Arts & Leisure

Observer & Eccentric

Page 1, Section C

Keely Wygonik, Editor 313 953 2105 kwygonik@oe.homecomm.net on the web http://observer-eccentric.com

Sunday, October 17, 1999

CONVERSATIONS

FRANK PROVENZANO

Bringing a piece of Africa to metro Detroit

Dudley Moore left his mother and three brothers in Zimbabwe nine years ago.

But Zimbabwe never left him.

Each summer, Moore travels back to his homeland for a six-week visit. He drives about 12,000 miles throughout Zimbabwe and the township of Soweto outside of Johannesburg, visiting artists' studios, looking for paintings and sculptures to bring back to his Birmingham Gallery.

At the end of his stay, he typically collects about 10,000 pounds of art, including marble-like sculptures.

Then, the art is loaded on a train heading from Harare to Durban, where it's placed on a freighter destined for the eastern U.S.

This past trip for Moore, however, revealed the discrepancies between the two worlds.

Across the Atlantic

The shipment of art took three weeks to cross the Atlantic and arrive in a Baltimore warehouse. But then, it took another six weeks before the crate arrived at Moore's gallery.

Somewhere in the crevices of his unflappable, urbane manner, Moore let his irritation show. He had paid a freight agent about $7,500 to handle the shipping arrangements.

When the freight arrived in Baltimore, however, the bill was marked "unpaid."

"The agent was a young guy, and I thought, 'Why not give him a chance,'" said Moore in his impeccable diction.

It's Moore's nature to be trusting.

For years, he had *trusted* that his gallery in downtown Detroit would attract visitors – white and black – interested in African art.

And in 1997 when he moved to Birmingham, he *trusted* that his clientele would become more diverse than the current base of 95 percent of African Americans who walk into his gallery.

Unpacking pieces

When Moore finally located the freight agent in Zimbabwe, he was given back only a partial amount of what he had paid. Where did the rest go?

"Right now, that guy's driving a brand new car," said Moore, who will go back to Zimbabwe to pursue a legal remedy.

Meanwhile, Moore had to pay about twice as much as he expected to pay to have the art shipped to his gallery.

He's spent this week unpacking the pieces of Zimbabwe and southern Africa.

"When people think of African art, they think of wooden sculptures," he said. "But our sculptors are known throughout Africa and Europe."

Closer to home

Moore is among those art dealers who are helping raise awareness in the U.S. about African sculptors, such as Nicholas Mukumburwana, Lazerus Takwire and Brighton Sango.

These sculptors gather the green mineral called verdite from the northeastern part of their country. The greenish material is wrought into representations of tribal chiefs, contemporary images of Nefertiti and mythic-like celebrations.

Few of the Zimbabwean artists attend traditional art schools. Instead, they select a mentor and they work side by side.

It's by traveling to Africa and learning of these established and up-and-coming artists that Moore is bringing the continent closer to home.

"If you go to Africa and stay in a four-star hotel, going on a safari with a tour guide, that's not seeing Africa," said Moore.

Africa, as Moore knows, is a state of mind.

Frank Provenzano can be reached at (248) 901-2557, or fprovenzano@oe.homecomm.net

Taking Connections

EDE explores sense of place; UMS presents experimental collaboration

Flyin' high: Eisenhower Dance Ensemble dancers Gregory Patterson (bottom), and Darby Wilde rehearse for their upcoming performance.

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER
fprovenzano@oe.homecomm.net

Despite appearing on a monthly magazine cover boasting of "powerful women" in razor Detroit, Laurie Eisenhower doesn't look like the power-hungry type.

On the contrary, she seems a bit embarrassed by the media attention as she sits in a twisted pretzel position on [illegible] in the Oakland University dance studio.

Down the hallway, her dance company and namesake, Eisenhower Dance Ensemble, rehearses for this Saturday's performance, "On the Move," in which they will share the stage with the Aerial Dance Company, based in Holland, Mich.

The collaboration is more about bringing together the respective audiences from western and southeastern Michigan. The only shared performance by the two companies will come when the curtain falls and the dancers take their customary bow.

Each company will split the program. In fact, EDE and Aerial won't be in the same theater until the dress rehearsal several hours before the performance.

Among EDE's pieces will be "Long Way Round," which the company premiered during their New York City debut in June. The piece was called a "fleshy, yet cerebral way of moving" by New York Times' dance critic Jack Anderson.

In some ways, EDE's New York debut gave them the legitimacy every talent company seeks, said Eisenhower.

"It's a rite of passage," she said. "We established ourselves here, but we've moved beyond. (The debut) has helped us get more widely known, and it'll also help when it comes to applying for grants."

Ironically, the "Long Way Round" may be an appropriate title for the long, rocky road Eisenhower is finding [illegible] company to a New York-bound ensemble. While that piece and the two others presented by EDE were characterized by the "Times" critic as having a "Midwestern sensibility," the gestures are simply tied to a sense of place, said Eisenhower, who grew up in Arizona and moved to Michigan in the mid 1980s.

"I avoid melodrama," she said. "I like to create images that you can't put into words, and that are emotional, but not based on acting."

The other two EDE pieces in "On the Move," include the intensely romantic "Moondances," and Lindsey Thomas' "Mostly Marvin," an homage to the late Marvin Gaye. Thomas' piece will be included in EDE's upcoming work inspired by Motown music, which will be held in early May at the Macomb Center for Performing Arts.

Eisenhower's style offers a stark contrast from the avant-garde leanings of New York-based choreographers, who are pursuing the latest trend of constructing dances of vague gestures.

"They're into 'noodling,'" said Eisenhower, who unfolded from her pretzel posture – knees pulled to her chest, legs wrapped around each other – to demonstrate "noodling." In an instant, her arms responded as waves and her torso became pliant as a spring.

By dancer standards, Eisenhower, 43, is well beyond her prime. But by artistic standards, she is coming into her own.

With 25 years choreography experience, her work reflects the emotional range of her life, including the last 10 years of motherhood.

"I think I'm a better director today," she said. "I know where I stand."

And, obviously, where to step.

Please see EDE, C2

Avant-garde: "Moondrunk," an eclectic blend of the music of Schoenberg, contemporary dance and theatrical lighting offers audiences a hallucinatory journey.

Dance dates

■ "On the Move" — a performance by the Eisenhower Dance Ensemble and Aerial Dance Company; 8 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 23, Varner Recital Hall, Oakland University, Rochester Hills. Tickets $6-$12, call (248) 370-3013

■ "Moondrunk" — a collaboration of chamber music and dance-theater, conceived by Sarah Rothenberg and choreographed by John Kelly; 8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 22, at the Power Center, Huron at Washtenaw, two blocks north of N. University, Ann Arbor. Tickets $10-$34, call (734) 764-2538

Solomon takes aim at TV legend Lear

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER
fprovenzano@oe.homecomm.net

At one point in her recent two-hour interview with Norman Lear, photojournalist Linda Solomon asked the creator of the landmark 1970s sit-com "All in the Family" and other television classics to remove his glasses. Like the floppy hat permanently affixed atop his head, Lear's wire-rimmed bifocals are as indelible as the image of Archie Bunker simmering about the "advancements" of civil rights, feminism and liberalism as he sat in his worn, high-back chair.

The eyes might be a window to the soul, but in Lear's case, they might not be readily accessible. While Lear – a longtime success since his days as a comedy writer for Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis – appears extremely likable, Solomon learned quickly not to mistake his easy-going demeanor with being a push over.

At the turn of the century, Solomon persuaded "CBS Morning" to air an interview with the father of the sit-com with a social commentary edge. The Mark Twain of the boob tube at one time had seven shows airing simultaneously, including "The Jeffersons" and "Maude." It was, she said, an easy sell.

The three-and-a-half minute interview will air Monday, Oct. 25, between 8-9 a.m. on the morning talk/news show on Channel 62.

Solomon of Birmingham traveled to Lear's palatial "Architectural Digest" featured home in southern California with a two-camera news crew. The interview with Lear includes Solomon's dramatically revealing still photos along with video footage.

Unlike her past photo essays that aired on CBS "Good Morning America" and CNN, this time Solomon appears in front of the camera.

While she was hesitant to inject herself into the story, she acceded to the producer's wishes. "They convinced me that with video, the story should be faster paced," she said.

Vintage: *Photographer Linda Solomon used natural light in her close-up of Norman Lear.*

Solomon, who first met Lear in 1983 shortly after he cofounded "People For The American Way," a group of cultural liberals formed to fight what they perceived as the invasive and accusatory views of the Far Right.

At the time, Solomon worked for "The Detroit News." Not only did Lear admire her work, he commissioned her to shoot his 65th birthday portrait and portraits of other family members.

In Solomon's typical approach, she photographed Lear in natural light with high-speed film and no gimmicks. Her extreme close-up of Lear is vin-

Please see LEAR, C2

POPULAR MUSIC

To long-time admirers, he's simply "JT"

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER
fprovenzano@oe.homecomm.net

Even in his upbeat compositions and maudlin love songs during a career that spans 30 years, there's a sense of longing and melancholy in James Taylor's music. It's not so much a solemn sadness, but the relentlessly introspective lyrics and mellifluous melodies that has sustained a loyal following since Taylor's early 1970s breakthrough album, "Sweet Baby James."

Those boomers who rode out the rebellious 1960s found solace in Taylor's dreamy lullabies and warm companionship in his painful honesty about dealing with addiction, loneliness and failed relationships.

"Fire and Rain," "You've Got a Friend," "Carolina in My Mind" and "Don't Let Me Be Lonely Tonight" aren't just acoustical gems, but a refreshing catharsis for anyone searching for self-assurance amid emotional uncertainty.

With several multi-platinum albums and a legion of loyal followers who often shout their affection during transitions between songs at a "JT" concert, Taylor will transplant his popular mainstream appeal to the classical music concert hall.

For three concerts beginning Thursday, Taylor will perform his own songs and standards with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. The songs have been arranged for orchestra by composer Stanley Silverman, who has also written scores for films and stage productions.

Few other concerts in recent years at Orchestra Hall, except for major headliners such as Kathleen Battle or Itzak Pearlman, have sold as quickly. Since it's been two years when he toured to promote his last album, "Hourglass," the rapid ticket sales prove Taylor's immediate and long-standing appeal with local audiences.

James Taylor

"We know that the people who'll come to the concert don't necessary attend classical concerts," said Charles Calmer, program director of the DSO.

"It's a different audience altogether. For us, it's about diversifying what we present and bringing in a broader audience."

Presenting a pop music icon like Taylor is the exception among major U.S. orchestras, according to Calmer. Four years ago, Taylor toured nationally and performed with symphony orchestras.

But since then, few other major symphonies have continued to present pop performers in what is traditionally, a classical music setting.

"He has the best arrangements for orchestra," said Calmer. "His pieces highlight the various instruments like no other (pop performer)."

In 1996, Taylor's show with the DSO was "wildly successful," said Calmer. His concerts with the Boston Symphony Pops is frequently aired during on-air fundraisers on PBS.

"He's got a real interest in perpetuating symphony orchestras," said Calmer. "He's doing something with his popularity."

In contrast to the whimsically sugary pop and hard rock bands of the early

Please see JT, C2

What: James Taylor, in concert with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.
When: 8 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 21, 8:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 23, and 7 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 24
Where: Orchestra Hall, 3711 Woodward Ave., Detroit
For ticket information, call (313) 576-5111 or www.detroitsymphony.com