

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

The latest heroic song from Stewart Francke

"Last night I stood outside my own house and I watched my children playing in the light. How great my luck is, how good my fortune."

— from S. Francke's "House of Lights," 1997

It had been months since Stewart and I last talked.

Before all-consuming 9-to-5's, creating new CDs and raising kids, we'd talk several times a week. Usually make a point to meet for lunch.

The agenda included anything worth talking or laughing about. Easy as finding a bookmark and turning to where you left off.

That's just the way it is, it seems, when two friends share dreams, disposition and a place called Saginaw as a hometown.

Then, last week, from that place that can make time stand still, the sucker punch arrived.

Hymns on the wind

A press release came across my desk announcing Stew's latest project, the Stewart Francke

Leukemia Foundation, established to help people who can't afford to search for a matching bone-marrow donor.

Initially, I didn't read past the headline, and wasn't much surprised.

If you want to know what compassion looks like in 3D flesh and blood, meet Stewart Francke.

Then I read past the headline.

Many people have heard his indelible songs about longing, loneliness and affirmation that resound as "hymns held on the wind."

Three months ago, however, the wind blew a staggering predicament his way.

In June, Stewart Francke was diagnosed with chronic myelogenous leukemia. Late next month, he'll undergo a bone-marrow transplant, getting an infusion

of healthy marrow from his genetically compatible sister, Kit Reece.

In a heartbeat, the several-month lapse in our communication grew into an heart-wrenching abyss.

Just stillness

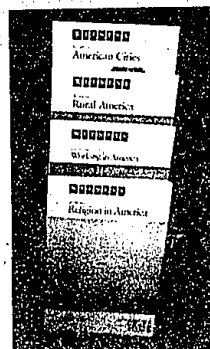
In the last few days, we've talked several times. We made plans for lunch. Once. Twice. Three times. Couldn't make it. Chemotherapy was shaking Stew's system like a rabid dog tearing at the stitching of a cloth doll.

At one point, when I asked him if I was calling at a bad time, he responded: "Yeah, would you leave me alone, I'm trying to die."

Then, he laughed. Long and hard. Find the bookmark. Turn the page. Neither of us saw this chapter coming.

Even in the face of mortality, Stewart responds in his inimitable way with humor, dignity and a sense that although things might not be going

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Focused: The writing in "Witness" is like a mosaic of voices.

Looking for a semblance of national discourse?

OCC bears 'Witness'

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

OK, enough already about the national intervention of Bill Clinton and his documented sexual indiscretions called the Starr Report. Isn't it time to get back to the national discourse about the most critical issues facing America?

You remember. The issues? Debates about social, political and legal circumstances that steer clear of graphic retellings of what occurred between President Bill and "that precocious intern" in the White House corridors.

Thankfully, there's a "G-rated" alternative to that pathetic pabulum from the Potomac.

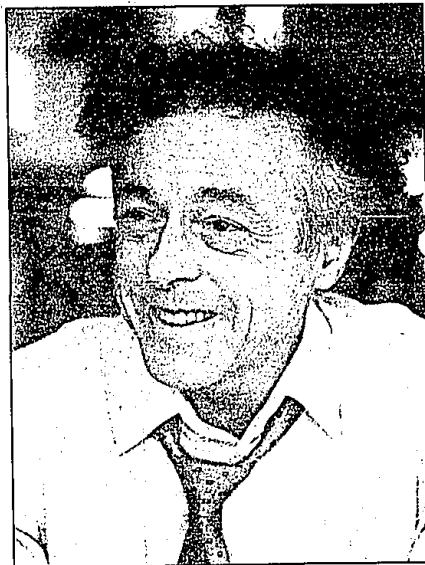
Tucked away on the third floor of a building referred to as "G" — no kidding — on the campus of Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills, a defiantly intelligent and

utterly readable literary journal, "Witness," has moved doggedly for the last 11 years to address issues such as the Holocaust, The Sixties, urban and rural America and religion.

"We try to illuminate moral themes from different literary perspectives," said Peter Stine, who serves as editor and one-man editorial board of "Witness."

The literary perspective, according to Stine, is devoid of esoteric academic jargon, legalese, sociological analysis and psycho babble.

Instead, the literary magazine that Stine places in the same class as the highly respected "Paris Review," "Ploughshares" and "Gettysburg Review" is filled with essays, poetry and short fiction by an impressive range of up-and-coming and established writers, including Joyce Carol Oates, Thomas



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBSON

Active voice: Peter Stine, editor of "Witness," brings a literary sensibility and a social activist appeal to the twice-annually published magazine.

WHAT: "The American Family," essays, poems and short stories, the fall issue of "Witness," a literary magazine
WHEN: Available in mid-October
WHERE: Barnes & Noble, Borders, Little Professor book stores; or by calling (248) 471-7740, or (734) 996-5732
SUBSCRIPTION RATE: One year — \$12; two years — \$22

Lynch, Stuart Dybek and Maxine Kumin.

"Witness" is funded largely by OCC and a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Among the 1,300 U.S. community colleges, Stine claims that OCC is considered the only community college that supports a world-class literary journal.

This year, "Witness" received only one of seven NEA grants given to literary publications.

In the next several weeks, the latest issue of "Witness" will focus on the American Family, perhaps the most traditional, yet most rapidly changing American institution, from single-parent households to extended families of divorcees to same-sex parents.

But don't expect any moralizing or political posturing in "Witness." (This isn't the bog on the Potomac, remember?)

"Witness" is more of a dialogue than a discourse," said Stine. "There's a play between different voices that comprise a chorus of singular voices. It's a 192-page mosaic."

Cues from Chekov

Appropriately, the choice of themes in "Witness" reflects Stine's

Please see WITNESS, C2

Taylor, answer to Cranbrook Music season

A few weeks before the Cranbrook Music Guild's brochure listing the season's concerts was scheduled to go to the printer, and Elaine DeWolf suddenly didn't have an opening act.

But on her seventh call to her list of agents, DeWolf, the Guild's longtime program director, found the answer to her subtraction problem.

On Tuesday, Oct. 6, pianist Charles Taylor, a Harvard-educated mathematician turned performer, will inaugurate the Guild's 48th season.

Winner of the Cliburn bronze medal and the top prize in the Kapell Competition in 1993, Taylor's technique and versatility have been cited as the reasons for his sudden emergence.

The upcoming performance at the Cranbrook House could provide a precursor to Taylor's soaring career.

Two years ago, the Guild presented the prestigious Cleveland Quartet. And last year, legendary pianist Menachem Pressler played at the intimate 185-seat venue inside Cranbrook House.

"We have long relationships (in the classical music world)," said DeWolf. "We're continually elevating the level of programming and our audience have responded."

With just more than a week before the opening-season concert, the Guild reported brisk ticket sales.

While the eclectic schedule may be the prime appeal, local audiences are probably looking for chamber concerts due to the recent demise of two local producing groups, Chamber Works and the American Artist Series.

For 1998-99, the Cranbrook Music Guild has assembled another list of eclectic performers.

Upcoming concerts include:
■ American String Quartet, Nov. 10 — International touring ensemble has a long recording history with the complete Mozart quartets.

■ Lyric tenor Scott Piper, Dec. 8 — A doctoral student at U-M, Piper has won a collection of prestigious awards. He's performed with the Michigan Opera Theatre and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

■ Paris Piano Trio, Feb. 16 — Legendary musical threesome with international renown for recordings of Schubert, Brahms and Chausson.

■ Endellia String Quartet, March 9 — Currently the Quartet-in-Residence at Cambridge University, the quartet is

Please see TAYLOR, C2



Trailblazer: Critics have called Christopher Taylor one of the most impressive young pianists on the horizon.

WHAT: Pianist Christopher Taylor in the opening season concert of the Cranbrook Music Guild
WHEN: Tuesday Oct. 6
WHERE: Cranbrook House, 380 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills (across from Christ Church Cranbrook)
TICKETS: Six-concert season — \$85 (regular); \$120 (patron); (248) 751-2435

Portrait of an artist

Painter deals with surreal demons

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

Cheryl Whyte Conlin calls herself a "work in progress."

Abandoned at age four by her father, Conlin lived as a prisoner of fears until music and painting helped her overcome the demons inside her.

A rock guitarist since she was 19, Conlin traded in her guitar for brushes and paints two years ago. Armed with an upbeat attitude, Conlin's ready to show the world her darkest, deepest secrets in "The Emotions Collection," a one-woman show at the Wyland Gallery in Birmingham. She's exhibiting surreal paintings, drawings and painted furniture, including a coffee table featuring an underwater fish scene.

Dressed in black, rock regalia, Conlin, a lifelong resident of Redford Township, moves from painting to painting explaining the concepts behind them. There are headless bodies on a bench, dark figures bound by their own emotions.



STAFF PHOTO BY IRAN MITCHELL

Sunshine and wisdom: These tables were painted by Cheryl Whyte Conlin.

"All the ones with the dark background are me," said Conlin. "I've gone through bouts of depression throughout my life. I decided to change my life."

Until a few years ago, Conlin played lead guitar and sang in Damzel. Now 36, Conlin has set aside her guitar to paint, although she still does studio work, and readily admits music's influence on her art. Music seemed a natural career choice for Conlin since she grew up listening to her mother Sophie Whyte sing and play country music in a band. Released in 1993, the rock group's last CD "Castle Walls" (on Premier Records) deals with a "World of Broken Dreams" among other subjects.

"You have to be able to feel the music," said Conlin. "You have to be able to feel to paint. Music taught me how to feel emotions. I always suppressed my emotions."

Conlin felt abandoned by her mother as well as her father in those early years. The time Sophie had to devote to her daughter was limited because of

The Emotions Collection

WHAT: An exhibition of oil and acrylic paintings, painted furniture, and drawings by Redford Township artist Cheryl Whyte Conlin. Complimentary wine and cheese reception with Conlin 6:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 3.

WHERE: Wyland Gallery of Michigan, 280 Merrill, Birmingham. Call (248) 723-9220

WHEN: Saturday, Oct. 3 to Saturday, Oct. 31. Hours are noon to 7 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, and until 9:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday.

rehearsing and performing. Conlin's finally come to terms with the loss of love she felt and appreciates one of the most valuable gifts from her mother.

"My mom supported me in my music and painting," said Conlin. "She always told me I could do whatever I wanted to do if I put my mind to it."

Untrained as a painter, Conlin drew photo realistic portraits of rock musicians, animals and landscapes for 10 years before volunteering to paint sets for a production of "Wizard of Oz" at a

Please see DEMONS, C2