

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

New literary mag explores the Detroit experience

Ever since he strung together his first alliteration, poet/journalist Glen Mannisto has railed against preconceptions and simplistic type casting. Apparently, there's one label that he doesn't care to refuse: "I'm an old Cass Corridor guy," he said, between sips of a coffee while sitting outside a cafe on a Royal Oak side street.

A humble self-appraisal shouldn't be mistaken for modest ambition. The guy with a poet's touch and philosopher's vigor has launched "trait," a literary quarterly on regional arts and culture that reflects the ideals — excluding rampant hedonism, of course — of the "Cass Corridor."

Reviving brain cells

The reference to the Cass Corridor is to a late 1960s, early 1970s community of co-ops and social theories put to practice. The social movement known as the "Cass Corridor" was located near the Wayne State campus, where avant-garde poets, painters and musicians lived the utopian mantra of the times.

Ask anyone in their 40s and 50s about the Cass Corridor before, during and after the Detroit riots. If their brain cells containing memories of that time can be revived, they're likely to respond with a sense of reverence. They might even recall the passion of what it meant to be defiant.

ant. And they'll no doubt have a nostalgic feeling of what it meant to explore the possibilities of life.

That was before commercialism became the dominant religion, and the monotonous landscape of suburban sprawl replaced the "urban experience."

It's enough to say that it was a different time and place.

For some, Cass Corridor was sort of a combination of San Francisco's Haight Ashbury experimentation set in a culturally fertile Greenwich Village-like setting.

But for Mannisto, Cass Corridor was the best example of "pure community" in recent Detroit history.

"It was a community not based on economics, but on interests and concern for people," he said.

It's that sense of community, along with a gritty sensibility that is reflected in the first issue of "trait."

Set sail

Like those behind many publications, Mannisto and publisher Carmen Hickok set out to develop an identity for their magazine.

They didn't have to look far. In spirit and deed, Mannisto's life and work can be considered the microcosm.

While many artists either leave Detroit, or eventually compromise their art for practical realities, Mannisto hasn't relented. His poetry has appeared in anthologies.

Please see CONVERSATIONS, C2

Simple Secrets

Walker Evans reveals the 'common man' in his photography

By LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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Except for one self-portrait taken in France in 1927, Walker Evans left himself out of his photographs.

From images of poor Southern farmers to people on New York subways in the late 1930s, Evans captures the boredom, weariness and indifference of people going about their daily life. He revolutionized documentary photography by not interjecting himself into the image.

Evans recorded the mundane, the not so pretty, the "common man." Fascinated with subjects he referred to as "aesthetically rejected" including signs, junk yards, gas stations, shop windows and farmers, Evans objectively documented their simplicity until his death in 1976.

Evans lets us in on his "Simple Secrets" in the newest exhibition at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Organized by the High Museum of Art in Atlanta from the collection of Marius and Benjamin A. Hill, the exhibition reveals the photographer's private moments with subjects. From a man asleep on a South Street sidewalk in New York during the Great Depression to junked boilers, thought to be taken in Detroit in 1946, the 88 images tell a story of life in America in the 1920s, 30s and 40s.

Nancy Barr, DIA assistant graphic arts curator, is anxious for people to see the exhibit installed in the newly renovated Albert and Peggy



Documenting history: Walker Evans captured life around a general store in Cuba 1933. The image was among 31 published two weeks after the fall of dictator Gerardo Machado in the book "The Crime of Cuba."



Societal differences: Walker Evans photographed this couple pan handling with tin cups on Halsted Street in Chicago in 1946.

Contrast:

Evans caught the contrast between the fashions of the women standing in front of S. Klein's Department store and the window mannequins.



de Salle Gallery, which has been closed for the last two years.

Chronology

The first images visitors see are taken from Evans early abstract period. After studying literature at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1926, he moved toward European avant-garde types of photography.

Images are hung chronologically. In the early 1930s, Evans began to photograph straight-on architecture. These photographs netted Evans his first solo exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

Some of the most moving images are those that Evans took while working in Pennsylvania, Ohio and the South for the Farm Security Administration during the Depression.

There are also photographs he took of African sculpture for a landmark exhibition by the Museum of Modern Art. Images from "The Crime of Cuba," published two weeks after the fall of dictator Gerardo Machado, speak volumes about the life of people standing in a bread line in 1933 Havana.

"Walker Evans in the history of photography is one of the seminal figures in the 20th century," said Barr, site curator for the exhibit in Detroit. "He left this vision of what America was. When I look at this I really do see

Please see SECRETS, C2



Wearable art: This silk-painted jacket is by Celia Block of West Bloomfield.

Arts festival plays on Greektown setting

By LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

Dave Roberts isn't shy about saying the Greektown Arts Festival is "the best street festival in Detroit," and he plans to keep it that way. The ninth annual event is "bigger and better than ever" and offers more art, a children's stage and historic tours of Greektown.

"We're able to entertain them better with fewer bands, but longer sets and a real good mix of jazz, blues and gospel," said Roberts. "And there's a larger number of artists. We have a lot to offer the community as far as entertainment and education. It's a great place to have a good time, eat some good food."

Roberts isn't worried about the 1-75 closure downtown deterring people from visiting the 9th Greektown Arts Festival.

"I don't think the closing has created

Please see GREEKTOWN, C2



Art of multiples: Michael McCullough of Farmington Hills carved this woodblock print of a loon.

MUSIC

Musician builds bridges with jazz suite

By KEELY WYONIK
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Through music, pianist Jeff Haas communicates pain and hope. "HaGasher Chai — The Bridge Lives," to be performed Sunday, May 23, at the Charles Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit, is a piece about "building bridges between cultures, generations and identities."

Band members — Alex Trajano of Troy on drums, multi-instrumentalist Rob Smith, alto-clarinettist Marvin Kahn of Southfield, and Marcus Belgrave on trumpet, range in age from 29 to 82.

"My hope is that as people hear it, they will take some responsibility to build bridges on their own," said Haas. "I believe that fear is learned. Arts are a non-threatening way of teaching love and understanding."

The Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit commissioned Haas in the fall of 1997 to write the 75-minute, 10-movement jazz suite to commemorate the centennial celebration of the Jewish community in greater Detroit with support from the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs.



Building bridges: The Jeff Haas Trio & Friends, Marcus Belgrave, trumpet (left to right), Jeff Haas, piano, Alex Trajano, drums, Rob Smith, saxophone, Marvin Kahn, alto clarinet and Chuck Hall, bass.

"It's a cool project," said Haas who stopped by the Observer & Eccentric Livonia office on his way to rehearsal. In addition to writing the piece, Haas and his Trio have presented over 20 jazz clinics to students in

grades kindergarten to 12 throughout the state of Michigan.

They will present two jazz clinics on Thursday at the Museum of African American History in Detroit.

Haas, the son of German Jewish immigrants, never knew his grandparents. They died in concentration camps during World War II.

"Music is a way for me to connect emotionally with my ancestors," said Haas. "L'Dor VaDor — Generation to Generation," which Haas recorded in 1996, combined traditional Hebrew prayer and folk melodies with jazz.

In "HaGasher Chai — The Bridge Lives," which Haas hopes to record, he blends jazz and Jewish melodies.

The music is only half of what the project is about. Explaining it to school children throughout the state, and helping them build bridges with each other and their community is an important part of Haas' work. It takes him all over the state, into communities where there are no Jews or African Americans.

Joined by Belgrave and the other mem-

Please see JAZZ, C2

Musical celebration

of diversity
What: The Jeff Haas Trio and Friends, featuring Marcus Belgrave, will perform "HaGasher Chai — The Bridge Lives," a new jazz suite.

When: 4 p.m. Sun., May 23
Where: Charles H. Wright Auditorium, Museum of African American History, 315 E. Warren, Detroit
Tickets: \$10 adults, \$5 children age 17 and younger, call (313) 494-5800, Ext. 0

Highlights: The Jeff Haas Trio and Friends will conduct two jazz clinics at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Thurs., May 20. The 11 a.m. clinic is intended for the general student population and will provide age appropriate discussion, using musical instruments to illustrate jazz basics. The 1 p.m. clinic is designed for music students and will focus more on the history and development of "HaGasher Chai — The Bridge Lives." There is still room for more students in the clinics. Call Tony Hankins, (313) 494-5835 for information.

Roundtable to discuss arts education

You're invited to "Opening the Book," — a roundtable discussion about arts curriculum in our local school districts, 6:30-9:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 18, at the Southfield Centre for the Arts, 24360 Southfield Road, Southfield.

Panelists will answer questions from the audience, and address their concerns about arts education and curriculum in the school districts the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers cover. There is no charge to attend.

Call Frank Provenzano, (248) 901-2557, Keely Wygonik (734) 953-2105, or Linda Chomin (734) 953-2145 if you have any questions.