

Sunday, May 6, 2001

ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS



LINDA ANN CHOMIN

Concerts feature new, familiar musical styles

World Wars I and II, the Vietnam and Korean Wars — granted parts of the last millennium had their dark side but there are positive sides too. The last 100 years brought the invention of the airplane and computers which have taken us at lightning speed into the 21st century.

James Nissen had all of these events in mind when he wrote *Requiem for the Past Millennium*. He'll present the work, along with a little help from his friends, in a multimedia concert at Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church in Plymouth on Saturday, May 12.

Accessible work

"It's eclectic," said Nissen, an assistant professor of humanities at Schoolcraft College where he also teaches music and conducts the

Requiem for the Past Millennium 8 p.m. Saturday, May 12 at Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church, North Terrestrial and Beck roads, Plymouth. Free will offering.

Livonia Symphony Orchestra presents a *Spring Vignettes* chamber concert 7:30 p.m. Friday, May 11 at the Livonia Civic Center Library Auditorium, 32777 Five Mile Road, east of Farmington Road. Tickets \$14, \$9 — students, call (734) 425-6855.

ences just love it. It's a beautiful, haunting, gorgeous work. It's an emotional work."

Commissioned three years ago by First Presbyterian Church in Dearborn where it premiered, *Requiem for the Past Millennium* will spotlight the talents of the Ann Arbor Digital Music Ensemble, a 24-voice choral group under the direction of Bradley Bloom, and Stephen Wroble and his students in Schoolcraft College's Computer Technology Department who will provide the graphics.

This is the fifth time the Requiem will be presented to an audience. According to Nissen, singers in the All State High School Choir at Interlochen, University of Michigan Choir and Flint Festival Chorus loved the Requiem when they performed it in concert.

"There are still images, a photo album of portraits of humanity, good and bad," said Nissen, who began writing music as a young child. Nissen earned a doctorate in composition from the University of Michigan School of Music. "We're looking back to the past 1,000 years."

Bloom, who taught music at Schoolcraft College for 30 years before becoming associate dean for the University of Michigan School of Music on May 1, can't think of another Requiem that combines traditional text with electronic and traditional instruments.

"It's usually done with timpani, voice and organ but we're using synthesizers and wind controllers," said Bloom who initially learned of the work when conducting the Flint Festival Chorus concert. "We have literally sounds that reflect the past and sounds that are current and of an electronic nature, but always palatable."

"It's not heavy metal but at times is eerie, mysterious. It's a first-class work that travels a fine line between being accessible and yet challenging to performing artists."

New art form

Wroble's biggest worry is to make sure the projected graphics, which he, Sarah Abati and Douglas Mumm flash on the screen, keep time with the music. Using three computers, the visual artists will overlap two different images at the same time onto the single screen.

"We believe we're creating a new art form," said Wroble, an associate

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Roadside culture: Willo-Acres Motel was built before the Township of Canton existed.

Artist brushes up on history to preserve the past

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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Back by brick the light crawls across the wall of the Rialto in Grayling. Robert Gniewek is capturing the essence of the 1920s theater in oil for posterity.

It's half past 10 on a Monday morning and Gniewek eagerly speaks about the work in progress as he pages through photographs of his completed paintings.

One by one, Gniewek tells the story behind the urban landscapes. Roadside diners and motels, Art Deco theaters, a garage on Woodward Avenue in Royal Oak — each painting a picture of a time when life proceeded at a much slower pace. A Canton motel is from an April show, "Mid-20th Century Roadside Culture" at the Louis K. Meisel Gallery in New York, the Farmington Civic from another solo exhibition at the David Klein Gallery in Birmingham in November 1999.

"The Rialto is a single screen movie theater," said Gniewek. "There's so few of them left."

The Rialto is but one of the reasons Gniewek began painting Art Deco theaters and various commercial buildings around town in the late 1970s after earning a master's degree from Wayne State University. Surviving the 1967 Detroit riot, as a student at St. Cecilia High School in the heart of the riot zone, triggered a need within him to preserve the past.

serve the past.

Preserving the past

"I grew up in Detroit," said Gniewek. "That's what I know; that's what I was attracted to, then I branched out to looking at urban landscapes throughout the world."

"I used to drive around the city and see what caught my eye. The theater series began with the Berkley in Royal Oak. Detroit has a rich history of Art Deco theaters of the '20s and '30s and today of course there's nothing left."

Gniewek expects the Rialto to take 250-275 hours to complete, a quarter of the time he put into a large-scale painting of Times Square. Photorealism is a slow, painstaking process. In the last 22 years, Gniewek's output seems small compared to a watercolorist's but the 140 paintings take the viewer back to a place where it seems possible to reach out and feel the coolness of a brick exterior.

Gniewek's ability to breathe life into a subject is why his work was published alongside artists Richard Estes and Chuck Close in Louis K. Meisel's book "Photorealism Since 1980." And it's why he's been invited to exhibit with Estes, Close and a group of Photorealists at a Denmark museum in late summer. Gniewek is currently preparing for a June exhibit at Van de Griff/Marr Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a show next year in Manchester, England, and one the following year

in Japan. It seems the urban landscapes are popular with viewers regardless of where they live. The painting of the Redford Theatre sold at a September show at the Van de Griff/Marr Gallery.

Appeal of Realism

"The Realist movement started 20 years ago. Realism is where the appeal is for me," said Gniewek. "I like doing dramatic landscape, things people can relate to, things that bring back good memories, lots of bright color and movement. Focal points keep the eye moving around. There's so much going on."

The excitement of the night scenes especially appeal to David Klein who's represented Gniewek for more than six years. The strong contrasts between light and dark set a mood whether it's the Fox Theatre or the State.

Gniewek's researched them all and it shows as he leads a tour of a dozen or so of the 196 single-screen movie theaters that showed movies in Detroit and its suburbs in the mid- to late 1940s. "The 1920s Burlesk on Woodward was one of the original burlesque houses," said Gniewek. "The Colonial in Detroit showed movies 24 hours a day. The Senate on Michigan Avenue at Livorno still holds organ concerts a couple of times a year. Built in 1951, the Ford Wyoming is the only Art Deco

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Classic film: The Redford Theatre still shows classic films like "Breakfast at Tiffany's" every weekend.



Urban landscape: Painter Robert Gniewek is fascinated by Art Deco theaters like the Farmington Civic.

THEATER

Marceau touches people with his soul

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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Marcel Marceau smiles and suddenly he's 20 again. The mention of mime brings back a flood of memories — his studies with Etienne Decroux. At 20, Marceau enrolled at Charles Dullin's School of Dramatic Art in the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre in Paris to study with the mime master after saving 250 Jewish children from the Nazis during World War II as a member of the French Underground. It was at this time that he learned the depth of the tragedy. His father was deported to Auschwitz and never came back. Marceau's love for his art kept him strong but he never forgot those early years in France.

On the second day of a mime workshop, offered as part of the University Musical Society educational programming at the University of Michigan campus, Marceau demonstrates a walk expressing sadness, depression, despair, but also joy. After all, that's what he's given audiences for more than 50 years. An hour before, even

without the white face the world has come to know so well, Marceau delights students, who have come from as far away as New York City, by showing them how a man would look if he were standing on a platform watching a passing train. His jerking head movements made everyone in the room smile as Marceau's eyes followed car after car after car.

A vocabulary of movement follows his words. Exercises are very important to mastering the art of mime. Next, his head begins bobbing as first a dog, then a horse walks by. Before long the movement picks up speed as the horse begins to gallop.

Touching people

"A mime has to be actor," he tells students in a charming, sometimes halting

What? Marcel Marceau receives come to know so well, Musical Society's Distinguished Artist Award at the Ford Honors Program. When: 6 p.m. Saturday, May 12. Where: Hill Auditorium, 825 North University Ave., Ann Arbor. Tickets: \$50, \$30, \$20, and \$15. Call (734) 764-2538.



Silence is golden: Marcel Marceau will be honored at a program featuring a performance by the white-faced master of mime.

French accent. "To be a mime is to touch people with my soul."

With his expressive face and dancer's body, he shows students that mime is

not an abstract but a concrete world, and they must learn from the past. "Kenton," he said, "knew how to do the face." There are many references to Laurel and Hardy and a handful of comedic legends. As a child Marceau imitated Chaplin, then World War II broke out and he wanted to become a painter. Marceau went to art school in Limoges where with great pride he notes, Auguste Renoir was a student. All the while Marceau remained in the French Underground.

At the end of the war in 1945, he joined a military theater company and performed for General Patton's Sixth Army. The first article written about his mime appeared in Stars & Stripes.

Alter ego

By 1947 Bip, his alter ego, the little clown in a battered opera hat, was born and in 1948 he left studies with Decroux to create his company. Bip became part of his life forever.

"Chaplin, Keaton, Laurel and Hardy, they learned from the gags of music

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