

Creative Living

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Squeeze play

World class awards bring mixed response

By Tom Panzenhagen
staff writer

In May, Peter Soave of Southfield won the prestigious Klingenthal international competition for classical musicians in East Germany. He was the first non-Soviet to win his classification since the Soviets began competing in the 50-year-old annual event.

"The Klingenthal is believed by many to be the highest competition — the epitome of competition," said Soave, 20. Previous winners — all Europeans — have gone on to successful teaching and concert careers in their homelands.

Soave's countrymen, however, didn't embrace the conquering hero.

"The Klingenthal has been stayed away from by the United States because it's 75 percent Communist bloc countries. It's slighted in the United States, so instead of people backing me, there was a lot of jealousy involved... a lot of animosity."

Soave felt he still had to prove himself.

He set his sights on the Coupe Mondiale, the western equivalent of the Klingenthal, held in October in London. His competition consisted of classical musicians from western European countries, Canada and the United States.

He won that, too, becoming the first person to win both events.

In Europe, Soave would be accorded the celebrity status Americans reserve for Olympic champions. Concert promoters would beat a path to his door.

In the United States, however, Soave cannot make a living on the concert stage.

Why not? Because he's a victim of discrimination.

Soave plays the accordion.

"TELL THEM YOU PLAY the ac-

cordian, and they think here comes Lawrence Welk or Frankie Yankovic," Soave said. He resents his contemporaries who have turned their backs on the accordion, as well as the portions of the American public that don't realize the accordion's potential.

"The accordion field is large, but a lot of people had to leave it because there wasn't much of a future."

"(Song writers/composers) Billy Joel, Barry Manilow, Dominic Frontiere started on the accordion, and people like this have a lot of pull in New York and California."

"But they don't work to help young musicians. They have the ability to help someone, but they don't want to."

Soave could make a good living as an accordion teacher, he said, but that would be turning his back on the instrument and his potential.

"I enjoy teaching, but my aspirations are with performance. I've worked hard for it (a concert career), and I hate to work to such a high level and then let it go away."

"I want to bring the instrument to the equivalent level of any other symphonic instrument. I'd like to do it here (in the United States). I'd like to bring the accordion to the level it's appreciated in the Soviet Union."

SOAVE CONCEDES he faces an uphill battle. He must educate everyone, including his American classical music colleagues.

For instance, the animosity he encountered after winning the Klingenthal stemmed from professional ignorance, he said.

"Many people have different feelings because of the instrument I play. They don't understand how it's arranged, its capabilities, or what it stands for."

For the record, Soave plays the chromatic accordion. It's highly evolved from the original accordion, which was

invented in Germany in the 1820s. It was first mass-produced in Italy in the late-19th century. The chromatic accordion also differs from the piano accordion, associated with Welk and Yankovic.

The chromatic accordion's greatest attribute is its versatility. Unlike the piano accordion's keyboard system on the left-hand side, which produces 41 tones, the chromatic accordion has 104 buttons that produce far more tones in a greater range.

The right-hand sides of both accordions look the same, but those buttons on the piano accordion play chords, while with the chromatic, the accordionist may play either individual notes or chords.

Octaves are easier to attain on the chromatic, as well.

"Accordion music of the past that the public is used to is passe, it's old, it's limited music."

"No one's learned this instrument (the chromatic accordion) to its fullest potential — it's been learned only up to a limit."

SOAVE HAS PLAYED the chromatic accordion for four years, but he received his first accordion — a mini-piano accordion — from his Italian immigrant father when he was 5.

"My father always wanted to be a musician when he was growing up, but he didn't have the opportunity. That was during the war, and he had to work to support his family."

Peter's father came to the United States in 1956, establishing a home in Southfield for Peter's mother and two older sisters, who joined him two years later.

"Then, once, my father was visiting relatives in Italy, and he came back with a small accordion for me."

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MINDY SAUNDERS/staff photographer

Peter Soave's chromatic accordion, made in Italy, weighs 13 kilos (nearly 29 pounds), costs \$7,000 and differs radically from the traditional

piano accordion. He says, "It's what you do with the bellows, it's how you breathe. The music is within you — you produce the music."



The mime by Robert Wilbert incorporates a delicate balance of shapes and forms in somber palette of earth tones. Yet, because of the light and shadow, and the waiting/relaxing pose of the figure, it is full of energy and quiet excitement.



The painter himself and his self-portrait present two moods of the same person. The background of the portrait is red, the old-fashioned fan, black.

Staff photos by Mindy Saunders

Wilbert's art — extraordinary

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

Robert's Wilbert's one-artist exhibition at Donald Morris Gallery of Birmingham through this month is his finest so far. In it all of Wilbert's considerable art skills, wonderful insight, judgment, and appreciation of painting as an expression of beauty are utilized to their fullest.

In each the dominant element is a person — sometimes a professional model, sometimes a friend or relative. In each instance, to a greater or lesser degree, they become subject with still life as Wilbert brings the familiar elements of earlier still lifes into these new paintings — red satin shoes, the white straight chair on its side, paint brushes in a tall cooler. These signature elements provide a continuity and strengthen the raison d'être for those not seen before. This artist is straightforwardly, albeit subtly, putting himself into the painting by using these items which catch his fancy to heighten the impact and complete the totality of the work — to repeat the line or color and to create a path for

the eye to follow.

"These are really studio paintings about art situations," Wilbert said, adding they are not meant to represent truly natural situations. "This is an art environment."

Yet, he has created his art environment with such sensitive balance of form and color that all elements interrelate like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

MANY THINGS are happening in these paintings. Light, shadow, the expressions of the faces, the lightness or looseness of muscles, geometric forms and beautiful color make these works intricate and complex.

"They are very close to nature in terms of color, but not in terms of universal slice of life," Wilbert said.

Perhaps the finest of a fine lot is "Gerry in White Face," 92 by 48 inches, done just before the show opened. Local mime, "Gerry The Fool" (Zelubinski), the model, wears the white face make-up of the mime, the white shorts over black leotards.

Wilbert portrays him in a moment of contemplation, relaxed, but muscles taught enough to move in a second if need be. The entire painting is done in shades of brown and gray, yet there is a contained excitement about it that is almost overwhelming.

Wilbert's women are of this generation, beautiful in a natural way without being decorative. They are neither shy, nor coy, but look out honestly, with a candid awareness of who they are.

His men, including the two self-portraits, seem less concerned with being male than being human.

Wilbert himself is honest, upfront, easy to talk with, aware of what he can do and ready to push that obvious ability to its limits.

These paintings are what they seem to be without mystery or obscure illusions. Their greatness lies in the fact that they are just about the best of what they are that one is likely to find anywhere.

The show continues at Donald Morris Gallery, 105 Townsend, Birmingham through the month. Hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.