

## CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

### Doctor-turned-author believes in magic

If you could have one wish, what would it be?  
"That I could have three more wishes."  
Claire, age 4  
from "The Magic of Children"

With a casualness that has put many of his patients at ease, cardiologist Dr. Mark Freed leans over a table of half-filled mugs in a local coffeehouse to make a point. It's the first of many.

His newest book, "The Magic of Children" written with colleague Dr. Robert Safian — both from Beaumont Hospital's cardiology department — isn't about heart disease, nor disorders of the circulatory system.



**Boundless:** Through quotes from children and photos such as these, Dr. Mark Freed's book presents a world of natural curiosity and wonderment.



Freed has found a poetically compelling interpretation of the cardiac muscle that distributes oxygenated blood, and pounds furiously when pleased, threatened or overworked.

According to Freed, contained within the pages of photographs by Kendra Dew and children's responses to questions about the intricacies of their world lies the cure for an unforeseen but inevitable condition — adulthood.

"The book," said Freed, "is about the part of the heart that medicine can't reach."

#### Comes a time

What do you want to be when you grow up?  
"A kid."  
Jodie, age 4

**What:** Book signing — Mark Freed, co-author of "The Magic of Children: A Celebration of Life, Love & Happiness" When: 5-7 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 20 Where: Borders Books, 34300 Woodward Ave., Birmingham, (248) 203-0005

At 42, Freed of Birmingham has the boyish appearance and eternal optimism of a person half his age. Actually, one-quarter of his age. Okay. Maybe one-eighth of his age. He recalls a pivotal time in his life. A life-changing revelation while attending medical school at the University of Illinois. A circumstance that could find its way into an episode of "ER," right? Not unless the graduation certificate is endorsed by the Muppets.

With the same assured manner that he's used to explain the cardiac catheterization process, Freed slips into

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## In search of...

# THE MEANING OF THE HOLIDAYS

BY FRANK PROVENZANO

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Ten minutes to 10 on a chilly Monday morning. A long line of shoppers wait stoically for the doors to open at a nearby Best Buy — another of those modern-day bees' nests for gadgetry and fun.

No signs of snow, but there's no doubt that the shop-until-you-drop season of conspicuous consumption is under way.

At 10 a.m., shoppers pass through the electronic doors at Best Buy as if solemnly traversing a spiritual threshold.

Indeed, they may be. In these days of "buy now pay sometime in the 21st century," the final weeks of the year blend unbridled consumerism, ritual and religion into a tightly wound knot called the holidays.

Perhaps a bit of perspective is in order. "This is the time of the year when the greater mysteries are reflected," said the Rev. Stephen Petty, pastoral associate at St. Michael's Catholic Church of Southfield.

Somewhere beyond the din of commercial jingles and the resignation of incurring debt lies the origins of the annual celebration whereby Christian, Jewish and African cultures coalesce.

A symbolic time when hopes ride high in the name of Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanza. Of course, a shot of egg nog and mumbling through a sing-along or two can't hurt to resurrect the spirit.

#### Holidays, healing & the arts

During this time of year, for many, the arts play a central role in expressing the eternal principles of faith, hope and charity.

Typically, as certain as crowded malls in December are renditions of "The Nutcracker" and "A Christmas Carol," or a performance of Handel's "Messiah."

Some might be surprised that the Detroit Oratorio Society chose an eclectic program for this year's holiday concert after five years of stirring perfor-



#### Celebrating:

(Top left, clockwise) Christ Church Cranbrook choir with orchestra; Santa with awestruck children on his knee; shoppers crowding the mall; the Troy Community Chorus directed by Steve Kosinski.

#### See listing of holiday events inside.

mances of Handel's ethereal masterpiece.

The decision, according to DOS executive director Christine Bonner, was based on economics. Approximately half of DOS' annual revenue came from the "Messiah" concerts. Last year, however, their performances incurred unexpectedly high expenses.

Because of competition with other holiday concerts, DOS has scaled down and broadened its program to include Britten's "Ceremony of Carols," Bibb's "Ave Maria," and Vivaldi's "Concerto in D for Flute."

"We're competing with community choirs for audiences," said Bonner, noting that DOS is one of the area's professional classical music choirs.

The ultimate competition, however, might be for audiences' attention at a time when most people's schedules fall between busy and frenetic.

"We call our concert a 'musical massage,'" she said. "It's a time to slow down, to find time to let go of stress."

#### Mood of the season

Without a doubt, the Southfield Symphony's upcoming concert will be their highest attended for the year. The program of traditional and light classical music has a distinctive multicultural appeal, said Charles Marks, managing director of the 105-member symphony with members from 38 communities.

How else could you explain selections from "The Nutcracker," Brahms' "Ave Maria," Strauss' "The Blue Danube," and pieces from Cole Porter? And, performances by soprano Jennifer Roberts, the

Women's Chorus of the Japanese Society of Detroit, and a symphony conducted by maestro Valery Leonyov, a graduate of the Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatory of Music in St. Petersburg?

While multicultural programs are certainly timely, holiday concerts are ultimately about setting the mood of the season.

"Our concerts convey the joy and excitement of the month for all faiths," said Charles Raines, director of music at Christ Church Cranbrook, which attracts their largest audiences during their month of holiday concerts in December.

On Sunday, Dec. 20, Christ Church Cranbrook will perform its annual hand bell concert of holiday classics. Raines expects a near capacity crowd at the majestic venue adjacent to the Cranbrook Educational Community in Bloomfield Hills.

#### Mysterious ways

Annual holiday concerts provide a way for the Detroit Chamber Winds & Strings to introduce themselves to new audiences, said Maury Okun, executive director of the Troy-based group of musicians.

"Music is central to the season of Christmas and Hanukkah," said Okun.

"People love traditional music. Our appeal is to set the music to clever arrangements."

Being clever, however, might have its limitations for anyone looking to grasp the deeper meanings of the holidays.

"There's a difference between Handel's 'Messiah' and 'Santa Claus Is Coming to Town,'" said Petty of St. Michael's.

Look around, stand in line, reserve your seat. The spirit moves in mysterious ways.

## MUSIC

# Musicians swing to Big Band music

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN  
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Duncan Jones grew up listening to Big Band music and the jazz piano played by his father Norm "Stomp" Jones who led a band in Long Beach, Calif. Early on, his father's music, and that of Count Basie and Duke Ellington, inspired the young boy to learn piano. By age 14, Jones was playing keyboards in a country bar in the backwoods of Ohio.

After studying composition at DePaul University, Jones began passing on his love of music to students in Bloomfield Hills and Dearborn Heights public schools. He joined the Plymouth Canton School District 21 years ago. By day, he teaches vocal music at Fiegel and Miller Elementary Schools, but nearly every weekend night he performs with The Couriers, a nine-piece Big Band which released the CD "Now a Memory" in 1996.

The Plymouth Community Arts Council is inviting all Big Band lovers to its annual dinner/dance fundraiser Saturday, Feb. 13 to kick up their heels to The Couriers' swing era music.

Playing live music was fun," said Jones, a Lathrup Village resident who played with Johnny Trull's band and with The Executives from the mid-1970s to 1990s. "I like the energy and the power of all those horns and all the colors you can get from the sounds by combining all those different instruments. I play the music because I like the music not for the money. Like me, most musicians have a day job. I'm lucky to teach music. I work to get the students to like music



PHOTO BY PAUL HENNINGMAN

**Jumpin' at the Woodlode:** The Couriers revive Big Band music in their CD "Now a Memory."

#### "In the Mood"

**What:** The Plymouth Community Arts Council's annual dinner/dance fundraiser with silent and live auctions, and music by The Couriers.

**When:** 6 p.m. to midnight Saturday, Feb. 13.  
**Where:** Fox Hills Country Club, Plymouth.  
**Tickets:** \$55 per person, \$50 before Wednesday, Dec. 30, call (734) 416-4ART.

and enjoy different kinds of music."

Several of The Couriers teach, although not all of them teach music. Trombonist Al Townsend, who formed The Couriers four years ago for clients who couldn't afford his 19-piece Ambassadors group, taught music, and was formerly director of the Ypsilanti High School band program. He played with the Gene Krupa Band from 1948 to 1950. At age 72, Townsend is ready to slow down. Although he retired from The Couriers after their appearance at Plymouth's Fall Festival in September, Townsend continues to arrange The Couriers' music and plays with them occasionally when needed.

#### Trombonist

Michael Hall, a brass instructor and director of the jazz ensemble at Eastern Michigan University, replaced Townsend as trombonist with The Couriers. He's played extensively throughout the U.S., Mexico, Europe, and China with jazz bands and symphonic orchestras including the Detroit Symphony. He took first place in the 1991 Tucson Jazz Society Competition and is a three-time winner of the Eau Claire Jazz Festival Combo Competition.

"Al Townsend was an arranger in the Big Band era and lived in that era," said Hall. "He was lead trombone with the Gene Krupa Band. He's arranged nearly all of The Couriers music. He just has so many of those sounds from the 40s and 50s and knows how to write those voicings to make us sound authentic."

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