," "Noon Dance"

For information and tickets to this and other concerts in the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival Series: Call (248) 362-6171, or (248) 645-6666.

Many writers claim that they listen to music while they write. Legend has it that William Faulkner sat an arm's reach away from the volume knob on his record player, often listening to Wagner's "The Ring of the Nibelung" in between sips of Jack Daniels.

But what do composers listen to when they're creating? "Having music in the background can't be done," said Joan Tower, arguably one of the least known and most talented composers in the classical music world.

Tower is the artist-in-residence at the fifth annual Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival. Her music will be featured in an "All-Tower Concert" Sunday, June 14, at the Temple

Please see TOWER, C2



Bold sounds: Joan Tower is considered one of today's most dynamic and colorful composers.

FESTIVAL



Hold on: The enchanting raku sculptures of Richard Salay of Troy are included in the West Bloomfield Art Festival.

WB Art Festival on the road to progress

In most suburbs, a simple conundrum persists: Where is the center of town?

Typically, it's a place not far from downtown. But subdivisions, strip malls and shopping centers have made suburban downtowns passé.

For the past four years during a weekend in mid-June, the west Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce has erected tents to mark the center of town near the intersection of Orchard Lake and Maple roads on the campus of Henry Ford Medical Center.

And with the gathering of 200 artists at the West Bloomfield Art Festival the makeshift

downtown has been as much of a community celebration as a hot spot for one of the top summer art shows in the country.

"In West Bloomfield, we have to focus on events that accomplish what might take place in downtowns in other cities," said Betsey Schneider, executive director of the West Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce.

The chamber also sponsors the annual "Taste of West Bloomfield," a festival of food featuring local restaurants. That event was also held at the Henry Ford Medical Center campus.

Next weekend, ground zero in West Bloomfield will be a

juried art fair that organizers contend rivals the quality of art at those other summer classics in Ann Arbor and Rochester.

Of nearly 10,000 art fairs held nationwide, the West Bloomfield Art Festival has been ranked in the top 100 by *Sunshine Artist*, a publication that critically reviews art fairs based on attendance, sales and hospitality to artists.

What's missing from the annual West Bloomfield Art Festival, however, is wider recognition and overflow crowds, said Schneider.

Please see FESTIVAL, C2

WHAT: Fourth Annual West Bloomfield Art Festival, a fine-art juried exhibit featuring 200 artists from around the U.S.

WHEN: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, June 13-14

WHERE: Outdoors at Henry Ford Medical Center campus, West Bloomfield, 6777 W. Maple Road (between Drake and Farmington roads).

ADMISSION: No charge, for information, call (248) 626-3636