

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

Solomon aims to capture the essence of Dutch

In a culture shaped largely by the "players" in the pervasive entertainment industry, Solomon has documented the images of those sparkling personalities who make the covers of glitzy fashion and lifestyle magazines and tawdry tabloids.

But for the last several years, one of the country's most recognized "celebrity photographers" has probed beyond superficial appearances in search of what she calls the essence of the personality of her subject.

Last summer, she traveled to Maine to photograph legendary American painter Andrew Wyeth for a photo essay that aired on ABC's "World News Tonight."

Recently, Solomon of Birmingham pointed her camera at one of the area's most popular and respected writers, Elmore Leonard.

"Her four-and-a-half-minute photo essay of Leonard will air this Tuesday on CNN."

As viewers are shown a series of still photos of the writer at work, Leonard will be heard reading from the upcoming sequel to "Get Shorty."

Down-to-earth
A longtime fan and acquaintance of Leonard, Solomon didn't feel that past photographers captured the essence of the bearded, bespectacled writer of such novels as "52 Pick-Up," "Glitz," "Rum Punch," and most recently, "Cuba Libre."

For instance, she referred to Annie Lebowitz's late 1980s photo for an American Express print ad of Dutch dressed in black, sitting at a typewriter on a barren beach.

"There's nothing sinister about him," said Solomon, noting that there's a distinct difference between Leonard's fictitious characters and their creator.

"For such a talented and prolific writer, Dutch is so accessible and down-to-earth."

For someone who has had dozens of best-selling books and films (most recently, Jackie Brown, "adapted from 'Rum Punch'") based on his works, Leonard generously gives time at book readings and on the local writers conference circuit.

As a natural-light photographer, Solomon was careful in selecting late afternoon to shoot Leonard at his sprawling Bloomfield Village home.

In the confines of his study, living room and garden, Solomon found what lies beyond Leonard's famous countenance.

Hands and heart
"I wanted to capture his world and to show his fans where Dutch Leonard writes," said Solomon.

There are photos of Leonard's ornate desk, bookshelves of first edition novels, a roomful of fine art and a backyard that could be the centerfold of Better Homes & Garden.

But the environment was merely a backdrop.

Watching Leonard write in long-hand the initial draft of a story,

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WHAT: "Elmore Leonard: A photo essay by Linda Solomon" on CNN's "Show Biz Today."
WHEN: 2:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m., Tuesday, Sept. 22.

Longing for community

Forum reveals diversity, missions distinguish local theaters

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

First, television. And now, the Internet. In a mere half-century, the global village has become a tightly wound electronic neighborhood where gossip shouted from one house can be heard around the block.

But as the world grows further into a tight-knit, dysfunctional family, there's a pressing need to reclaim a vestige of the old world, and a sense of community.

In the arts, that need for community—and communal experiences—most strikingly finds a form of expression in theater.

On Wednesday, Sept. 16, the Observer & Eccentric held its latest in an ongoing series of roundtable discussions about the arts. The conversation at the Southfield Center for the Arts included representatives of nine diverse theaters from around the area.

In the 2-1/2 hour public forum, it soon became apparent that these theater devotees pursue their own brand of theater-inspired community. From productions of contemporary works at Equity theaters to performance of the classics at university theaters to renditions of mainstream lighthearted comedies and delightful musicals at community theaters.

Healing the wound

"One of the things that's so lovely about theater is that it's a (mutual) experience, one that audiences share in to foster community," said Jan Radcliff, founder of Heartlands Theatre Company of Birmingham, a group devoted to the professional development of local playwrights and actors.

Unlike television and movies, watching a live theatrical performance offers intimate portrayals of the delicate balance of art and reality, life and illusion.

"The challenge is to get people hooked," said Blair Anderson of Wayne State University Theater Dept.

"People like the ritual of sitting down and clapping together. It's like feeling like one group."

If theater can build a sense of community, then, many participants believe, it also can heal the wound of isolation.

Diversity of voices

"We have been part of the growth of downtown Royal Oak," said Cate



Jay Peterson
Birmingham Village Players



Phil Hadley
Farmington Players



Jan Radcliff
Heartlands Theatre Company



Evelyn Orbach
Jewish Ensemble Theatre



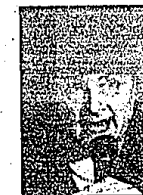
Gregg Bloomfield
Mendow Brook Theatre



Ken Kuna
Plymouth Theatre Guild



Blair Anderson
Wayne State University Theater Dept.



Cate Foltin
Stagecrafters



Bill Mandt
SRO Theatre

Foltin of Stagecrafters. "We're tied to the community. They feel a very strong sense of ownership."

Indeed, in Farmington, Birmingham, Plymouth, and Southfield community theater groups were founded on similar notions that history and a community's identity intersected on a local stage.

"We started in the 1960s when our predecessors bought a barn and said, 'Hey, let's do a show,'" said Phil Hadley of Farmington Players.

"Our members are from the community, and respond to what they want. We're proud of our history and legacy."

Few theater groups go as far back as the Birmingham Village Players, founded 75 years ago. Village Players, boasting a renovated space, has broadened its one-time exclusive social club membership.

"We did a study and found out people didn't even know we were here," said Jay Peterson of Village Players.

Participants in O&E's Roundtable Discussion, "Building a Theater Community"

- Birmingham Village Players
Jay Peterson
- Farmington Players
Phil Hadley
- Heartlands Theatre Company
Jan Radcliff
- Jewish Ensemble Theatre
Evelyn Orbach
- Mendow Brook Theatre
Gregg Bloomfield
- Plymouth Theatre Guild
Ken Kuna
- SRO Theatre
Bill Mandt
- Stagecrafters
Cate Foltin
- Wayne State University Theater Dept.
Blair Anderson

Other theater groups in attendance included St. Dunstan's, Trinity House, Players Guild of Dearborn, Jack-in-the-Box Productions, Timberbox Productions, Oakland University Department of Music, Theatre, and Dance, and the Detroit Repertory Theatre.

Please watch for the O&E's continuing coverage of theater. In the upcoming weeks, stories will include how theaters are appealing to younger audiences, building partnerships with business and educating prospective audiences about theater.

"Now we're working closely with the business district and restaurants so people can come to the theater and (go out) afterward."

Though interested in drawing an audience, clearly for community theaters, the focus is on having fun, socializing and pursuing a craft that may have been forsaken, or dreamt about, but never attempted.

"(We) offer an opportunity for people in our community to engage in a cultural experience," said Ken Kuna of the Plymouth Theatre Guild.

A case, perhaps, of theater serving as the entertainment age's equivalent of a townhall meeting.

That's not to say that community theater doesn't have a therapeutic influence.

"SRO was formed nine years ago to meet the needs of senior adults," said Bill Mandt of the Southfield-based civic theater.

"We were under the false impression that they wanted to see plays about senior issues," he said. "(Instead), they wanted to be frightened."

Please see THEATERS, C2

DANCE

A 'Romeo and Juliet' worthy of a princess

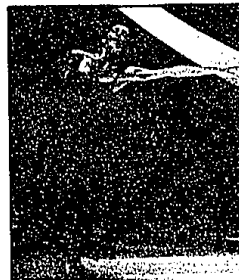
BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

Check and recheck your watch. And forget about a last-second rush to the rest room.

At precisely 7:48 p.m. Eastern time this Thursday, be seated—and be staring. The event before the event will take place in the pricey box seats at the Detroit Opera House—the first-ever entrance of royalty in the stronghold of blue-collar U.S.A.

Princess Caroline of Monaco might not be presiding over her loyal subjects at the upcoming ballet production of "Romeo and Juliet," but she'll surely be the most watched person not wearing leotards and a tutu.

The princess will make her first visit to the area at the opening performance of Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo's classic ballet based on Shakespeare's incompatible romantic play about star-crossed lovers from the founding families of Capulets and Montagues set to the music of Sergei Prokofiev. The four-day stint at the Detroit



Classic steps: Shakespeare's romantic tale of Romeo and Juliet, set to the music of Prokofiev, opens MOT's fall dance season.

Opera House inaugurates the ballet company's 1998-99 world tour.

Historic crossroad

Coming a few months after the announcement that the Detroit Opera House is the new Midwest home of American Ballet Theatre, the upcoming ballet raises the standard on professional dance brought to the area, said David DiChiera, general director of the Michigan Opera Theatre, which produces a fall-to-spring schedule of dance and opera at the Opera House.

"Now that ABT is touting us, and an event like the Les Ballets de Monte Carlo opening their tour here, the Opera House is being seen as one of the top five houses in the country," he said.

At the beginning of the century, Monte Carlo was arguably the most fertile place for dance in the world. The commingling of leading Russian dancers and early 20th-century composers transformed the staid form of dance into a distinctive 20th-century

WHAT: "Romeo and Juliet"

WHEN: 8 p.m., Thursday-Saturday, Sept. 24-26; 2 p.m., Saturday-Sunday, Sept. 26-27
WHERE: Detroit Opera House, (at the corner of Broadway and Madison Avenue), Detroit.

COMMAND PERFORMANCE: 8 p.m., Thurs. Sept. 26.

TICKETS: \$15-\$55; (313) 874-7850

aesthetic.

But with the emergence of modern dance, the appeal of the classic ballet began to wane.

In the mid 1980s, Princess Caroline revived the ballet company in accordance to expressed wishes of her mother, the late Princess Grace of Monaco. Today, Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo is funded exclusively by the Monaco government.

"Romeo and Juliet" culminates an 18-month effort to bring Les Ballets de Monte-Carlo and Princess Caroline to the Opera House.