

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

Communities weave a bond through arts

Amid-December snowfall blanketed the rolling hills around the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association.

The newly expanded facility is bustling with activities. Inside, the annual holiday show has attracted a constant flow of shoppers. The cash register chimes along with the holiday music.

These are good times. It's been an unprecedented year for the BBAA. The community art association has not only expanded its facilities, and increased membership, but



STAFF PHOTO BY LAWRENCE H. MORSE

Mentor Helen Febbo teaches how art can improve self-esteem.

What: Student Outreach Educational Program, providing arts instruction to public school students in districts without school room art classes.

Where: Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, 1516 Cranbrook Road, Birmingham

Need: Anyone interested in making donations to the BBAA's program should contact Janet Torno, (248) 844-0856.

under the leadership of executive director Janet Torno, they've broadened their vision.

After months of classes, exhibits and lectures, it's time for a reprieve.

There's a quiet satisfaction in the air. Travel northward from Birmingham on Woodward Avenue for about 20-25 minutes, and the snow and season has left

a different impression.

In some areas of Pontiac, the season brings a reminder of disparity and need. For some, who struggle economically and from lack of opportunity, the holidays only further illuminate their quiet desperation.

These are tough times.

Helen Febbo has seen both worlds. The Birmingham painter and printmaker has a clear-eyed view of what's at stake.

And she's doing something about it.

Pragmatic side of idealism

Febbo, an instructor at the BBAA, has a studio near downtown Pontiac.

For some artists, a studio is a sanctuary. But not for Febbo. Like her art, which is distinguished by its warmth and refinement, Febbo has a genuine appeal and a tender touch.

Her artwork might be abstract, but her subjects are clearly rooted in the concrete world. It's been a case of an idealistic artist meeting pragmatic social worker.

For the last several months, Febbo and Leona Patterson, who works at a homeless shelter near Febbo's studio, have figured out a way to transport Pontiac school kids to the BBAA for art classes.

The 11 African-American students, ages 10-15, are from Harrington Elementary and Madison Junior High School. They were selected for two

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FOOD FOR THE MIND, HEART AND SOUL

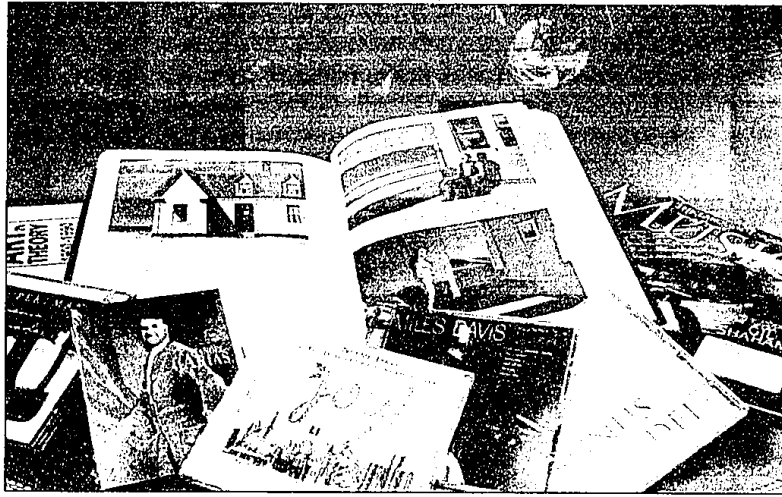


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY TOM HOFFMAYER

Wrap 'em up: Music and books are among the most popular holiday gifts.

DON'T PLAY IT BY EAR, HERE ARE SOME GIFT SUGGESTIONS

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

With Hanukkah and Christmas 10 days away, procrastinators face an immovable deadline.

Gift wrapping last year's fruit cake as a door stop won't win any points with your in-laws.

Some advice: relax and let the Yuletide spirit move you. Take a sip of eggnog, stand under the mistletoe and ponder the gift of music and ideas.

The following informal but critical list might be helpful. Finding a shuttle to your favorite music and bookstore, however, is left to your discretion.

MUSIC Classical

It's too soon to know whether the change of format at WQRS-FM will adversely impact classical music sales, said Tom Sipe, assistant manager at Harmony House Classic in Royal Oak.

At the busiest shopping time of the year, the local outlet with an expansive catalog of recorded classical music reports brisk sales and some interesting popular selections by customers.

Agnes Dei: Music of Inner Harmony (Erato 14634) performed by the Choir of New College, Oxford, conducted by Edward Higginbottom.

First there was New Age sounds and Gregorian chants. Then came growing demand for choral music without orchestration.

The Oxford choir performs a range of work, including Taverner's "The Lamb" to Gorecki's "Totus Tuus."

Cinema Serenade (Sony 63005) - A collection of musical pieces from recent movies, performed by Itzhak Perlman with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra conducted by John Williams.

The arrangements include music from "The Color Purple," "Il Postino," "The Age of Innocence," "Out of Africa," "Schindler's List" and "Cinema Paradiso."

Murray Perahia Plays Handel and Scarlatti (Sony 62785) - One of the greatest contemporary pianists performs works originally composed for the harpsichord.

Perahia's comeback year includes two other CD recordings of Schumann.

Handel Arias (Deutsch Grammophon 453-480-2) - Welsh baritone Bryn Terfel has been credited with



STAFF PHOTO BY JERRY ZOLNERT

Relentless search: Steve Briand, an employee at Borders in downtown Birmingham, takes inventory in the store's classic literature section. Local book stores are increasing their staffs by as much as one-third to deal with the holiday shopping rush.

expanding the popularity and repertoire for the "other" vocal range.

After two decades of dominance by tenors such as Favretti and Domingo, Terfel's "Something Wonderful," a collection of Rodgers and Hammerstein recorded last year, remains one of the best vocal CD sellers.

Sumi Jo, Live at Carnegie Hall (Samsung 019)

- Many opera devotees will remember soprano Sumi Jo in last fall's Michigan Opera Theatre's "Rigoletto."

The live concert recording is a showpiece of Sumi Jo's impressive vocal range. The performance includes classic opera and lighter pieces, including Bernstein's "Glitter and Be Gay" and Herbert's "Italian Street Song."

The Fiddler of the Opera, Gil Shaham (Deutsch Grammophon 447-640-2) - After only six years as a recording artist, Shaham has been called a young Perlman.

His recent CD includes virtuoso opera transcriptions for violin and piano, including "The Barber of Seville," "The Magic Flute," "Sadka," and "Carmen."

In the crowded field of contemporary violinists, Shaham's virtuosity has yet to gain wide recognition among listeners.

But it's only a matter of time before it does, according to Sipe.

Puccini's La Rondine (EMI 56338) - One of Puccini's lesser known operas, featuring tenor Roberto Alagna and soprano Angela Gheorghiu.

The compelling performance offers insight to the artistry of the composer of "La Boheme," "Tosca," and "Madame Butterfly."

Beamed sets: The Nimbus Series, including 5-6 CDs of selected works by Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn and others; Deutsch Grammophon's "Complete Beethoven Edition," available in 20 volumes.

Jazz

With digital remastering technology, jazz classics have overshadowed many contemporary releases, according to Vince DeLeon, buyer for Harmony House superstores throughout Oakland County.

"There's been a constant interest in the more traditional jazz," said DeLeon. "Many alternative music listeners, especially, are crossing over to listen."

Several of the most requested jazz CDs, include: **Forgy and Besa** by Joe Henderson - Variations of Gershwin's American classic by a range of contemporary jazz artists.

With Strings by Gary Smulyan - A straight-up

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BEHIND THE SCENES

Changes at the DIA stabilize the road ahead



Behind the scenes: MaryAnn Wilkinson has been named curator of 20th century art at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

Seven years after the Detroit Institute of Arts faced reduced hours, trimmed its staff and held fewer exhibits because of state funding cuts, the road to the next century seems much clearer and smoother than just six months ago.

At the end of 1997 - the year when its executive director resigned, when the "Splendors of Egypt" exhibit experienced unprecedented success, and when day-to-day operations were transferred from the City of Detroit - the Detroit Institute of Arts stands at a watershed moment in its nearly 80-year history, according to Maurice Parrish, interim director.

With the Detroit City Council's decision late last month to transfer the management of the museum to the Founders Society, the initial step has been taken to reinvent the perception and stabilize the financial condition of the museum, said Parrish, who

assumed the top post after former director Samuel Sachs II resigned in September.

For the past year, the council vacillated over transferring control of the museum. The majority of the nine members were concerned about honoring the city's contract with the union employees and maintaining a residency requirement for museum employees.

Behind the scenes, however, the issue seemed to be the perception that by yielding control of the museum, the council would be giving away the city's cultural treasure to "outsiders."

Apparently, financial and political realities have prevailed.

"We're now in alignment with the most typical way art museums operate," said Parrish.

Before the council's move, the DIA was jointly operated by the city and the Founders Society. The new agreement calls for the Founders Society to handle the daily operations. The city's arts commission, a mayoral appointed

board, retains its oversight duties.

"We now have a single organization with the ability to get public funds, but not necessarily dependent on them."

Short-term/long-term

In the short term, visitors to the DIA will not notice any changes in hours, admission, exhibits or facilities.

The actual transition of management responsibilities from the city to exclusively the Founders Society - a private nonprofit organization founded in 1920 to support and raise funds for the museum - will take about six months.

Approximately 70 percent of the DIA's \$30 million budget is raised by the Founders Society.

Most recently, the St. Louis Art Museum and the Philadelphia Museum of Art made similar management changes. Like the DIA, these museums are publicly owned, but rely heavily on corporate and individual donations for funding.

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