

ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS



LINDA ANN CHOMIN

Brighter days could be ahead for the arts

Gov. John Engler's budget cuts of state funding for the arts in 1991 brought dark days for the Detroit Institute of Arts and local cultural institutions and organizations.

Galleries in the Detroit museum were open for only half days, and staffing was cut. Community symphonies and arts councils, which depended on money from grants from the Michigan Council of the Arts, then renamed the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, fared as well. But arts advocates rallied and came up with innovative fund-raising techniques.

Change of heart

Now it seems Gov. Engler has had a change of heart with the creation of a Department of History, Arts and Culture. He's currently writing an executive order for the new department

which will coordinate resources in an effort to give higher visibility to historical museums and arts and cultural organizations in the state. Although the scope of the department is sketchy, and additional funding will not be forthcoming, the new department, hoped to be up and running by spring, will elevate the image of Michigan as a state that values arts and culture. That could help tourism and in turn the historical, arts and cultural institutions and organizations.

Arts spending

"Michigan is already No. 1 in the country in terms of spending on the arts," said Engler's press secretary John Truscott. "We're looking to get more bang for the bucks in promoting and coordinating historical and cultural activities. The Governor's seen what other states do like linking with local tourists agencies. It can be as simple as placing brochures for museums in these agencies to promote local historical and cultural treasures. We think it could be a big boon to tourism and it's a great educational tool for school groups. The other benefit is if you get all of these groups together it's more likely they will talk to each other."

Arts groups didn't wait around for culture to die in the state after the devastating budget cuts of 1991. They began a dialogue shortly after the announcement and have made tremendous strides in promoting and coordinating the arts thanks to groups like ArtServe Michigan, an independent statewide organization that builds support for the arts, and cultural activities through advocacy, education and services.

A place they deserve

"I think the creation of the new department is great," said Barbara Kratchman, president of ArtServe Michigan. "It finally gives arts a place they deserve. Arts and cultural advocates have been doing a great job. A market study last year showed 58 percent of households participating in arts and cultural activities. I found it very interesting that we're ahead of the national average."

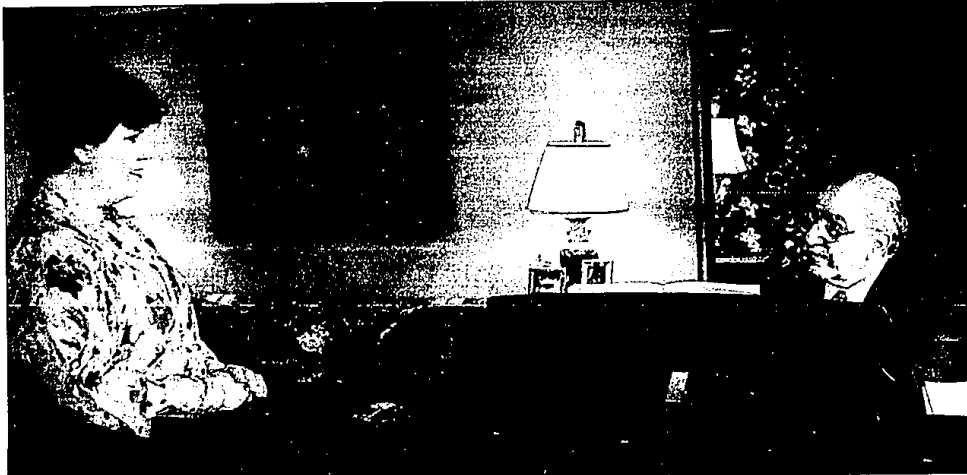
Kratchman stressed that the arts are not just for the elite but showed they were getting into distressed areas and reaching younger people. The appeal of arts is cutting across all the boundaries.

The ability of the arts to bring people together is what makes music, dance, theater and media ranging from painting to sculpture so important. ArtServe recognizes that fact and has worked tirelessly to try to get more funding for the arts. The defeat of Proposal A, which would have levied a tax to fund regional and local arts and cultural organizations as well as sports, has only made supporters more adamant about promoting them.

"We're now working on a feasibility study," said Kratchman, a former director of the state arts council.

"There's a need for organizations big and small to spend more resources in the area of marketing. We're looking at what kinds of things can these organizations do together."

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Teaching technique: Ara Berberian works with student Rosanne Thomas, a Farmington resident, on the finer points of singing.

Seasoned operatic singer brings lessons home

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER
lchomin@oo.homecomm.net

A vintage poster that hung in the barn alongside Ara Berberian's Southfield home hints at the breadth of a singing career that spanned more than four decades.

Over the years, Berberian's shared billing with Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo and Dame Joan Sutherland. Stories of his childhood and 20 years as a bass with the Metropolitan Opera in New York City would fascinate any listener with its animated detail.

But it's the students at Madonna

University in Livonia who are now fortunate enough to benefit from his expertise since his return to Michigan. Berberian's demonstration of practicing the proper singing techniques reveals his extensive experience on stages around the world backed by a knowledge of the basics.

"We're all products of our teachers," said Berberian, who joined the Madonna University faculty as artist-in-residence in January. "I owe my teachers good and bad for everything I've been able to do. If you have a good teacher, you will learn. If you have a bad teacher, you learn from that."

"What I know from performance is that you cannot sing opera without technique. I try to give students what I know has worked for me."

Early years

Berberian learned about opera early from his father, who played 78 rpm recordings of Verdi and Wagner day and night in their northwest Detroit home. By 17, the young Armenian lad had dropped violin studies for voice because his violin vibrate was bad, he said. A high soprano at age 13, Berberian would go on to tackle bass roles in *The Magic Flute*, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, *Rigoletto* and *The Barber of Seville*. He has performed in more than 155 operas and 100 oratorios, and appeared on television in *Live from the Met* presentations. But it was at age 13 that a Philadelphia Grand Opera Company performance of *La Traviata* at Masonic Temple in Detroit would change his life.

"The doorman was a client of my father," said Berberian. "He got me a job as an usher so I could see all the operas for free. I never owned long pants, so I had to go out and buy a black suit." For the next two years, Berberian took three buses to the Masonic Temple to watch Detroit Symphony Orchestra concerts, ballets and operas. He saw everyone from Vladimir Horowitz to Jascha Heifetz, Marian Anderson to Ezio Pinza and Broadway productions of *Showboat* and *Cole Porter's Anything Goes*. By the time he went off to study for an economics degree at the University of Michigan, Berberian knew music would play a role in his life. He joined the Men's Glee Club, the University Musical Society Choral Union and took classes in operatic languages.

"Ann Arbor was everything to me. I had the opportunity to sing in oratorios and the May Festival with 400 and some singers and world famous soloists. By the time I got to U of M, I'd seen 25 different operas and knew I wanted to sing. My aspiration was to be a lawyer but my dream was to be a singer."

"Opera of all the art forms is one of the constants in our civilization. It's always a feeling of tapping into the soul of the human being of its past, a reaching back."

Berberian eventually went on to practice law but also became a member of the Detroit Bar Association Glee Club. It was apparent his heart was elsewhere. After a two-year stint in the Army, Berberian went to New York in search of his dreams. Experiences such as singing with the U.S. Army Chorus for President Dwight Eisenhower at the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D. C., made him certain he wanted to sing on stage. During his career Berberian would sing for seven living presidents and at the funeral of former President Herbert Hoover.

Long and winding road

In New York Berberian lived with four lawyers in Greenwich Village and worked as a cashier at a cafeteria one block from the Metropolitan Opera while auditioning for roles. Before long he was making \$28 a week singing with the Turnau Opera Players in Woodstock, N.Y. He would go on to perform with the New York City and San Francisco operas before singing with the Met, an experience he only imagined several years earlier when one of the stage hands let him watch produc-

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Learning from experience: Ara Berberian brings years of professional operatic singing experience, including 20 years with the Met, to his position as artist-in-residence at Madonna University.

FILM

Creating less a mystery after seeing 'Pollock' and Picasso

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER
lchomin@oo.homecomm.net

Pollock and Picasso created art in totally different styles but shared a desire for fame.

A self-destructive personality and bouts of drinking eventually led to Jackson Pollock's tragic death. Pablo Picasso died at age 91 after living as a recluse during the last few years of his life. Why did the Cubist painter live and go on creating for so many years and Pollock, who oddly enough was influenced by Picasso, self-destruct at 44? That's just one of the mysteries about these artists that may never have an answer. It's also one of the reasons film makers have always been fascinated with the subject of artists.

Two of the best films - *Pollock* and *The Mystery of Picasso* - dissect the artist and the process of creating. Henri-Georges Clouzot's *The Mystery of Picasso*, which won the Prix du Jury at the Cannes Film Festival in 1956, gives audiences a glimpse of the normally private process of painting by showing the Spanish artist working with ink



Action painting: Ed Harris gives a riveting portrayal of Jackson Pollock, the legendary American Abstract Expressionist who turned a drip method of painting into fine art.

markers that bled through the surface so strokes are visible to viewers. *Pollock* delves into the life of the American artist for whom the term "action painting"

was coined. Ed Harris, who starred in and directed *Pollock* has been nominated for an Oscar in the category of best actor.

The two films will be shown back-to-back Feb. 23-26 at the Detroit Film Theatre of the Detroit Institute of Arts. "The films are very different," said Detroit Film Theatre curator Elliot Wilhelm. "There's a whole history of the subject about people wanting to make films about artists. Bio-pics or biographical movies

are one of the most difficult things for movie makers to do to capture the moment of inspiration and not to look silly. In *The Agony and the Ecstasy* about Michelangelo, Charlton Heston goes up to the mountain top then there's a bad special effect, a blast of music and that's the moment of inspiration for Michelangelo's portrayal of

Detroit Film Theatre

■ *Pollock* 7 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Feb. 23-24, 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 24, and 3 p.m., 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 25
■ *The Mystery of Picasso* 7:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 26
Where: Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave.
Tickets: \$6, \$5 students/seniors, call, (313) 833-3237

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