

## North Oakland is broadening its view, motto

**A**t one of the first meetings of the Orion Cultural Council, Tina Collins felt the pull of necessity. As the only volunteer with professional experience in the arts and public relations, her appointment to the post of coordinator quickly became a "done deal."

What's less clear, however, is whether the Orion area - art center for Oxford, Oakland Township and Clarkston - can broaden the perception of itself as the proud place "Where Living Is A Vacation."

If hope and ambition are any indication, then those signs proclaiming Lake Orion's motto will have to be amended.

And soon. Collins and the Orion Cultural Council are boldly expecting a sold-out performance for Sunday's inaugural event, "Winds of Spring," a concert featuring the Troy-based Detroit Chamber Winds and local musicians.

The idea is quite simple: sell all 839 seats at the new Lake Orion High School Performing Arts Center.

The plan, however, sounds more like an appeal for good citizenship.

### A broader itinerary

A few years ago, the Lake Orion community supported the building of a new high school, including a theater that provides a venue for students and professionals.

"The many who pushed for the special millage for the new facility claim a performance space was needed to bring in professional and amateur musicians and thespians."

The practical side, according to Collins, is that the center provides a way to educate students and the community about the arts. The new performing venue complements the ongoing art exhibits at the Orion Art Center and Olde World Canterbury Village.

A sell out of the first professional event in the new theater would prove deep citizen support of the arts, according to Collins.

"We're not going to have a Broadway performance of 'Show Boat,'" she said.

"But maybe people will realize that you don't have to go too far for entertainment."

**A "Done deal"**

The approach taken by the Orion Cultural Council is becoming more common through the metro area.

In the face of the isolation induced by a monotonous-looking suburbia of congested roads and indistinguishable strip malls, many suburbanites are finding ways to cultivate the arts from the grass roots.

The Lake Orion Cultural Council modeled itself after the Waterford Cultural Council, established in 1992 by a group representing local businesses, schools and government.

Call it building culture. Or call it building community. Doesn't matter. You get to the same place on the map.

In less than two years since it was formed, the Lake Orion Cultural Council is already exploring partnerships with the nearby Orion Arts Center, the local public school system, the village and township of Lake Orion, and the business community.

"We're up to about 200 tickets sold for the concert," said Collins, who duly noted that the recent four-performance student production of "West Side Story" was sold out.

With less than a week to go and three times as many tickets unsold for their inaugural event, all hope is riding on a strong walk-up crowd.

But with the summer wind calling and a hockey game on the tube, the competition for ticket-buyers on Sunday will be tough.

Of course, some in the Orion area doubted that the state-of-the-art performing arts center would ever be built.

Maybe that's why in the land of many lakes, it's a time for hope - and perhaps, a new pastime.

A sell-out concert would merely make it a "done deal."

That's not a bad motto.

## MOT's 'Porgy and Bess' bids for crossover audiences

# INTO A BRAVE NEW WORLD

**M**ore than an hour past the time when the scheduled interview was set to begin, and Peabo Bryson, finally emerges from his room where he's staying in downtown Detroit.

For the next three weeks, the smooth-voiced singer of such mega pop hits as "Beauty and the Beast" and "A Whole New World (Aladdin's Theme)" will be a resident of Detroit, a People Mover ride away from the Detroit Opera House where Bryson has been cast as the dope-dealing, sauntering Sportin' Life in Gershwin's "Porgy and Bess."

The Michigan Opera Theatre's production of an unprecedented 14-performances opens Saturday.

Maybe Bryson's tardiness is due to jet lag. Perhaps the weariness of a time zone change. Not quite. Word is that Bryson isn't a morning person.

But by now, it's well past noon. In other words, "Showtime!"

With his finely tailored suit and flawlessly matching tie in place, there's no need to check his attitude. He's not a rapper with a violent case of hiccups and potty mouth.

Bryson chooses his words carefully. He even mentions the "r" word many times. As in "having a responsibility" as a role model and celebrity.

For a big-time, headlining pop star, he has a refreshing scaled-down ego. In the operatic world where egos are as voracious as Pavarotti's appetite, that's like finding a diamond in the rough.

"Peabo is more than I expected, both as an artist and a human being," said David DiChiera, managing director of the Michigan Opera Theatre.

"(Sportin' Life) is to the side of a traditional opera role," said DiChiera. "It's the role for an entertainer, a perfect role to showcase Peabo's talents."

The combination of MOT producing the only large-scale production of Gershwin's classic opera and the widespread attention to the composer during the centennial of his birth has



made "Porgy and Bess" the hottest ticket of MOT's season.

Of course, the choice of the Grammy and Oscar Award-winning Bryson in the role of Sportin' Life - once played by legendary stage actor Cab Calloway and then Sammy Davis, Jr. in the 1959 film - has helped to broaden appeal to nontraditional opera audiences.

The buzz about the opera hasn't been confined to metro Detroit. MOT's "Porgy and Bess" will receive an international audience. National Public Radio will tape, then broadcast the performance worldwide.

### Cross-over appeal

For some, Bryson's move from rhythm and blues into opera might

Songs of the struggle: "Porgy and Bess" is considered the greatest American opera.

Since its first performance in 1935, the opera about the struggles of southern African Americans has been described both as controversial and compassionate. Few have argued about the power of Gershwin's music.

best he summed up as entering a "brave new world."

Crossing musical styles isn't anything new for Bryson. In 1992, he became the first musical artist to have songs atop four different charts.

"A Whole New World," a duet with Regina Belle, topped the pop and adult contemporary charts, while "We Kiss In A Shadow," and "By the Time This Night Is Over," were top sellers on the classical and jazz charts, respectively.

"I don't like the perception of singers being one-dimensional," said Bryson, whose delicate articulation belies his expansive singing voice.

"If music is a universal language, then singers must learn different kinds of music. Why not opera?"

There isn't a hint of the brash South Carolina dialect of the character Sportin' Life, whom he portrays in "Porgy and Bess."

Admittedly, Bryson speaks with a Midwestern drone, although these days he lives in Atlanta, not far from Greenville, South Carolina, where he grew up in "the hood."

Success hasn't come suddenly. Since the mid-1970s, he's built a career with a smooth, luscious sound that complements jazz, and rhythm and blues arrangements. (By the way, he's not eager to talk about his forays into disco.)

Since the early 1980s smash "Tonight I Celebrate My Love" with Roberta Flack, Bryson has scored

Please see **BRAVE, C2**



**Multi-dimensional: Peabo Bryson, one of the most popular and acclaimed pop singers of the 1990s, brings his high energy, velvet voice and an uncharacteristic "attitude" to the role of Sportin' Life in "Porgy and Bess."**

**WHAT:** "Porgy & Bess," an American folk opera by George and Ira Gershwin and DuBose and Dorothy Heyward, presented by the Michigan Opera Theatre

**WHEN:** 8 p.m. Saturday, May 30, Wednesday-Saturday, June 3-6 and June 10-13; 2 p.m. Sunday, May 31; 2 p.m. & 7:30 p.m. June 7, June 14

**WHERE:** Detroit Opera House, at the corner of Madison Avenue and Broadway, one block east of Woodward Avenue, Detroit

**TICKETS:** \$18-\$95; (248) 645-6666, or (313) 874-SING

### "Porgy & Bess" - Background

An opera by George Gershwin with text by du Bose Heyward and Ira Gershwin premiered in Boston, September 1935.

Often called a "folk opera" because of the synthesis of what was called southern Negro dialect and customs along with various musical forms, including jazz, blues, gospel and classical.

Critics have called it both a "glorious love story" and "a construction built of demeaning stereotypes."

The story is set in Catfish Row, a black tenement on the waterfront of Charleston, South Carolina during the 1920s. The area is filled with fishermen, drifters, derelicts and those struggling to find joy amid misery.

The love story concerns Porgy, a cripple, who befriends and falls in love with Bess, the girlfriend of the notorious Crown.

Memorable songs include: "Summertime," "I've Got Plenty of Notthin'," "Bess, You Is My Woman Now," and "It Ain't Necessarily So."

In 1952, an all-black company toured Europe where they performed to sold-out audiences in Berlin, Vienna and London.

Fifty years after its premiere, a production of "Porgy and Bess" appeared at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in 1985.

## DANCE

## From the ashes of Hiroshima rises the antithesis of MTV mentality

If existential philosophy - and all of those serious questions about time, being and existence - were set to music and choreographed, it'd look and sound like Butoh Dance.

Pretty heavy stuff. Not quite the standard fare for prime time, MTV or a candidate for a corporate-sponsored tour.

Actually, Butoh, a deliberate and provocative dance that began in post-war Japan, cannot be contained by walls, halls or convention.

This Friday and Saturday, the New Butoh 1998 World Tour, "Space Dance: Body of the Future," premieres at the Cranbrook Art Museum in Bloomfield Hills.

At the museum? Well, sort of.

More accurately, the performance will take place in the museum, then across a walkway, down an embankment and onto the adjacent parking lot.

**WHAT:** "Space Dance: Body of the Future," the premiere performance of the New Butoh 1998 World Tour, choreographed by Tetsuro Fukuhara

**WHEN:** Performance - 9:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, May 29 & 30; workshops - 6:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday, May 25-28

**WHERE:** Cranbrook Academy of Art, 1221 N. Woodward Avenue, Bloomfield Hills, (248) 645-3333

Admission free

The dance begins past nightfall because the choreography calls for a natural setting of darkness. Don't worry about reserved seating. The audience will be expected to follow the Butoh dancers as they "react" from space to space on the Cranbrook grounds.

With a light and sound design to accompany the performance, "Space Dance" may be the ultimate expression of "rehearsed spontaneity."

The avant-garde, slow-motion Butoh steps have been called "body meditation."



Interpretive dances: Cranbrook Academy of Art graduates Kun-Ah Yoon, left, Kenta Kishi, Aki Takahashi and Kaori Takami stand before a video of a Butoh dancer.

"Although most of the movements are so slow that they're barely perceptible, the dance is anything but predictable."

Basically, Butoh looks like animated sculpture, both highly abstract and strikingly intimate. Apparently, that's the aim of the dance, which the choreographer claims, was born from the ashes of Hiroshima - the Japanese city

decimated by the first atomic bomb. And a city that has become a symbol of both inhumanity and a modern-day phoenix.

### Technology & the body

"The dance is a response to the environment, a questioning of the existence

Please see **HIROSHIMA, C2**