

### THE WEEKEND

#### FRIDAY

Spend "A Day in a New Century Garden" at the 2000 Ann Arbor Spring Garden & Flower Show, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. on the Washtenaw Farm Council Grounds, 5055 Ann Arbor-Saline Road, Ann Arbor, 1-94 to Exit 174, then south. Admission \$10 adults, \$9 seniors, \$5 children (age 12 and under), call (734) 434-8004.

#### SATURDAY



"Let Your Spirit Soar," a celebration of vocal and performing arts at Nardin Park, United Methodist Church, 29887 W. 11 Mile Road, Farmington Hills, (west of Middlebelt), 10 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Highlights include children's workshops 10 a.m. to noon, concerts 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. and an art exhibit. No charge with the exception of a Kingdom Heirs gospel concert at 8 p.m. Concert tickets \$8, call (248) 476-8860.

#### SUNDAY

The first Athena Women's Music Festival 1-4 p.m. at Amer's, 312 State Street in Ann Arbor showcases the talents of local folk-pop artists including headliner Lori Amey. No charge, call (734) 761-6000 for more information.

**Hot Ticket:** Garth Fagan brings his troupe, "Garth Fagan Dance," to the Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts in Detroit, Thursday-Sunday, March 30 to April 2. Tickets \$30-\$40, call (313) 963-2366 or (248) 645-6666.

# EL DORADO

ANIMATOR BRINGS COLORFUL CHARACTERS TO LIFE

BY STEPHANIE ANGELIN CASOLA  
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Not many people make a definite career choice at age 9. But Dreamworks animator Kent Culotta took one look at "Sleeping Beauty" and knew just what he wanted to do.

"I loved the way that one looked," said the Plymouth native. "I saw everything that came out at that time. It was a cumulative effect."

Culotta studied graphic design at Michigan State University, where he learned to use an animation camera. After earning his bachelor of fine arts degree, he moved to California and completed graduate school coursework in animation at UCLA.

Now a Glendale, Calif., resident, Culotta has had a hand in "Pinocchio and the Emperor of the Night," and recent favorites like "Who Framed Roger Rabbit," "The Little Mermaid," "Rescuers Down Under" and "Beauty and the Beast." He adds characters like Roger Rabbit and Droopy, Ariel and Ursula, and Belle to his list of experience with character model clean-up and assisting other animators.

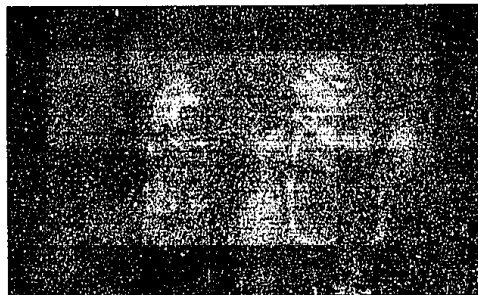
Truly realizing his longtime dream, Culotta became an animator for Dreamworks' "The Prince of Egypt" and furthered his skill with Dreamworks' latest release "The Road to El Dorado."

#### The City of Gold

"The Road to El Dorado" tells the story of two wide-eyed friends, the discerning Tulio (Kevin Kline) and the free-spirited Miguel (Kenneth Branagh), who in 1519 stumble upon the legendary city of gold known as El Dorado. Mistaken for High Priest Tzekel-Kan (Armand Assante) for reverend gods, the bumbling con men believe they've found the road to fortune and glory.

But their lies begin to unravel and time runs short as Spanish explorer Cortes approaches and Tzekel-Kan threatens an evil takeover of El Dorado. It's the pure-hearted ruler, known as the Chief (Edward James Olmos), who's onto their scheme but aids them every step of the way. With the help of Chel (Rosie Perez), a stunning and smart native, good triumphs over evil. Like Elton John sings, "All will be revealed/On the trail we blaze," and friendship becomes more valuable than all the gold in El Dorado.

The comedic adventure-fantasy is



Ruling powers: The Chief and Tzekel-Kan believe ancient gods have arrived in El Dorado in a scene from "The Road to El Dorado."



A way out: The Chief, animated by a team including Plymouth native Kent Culotta, speaks to Miguel and Tulio who are eager to take their gold and leave El Dorado.

brought to life by a host of animators like Culotta. From the streaming rivers and rushing ocean waves, to the lush rain forest and sparkling city of gold, the latest in high-tech animation draws fire from the sketches of imagination and colors it in with vibrant, realistic movements, heart-felt emotions and life lessons.

"I just think it's a great way to tell a story," said Culotta, who worked on the animation for the Chief. "There's just so many things you can do... It's a very rich medium."

#### Paving his own road

In the mid 1980s when he was beginning his career, animation was in a sort of slump, confined to television cartoons like "He-Man" and considered to be "kiddie stuff." Culotta

didn't realize then that he was on the cusp of a cartoon renaissance spurred by companies like Walt Disney Feature Animation.

"When I started it was very difficult to get a job," he said. Now film and television are flooded with traditional and computer animation. It isn't just restricted to Saturday morning cartoons anymore.

While computer animators also worked on "The Road to El Dorado," Culotta draws by hand. His only contact with computers is shooting his drawings with a computer-operated camera. While he sees the industry moving closer to computers, he said, "I love having a pencil in my hand."

That pencil did not serve as lead animator for the character, so Culotta did not set the tone and mannerisms of the Chief. But he did help bring the Chief to life onscreen. "My job is to try to assimilate (the lead animator's) version of it and make it my own as well."

As often happens, the Chief became a different sort of character in the final product than he was originally intended to be. "He started out mainly as a comic figure and ended up being more the straight man," said Culotta. What animators initially pictured as a cartoon-like Jackie Gleason became a much more serious, profound character of enormous proportions and keen observations. "He's a good guy; he never really believes these are the gods they pretend to be."

Please see EL DORADO, E2



Orchestra: Conductor Nan Washburn and the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra.

## Orchestra 'pops' for a good time

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN  
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Looking for fun, laughs, a good time? Then Nan Washburn wants you to take note of the Plymouth Symphony Orchestra's approaching Pops Dinner Concert and Auction Friday, April 7 at Laurel Manor in Livonia.

If you love a South American beat or music from movies such as "Pocahontas" and "E.T.," the Plymouth Symphony conductor thinks you're gonna love "Spring Flings: Dance & Romance."

A major fund-raiser for the orchestra now in its 64th season, the evening features silent and live auctions of items ranging from a chance to conduct the orchestra to season tickets and an evening at Genetti's dinner theater. A raffle will award a first prize of \$1,000 and a second prize of two airline tickets.

"It's a fun, fun event with a great meal and a combination of dance and romance tunes that are favorites, but with a sprinkling of some exotic things," said Washburn. "It's important for the community to support the orchestra, and it gives the orchestra a chance to let their hair down a little bit. There'll be auction items that they might get a good deal on and an auction winner who'll get to conduct Sousa."

#### Program

The evening program includes such popular tunes as Alan Menken's "Color the Wind" and "Carmen Suite No. 1" by Georges Bizet. But count on Washburn to add her own color to the program. Orchestra members have been working hard to learn the difference between a western and eastern gilasando for Mao Yuan's "Dance of the Yao People." They'll play the work right after "Summer-time Fantasy for Flute and Orchestra," an adaptation of a Gershwin song by Ronald Foster. PSO principal flutist Deborah Rebeck Ash

Please see ORCHESTRA, E2

### BALLET

## Dancers sparkle in enchanting 'Swan Lake'

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN  
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Eric Johnston is enchanted with Tchaikovsky's classic ballet, "Swan Lake" because it has all the elements of a good love story - a prince falls in love with a girl he hopes to save from spending the rest of her life as a swan.

Johnston, a Farmington Hills resident, dances the role of Prince Siegfried in addition to directing the production by Eric Johnston's Detroit Ballet Sunday, April 9 at the William M. Costick Activities Center, 28600 Eleven Mile Road, east of Middlebelt, Farmington Hills. Tickets \$2, and \$5, call (248) 473-9570

St. Petersburg in 1895, features Sally Wood as Odette, the White Swan. "It's a compilation of the four-hour 'Swan Lake' with highlights of the story," said Johnston. "They talk about fundamentals of human relationships apart from human love."

#### History

This is the eighth "Swan Lake" Johnston's directed although he's danced in the ballet many times. A dance student from age 4, Johnston knew he wanted to eventually join a traditional ballet company. In his early teens, he learned the basics from George Zorich, a former principal dancer with Ballet Russe de Monte

Carlo, at the Betty Johnston Dance Studio owned by his mother in Farmington Hills. He went on to train at the American Ballet Theater School, the Harkness Ballet and University of Cincinnati where he earned a bachelor of fine arts degree.

Johnston has been a member of the Cincinnati Ballet Company and London Ballet Theater, London England. He returned to Detroit in 1985 to teach at the school his mother, Betty began, 50 years ago. Johnston also teaches at the Birmingham Dance Academy. He founded Eric Johnston's Detroit Ballet 13

years ago as a bridge for dancers hoping to one day perform with a professional company.

Johnston's Detroit Ballet presents four productions a year including "The Nutcracker" and children's ballets such as "Peter and the Wolf" and "The Sorcerer's Apprentice."

"Ballet goes in and out of popularity depending on if there's a Baryshnikov or a Margot Fonteyn in the spotlight," said Johnston who received the Farmington Area Arts Commission's Artist-in-Residence award in 1993. "If I don't do it, nobody will. We're losing the tradition of a ballet company. I'm an artist. If I don't speak, ballet will be lost and



Classic tale: Eric Johnston (center) and company members in a scene from Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake."

these ballets say things."

#### Passion

It's apparent Johnston, who's 44, still has a passion for dancing. He's frequently a principal in the company's productions.

"Dance isn't like a painting," said Johnston. "Dance will never happen again. There's something beautiful when they're dancing honestly - you'll see right into their hearts."

Caroline Coleman appreciates Johnston's commitment to ballet. The Farmington Hills resident danced her first "Swan Lake" at age 7 as one of the pages. Now 14, Coleman dances in the Swan Corps who accompany the White Swan, and as one of the princesses hoping to marry the prince. A dancer since age 4, Coleman is performing in her fourth "Swan Lake." She's currently understudying the role of the White Swan. She also takes part in the lecture/demonstrations Johnston presents to students in Detroit and Pontiac schools as part of the Omni Arts in Education program. He's made 400 appearances so far.

"That's what I like about Eric's productions," said Coleman, an East Middle School student. "He'll create roles and when you're not in it, you're an understudy. And I like to go to schools to present it. A lot of the kids haven't seen dance before."

#### Musical

As a musician, Coleman has played Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" music before. Her flute and piano playing help her evaluate the score before it comes time to put on her dancing shoes.

"It's been a lot of rehearsal and blocking and coordinating the dancers," Coleman said. "Knowing the music, you can appreciate what you're dancing to. Sometimes it's frustrating but you work at it to see if you can kick your leg higher or turn an extra time. Then if you can do it, it's a really great feeling."