

# LeWitt

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could've hardly been called the stereotypical temperamental artist. On the contrary, he studied the dimensions of the Robinson Gallery before even drafting the preliminary drawing for the painting.

Interestingly, LeWitt never set foot in the gallery. But until the actual drawing was sketched on the walls, LeWitt wouldn't reveal details of the design.

Over the past two weeks, LeWitt's assistant was on hand to transfer the drawing to the gallery walls, and coordinate the painting. The actual painting, which included the brush strokes of 31 local artists, was more like teamwork than an individual artistic statement.

BBAC's Torno bristled at the suggestion that LeWitt's wall drawing was a mere large-scale

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painting-by-numbers project.

"This isn't a painting that can be replicated," said Torno, who served as assistant director of the University of Michigan Art Museum during the installation of a LeWitt wall painting two years ago.

If some contend that the wall painting could be configured on a computer, they'd be missing the point of LeWitt's novel approach to creating and viewing art, said Susanna Singer, executive assistant to LeWitt.

"He comes up with the vision and the plan and he lets other skilled people complete the

painting within those constraints."

Essentially, like an architect or a playwright, LeWitt gives up the blueprint for his work so others may interpret his vision, said Singer.

In an age of self-immersed artists, LeWitt's approach to abstract himself from his work may be the most minimalist trick of all.

As he has demonstrated in his work, sometimes a painting is just a series of peaceful shapes and colors.

What's there to "get"?

## ART BEAT

Send items for consideration in *Art Beat* to Frank Provenzano, Observer & Eccentric Newspaper, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009, or fax (248) 644-1314.

### PERFORMANCE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Detroit Chamber Winds & Strings will present "Colors," an interactive musical presentation, especially geared for children, 1:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 10 at the Community House, 380 St. Bates St., Birmingham. Tickets are \$5 per person, call (248) 644-5832.

"Colors" is a fully narrated program featuring a trio of woodwind players. The performance uses examples and paintings from a number of famous artists to demonstrate how color is used to set moods.

Detroit Chamber Winds & Strings is an ensemble of musicians drawn primarily from the ranks of the Detroit Symphony and Michigan Opera Theatre Orchestras.

"Colors" will be narrated by Denise McCauley, a well-known local actress.

### DETROIT SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Known for his high-energy and unconventional performances of both classical and contemporary repertoire, Britain's "bad boy of the violin" Kennedy (who has dropped Nigel as his first name) has returned to the stage. Kennedy will join the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and conductor Paavo Jarvi — eldest son of DSO music director Neeme Jarvi for four concerts at Orchestra Hall in Detroit — 8 p.m.

Thursday-Friday, Oct. 8-9: 8:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 10 and 3 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 11. Tickets \$17-\$48 (a limited number of box seats available for \$65-\$63), call (313) 576-5111.

The program will feature the DSO premiere of "Insula Deserta" by Estonian composer Erkki-Sven Taur, Brahms' Violin Concerto with Kennedy as soloist, and Sibelius' Symphony No. 2.

### ART AND SOUL AUCTION

Very Special Arts Michigan and Special Olympics Michigan host an art and sports memorabilia auction to benefit their organizations, 7 p.m. Friday, Oct. 16, at the Rosterit Club, 100 Marquette, Detroit. \$50 per person, \$100 for patron. (248) 423-1080/(800) 644-6404.

# Heroism

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of African American History.

## Flying high

Unlike many composers with formal, academic training in music theory, Belanger brings a command of sensibility and a cinematographer's esthetic to writing orchestrations.

Belanger's only "formal education" includes two music theory classes during his student days at Oakland Community College in the late 1970s and constant references to a book on composition written by 19th-century Russian composer Rimsky-Korsakov.

"What he's doing comes entirely from his ideas and experience," said Felix Resnick, music director of the BBSO who'll conduct Belanger's tribute to the Tuskegee Airmen.

Over the last six months,

Belanger and Resnick, who also plays violin in the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, have refined "Salute to the Tuskegee Airmen" to "make it more adaptable to the orchestra."

Last Monday, the BBSO played the piece for the first time. It was also the first time that Belanger heard his work played on actual — not synthesized — instruments. He recorded the 32-second piece on his Roland JV-1080 synthesizer.

While his compositions are infused with distinctive influences from Copland, Barber, Gershwin and Berstein, Belanger's work is also filled heavily with anecdotal references of a musical score for a film.

His earlier attempts at orchestral compositions were written to

accompany films that he also produced. And, apparently, his work as a video producer and director of corporate training films has cultivated a sense of music as the backdrop for situations.

But by no means is Belanger's music inconsequential to the story of the Tuskegee Airmen, whose unparalleled wartime success in flying escort missions in North Africa and Italy brought attention to the segregation of the armed forces.

"I want to pay tribute to these guys who were pioneers in racial equality," said Belanger.

"They took a stand years before Rosa Parks, Brown v. Board of Education and the Civil Rights Movement."

The 35-minute composition is divided into four sections:

"Dreaming of Flying," "Fighting Adversity," "First Flight," and "Dogfight & Finale."

The overture, as described by Belanger, is the musical backdrop of a familiar image.

"This is the music you'd hear if you could see a close-up of a child looking up at the sky watching a plane fly through the clouds."

That child-like wonder infuses Belanger's work but doesn't overshadow his admiration for the men with "a sense of patriotism who fought for a principle."

### An American theme

While attending a fund-raiser for the Tuskegee Airmen National Historical Museum in 1992, Belanger was captivated by personal stories of the soldiers' bravery. He found that the struggle to overcome discrimina-

tion was a universal theme about aspirations for justice.

Before he began to compose his musical homage, Belanger diligently learned of the many stories of those who fought in the 99th aquadron and the 332nd fighter group.

As a lifelong suburbanite, Belanger was sensitive about any criticism about a white person not being able to grasp the struggles to overcome racial discrimination.

But clearly, empathy doesn't require a genetic-race test.

When the time came to apply for an arts grant, Belanger sought the endorsement of the local chapter of Tuskegee Airmen.

"We need more of this kind of cross-cultural understanding," said Wardell Polk, president of

the Tuskegee Airmen National Historical Museum located at Fort Wayne in Detroit.

"We need a two-way understanding of the recognition of talent, black and white," said Polk, who served in a Tuskegee bomber group.

"What better medium than music to communicate that feeling."

Comparing Belanger's latest composition to Copland, Barber or any other American composer is unfair, said BBSO's Resnick.

But placing Belanger's composition in the tradition of those who've broadened the quilt of American history surely isn't a stretch.

Said Resnick: "If there's a political point that's made in the composition it's a damn good one, isn't it?"

# Color

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bloody revolutions in Africa, aren't these questions that should be asked by all of us?

## Resolution at hand

Beneath his calm facade, there's a sea of torment that until recently Unwin had struggled to navigate.

His voice quivers as he describes arriving at Auschwitz

— one of the infamous German concentration camps — when "the ovens were still warm and the bodies were still there."

Even after the last decade living amid the rural solitude there was no hiding from what he saw more than 50 years ago.

A few years ago, Unwin realized that representational painting wasn't reflecting what was in his soul. He turned to abstract painting. He needed something more.

And then, he found solace in exploring African American culture. Soon, he realized there was no difference between the Holocaust and slavery perpetrated in America.

The resolution was at hand. During the development of "Black Echoes," it was typical for Unwin to awake in the middle of the night and head to his easel.

He filled his studio with books on African American history and listened to the music of Africa, minstrels, and spirituals.

"I was hearing it, seeing it, feeling it. All along I felt like I was fighting with the canvas. And I wanted to win."

Based on "Black Echoes," he did.

Certainly, there's a striking disparity between the artist and subject. As stark and obviously different as white and black.

But in feeling and form, it's impossible to determine the skin color of the artist who created the 21 paintings in "Black Echoes."

Unwin reminds us that perhaps we're all one color. One people with myriad expressions.

After all three years, he may have found the answer.

You can reach O&E Arts Writer Frank Provenzano at (248) 901-2557, 805 E. Maple Road, Birmingham 48009. Or send an e-mail to: fprovenzano@oe.homecomm.net

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# Poetry

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"It's more like a show of improvisation happening right before you."

At the other extreme of the improvisation spectrum, poet Liebler's performances are more rehearsed and probably come closest to a rock rap sound. Liebler is a professor of English at Wayne State University.

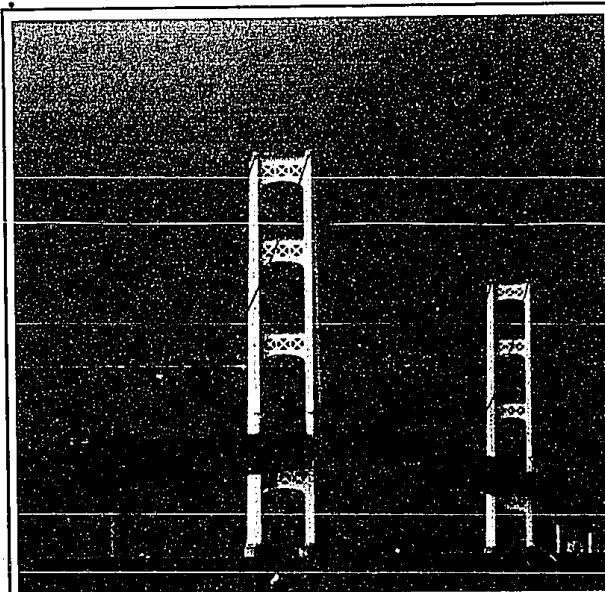
Meanwhile, poet Tillinghast, a U-M English professor and organizer of "Border Crossings," offers a backdrop of world music to go with his visually charged poetry.

Funds raised at the poetry festival will benefit the Great Lakes Literary Alliance, a non-profit of small and chain book-sellers looking to expand its activities beyond sponsoring readings.

Eventually, according to Keith Taylor, president of the alliance, the literary organization intends to sponsor workshops, publish literary journals and offer grants to writers.

"We've started here, but we want to reach out to nearby states," he said.

"There are big corporations that have supported orchestras and museums, but there's really nothing that supports literary endeavors."



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