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BOOKS John Grisham's picture

of 'A Painted House' imaginative, memorable

> Reschall acts as an important subtext to the main drama. On most steamy nights during har-

vest time, after a day of backbreaking labor, the family gathers around the radio to cheer for their beloved St. Louis Cardinals.

A Painted House By John Grisham

(Doubleday, \$27.95)
Though most of this novel takes place on a hardscrabble
Arkansas cotton

Arkansas cotton
farm, in the end
Michigan turns
out to be a kind of
Promised Land.
Don't expect
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Don't expect
any courtroom
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pages, though. A
Painted House
instead on

DidZ Peinted House is, instead a tale about a family, and what happens to me meaningful harvest season in 1952. It's a work of fiction that offinitely off the beaten path for John Grisham, but it nevertheless reveals his outstanding ability as a storyteller, whatever that the best atories are those that are brought to life by characters we care about, existing in a place and time that captivate our imagination.

Opening words

Opening words
Grisham does this at the outset with the book's opening
words — The hill people and the
Mexicans arrived on the same
day. .in September 1952. The
Cardinals were five games
behind the Dodgers with three
wocks to go, and the season
looked hopeless. The cotton,
however, was waist-high to my
father. .. and he and my grandfather could be heard before supper whispering words that were
seldom heard. It could be a good
crop."

seldom heard. It could be a 'good crop."

A Painted House is narrated by Luke Chandler, looking back from his viewpoint as an inquisitive 7-year-old. (Luke spends so much time listening in on adult conversation and spying on other people that he seems just a bit absurd sometimes, although we're not sure he's supposed to impress us that way.) He lives with his grandmother and grandfather and his parents in a

small, unpainted farmhouse on rented land in the Arkanses delta. Perhaps it was a kinder, gentler era — though definitely not always kind and gentle — and without a doubt, times were changing, Along with this backdrop of change, Luke himself is changing, too.

One member of the farm family is missing, but his presence is strongly felt, anyway. Luke's 19-year-old Uncle Ricky — a kind of local hell-raiser — is away at war in Korea.

Basebell acts as an important subtext to the main drama. On most steamy nights during harvest time, after a day of backbreaking labor, the family gathers around the radio to cheer for their beloved St. Louis Cardinals and star players like Stan Musial, Red Schoendienst, or "Country" Slaughter, As it happens, this is more than just a family ritual.

Luke sees professional baseball as his ticket to a better life, away from the cotton patch. It's not an altogether foolish dream, either. He loves the game, and both his grandfather and his father almost made it to the big leagues before two world wars threw them off the track.

A Painted House first appeared in serial form in the literary magazine, The Oxford American, before being brought out early this year in hardcover. Maybe this is what gives it a kind of Dickensian coloration — especially when we meet and come to know its memorable characters.

characters.

Included among these are edgy, hard-working grandfather Eli Chandler who exists in a perpetual state of worry about his crops; the resourceful Gran,

whose countrified household duties extend even to medical "cures;" Luke's conscientious father whose dreams of leaving the farm have been dashed by a war injury; the boy's more hopeful mother ("raised... at the... edge of... town... in a painted house"), who not only can see the pessibility of a better future for her only son, but intends to carry through with what she sees.

Cast of characters

Rounding out the cast are Chandler's rural neighbors, various townsfolk, migrant workers from Mexico, and the hill people who immigrate from the Ozarks at harvest time to toil in the cotton fields.

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Even peripheral players, such as the angry Baptist minister, make indelible marks. Those with larger roles, like the seductive "hillbilly," Tally, her explosive brother, Hank, or the remote, crippled Trot, emerge as essential parts of a lively American tapestry.

remote, crippled Trot, emerge as essential parts of a lively American tapestry.

Grisham's depiction of the physical community add considerable spark to the story. The roaring cotton gin with its "noisy precision," the village abops, the cincroofed sharecropper's homes, the weedy front yards, the snake-haunted chicken house, even the prickly feel of the cotton boils in the heat of the noonday sun—all are brought superby to life on the pages of A Painted House.

How does Michigan play a part? For an answer, you'll have to read the book.

Victoria Diaz is a Livonia resi-dent who writes about books, the-ater and movies for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

## **ART BEAT**

Art Beat features various hap-penings in the suburban art world. Send Wayne County arts news leads to Art Beat, Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schooleraft, Livonia M 48150, or fax them to (734) 591-7279.

FREE CONCERT FREE CONCERT
The Redford Civic Symphony
Orchestra will present a Cabarot
Concert 3 p.m. Sunday, May 20
at Thurston High School, Redford. There is no admission
charge. For more information,
call (313) 538-1652.
The season concludes 7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, June 19 in Capitol
Park, Redford.

CHORAL CONCERT

CHORAL CONCERT
The Finnish American Singers present "Let There Be Music" 3
p.m. Sunday, May 20 at the Finnish Cultural Center, 35200
West Eight Mile Road, between Newburgh and Gill roads, Farmington Hills
Tickets are \$7 and include as andwich and desserts. (248)
479-6339 or (248) 589-8829.

478-6939 or (248) 689-8829. The program includes Finnish classics, music by Sibelius. Soprano soloist Vickie Kimler will sing "Michigan Morn" by Jennings/H. Owen Reed. Choir director Henry Neasko will join Kimler for a 1926 duet "Moonlight and Roses."

OPENING RECEPTION

OPENME RECEPTION

Ivan Kende, an arts instructor
at the Plymouth Community
Arts Council, shows acrylic
paintings, pastols, and select
work from his Conte drawing
series May 24 to June 18 at the
Pierre Paul Art Gallery, 850-18
Washtonaw Avenue, Ann Arbor.
An opening reception with the
artist takes place 6-8 p.m.
Thursday, May 24 at the gallery,
Hours are 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday-Friday, until 6 p.m. Saturday, and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday,

day, and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday. For information, call (734) 975-

his native Hungary in 1956 at age 10. He picked up a pencil and hasn't put it down since. He currently teaches figure drawing at the Plymouth Community Arts Council.

at the Plymouth Community
Arts Council.

VOCAL EXTRAVAGANZA

The Langsford Men's Chorus
and PRime vocal jazz team up
for the first time for a spring
concert 3 p.m. Sunday, May 20
at St. Paul's Presbyterian
Church, 27475 Five Mile Road,
west of Inkater Road, Livonia.

There is no admission charge,
donations accepted. For information, call (248) 682-6862.

The two groups share more
than a love of music — both are
directed by Steve SeGraves of
Plymouth. SeGraves recently
created the Langsford Men's
Chorus as a tribute to the late
Harry Langsford, director of the
Wayne State University Men's
Glee Club. The chorus will perform several of Langsford's
favorite arrangements.

PRIME will entertain with jazz
standards, swing, ballads,
popfrock, and original tunes and
arrangements. For information
about PRime, visit the Web site
at www.PRime-vocal-jazz.com.

PANTIN' NI HE STREITS

A creative calabreation of the

PAINTIN' IN THE STREETS

A creative celebration of the city, "Paintin' in the Streets," will allow spectators to view the artistic process up close. More than 30 local artist will take to the streets to document their vision of Detroit's architecture vision of Detroit's architecture and street scenes each Saturday in May. These works will then be curated and presented in an exhibition and sale at the Scarab Club June 29 to July 29. An opening reception is scheduled for 6-9 p.m. Friday, June 29 at the club on Farnsworth behind the Detroit Institute of Arts.

The final "Painting" in the Streets" takes place 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, May 19 in Greektown and Eastern Market.

For more information, call project director Jillian Omand at (248) 399-0633.

VAAL EXHIBIT/CLASSESThe

VAAL EXHIBIT/CLASSESTIC Visual Arts Association of Live-nia continues its spring show through May 31 in the lobby of Livenia City Hall, 33000 Civic Center Drive, cast of Farming-ton Road. In addition to exhibiting its members work, VAAL is holding art classes in Room 16 of the Jef-ferson Center, 9501 Henry Ruff, Livenia. Learn to create watercolors

Learn to create watercolors with Farmington Hills artist Marjorie Chellstorp beginning June 20, or oil paintings with Lin Baum (June 19).

Lin Baum (June 19).
Workshops to paint sunflowers in watercolor with Farmington artist Gwen Tomkow take place 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday-Sunday, Aug. 3-5. The cost is \$75 members, \$80 non-members.

For more information or a brochure, call Mary Ann Adams at (734) 455-9517.

QLUCK'S "ORFEO ED EURIDICE

GIUCE'S \*ORFO ED EURIDICE"
The University Musical Society along with Peter Sparling
Dance Company present Christopher Gluck's classic opera Orfoe
of Euridice 8 p.m. Saturday,
May 19 at the Michigan Theater,
608 East Liberty, Ann Arbor.
Admission is free. For information, call (734) 764-2538.

Admission is tree, for informa-tion, call (734) 764-2538.

This production of Gluck's famous opera represents a multi-faceted collaboration with former Martha Graham dancer Peter Sparling choreographing the work, and students from Univer-sity of Michigan School of Music performing the score under the direction of Stephen Jarvi. Stu-dent soloists are Pel Yi Wang, Katherine Alexander and Loren Allardyce. This is a preview per-formance and open to the public The final production will occur in November featuring renowand singers Ewa Podios, Lisa Saffer and Isabel Bayrakdarian.