

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

Is proposed big-time theater in civic complex a "done deal"? Not yet.

Ask Carole Sugrue what she thinks about the proposed 5,000-seat, \$40-\$50 million theater in Troy, expected to rival the Fox, Fisher and Masonic Temple.

The 26-year resident of Troy has seen the area evolve from farm fields to a suburban landscape of strip malls and corporate headquarters. She'll pause, then open a folder stuffed with clippings, reports and notes.

Ammunition in a proverbial struggle of "citizen David" versus "corporate Goliath."

This is the way of a lone Troy resident standing up to multi-million investors and a city that apparently equates supporting culture with construction of a big-time, big-ticket venue.

Sugrue, president of the Troy Arts Council, has her own ideas of what should be erected on the 124-acre site along Big Beaver at Livermore.

But she wonders if anyone is listening, especially the Troy City Council, hyping the proposed center as a "done deal," and an essential piece of the broader civic complex development.

No opposition?

The city contends that voters support for bonds in the April 6 election will help finance a new community center and public safety building expected to be constructed near the proposed theater.

The expansive site east of I-75 would also include an outdoor amphitheater, lofts, condos and specialty stores.

For the record, the city council contends that's there is no political opposition to the plan.

That might sound like a deal. But "done"? Hardly.

Tuesday, the Troy Arts Council — once an advisory board to the city council and now a nonprofit group — met to decide whether to disband or continue to press the city to consider a cultural center that would include three different size theaters, studios space and a lecture hall.

Unlike the theatre bids by four private investors, the Troy Arts Council would call upon Troy residents to finance the theatre complex at approximately the same cost as the private development.

The Troy Arts Council contends that a city-backed cultural project must encourage citizen participation in the arts. They cite a 1993 citywide survey that bolsters their claim.

While the Troy Arts Council brings up many valid concerns, frankly the debate is not limited to Troy residents.

Alarming subtext

The 5,000-seat theater, if developed, could either dramatically enhance or dramatically reconfigure the local arts scene.

And that is worth discussing on a broader level.

The construction of another entertainment venue in the suburbs raises several issues at the core of why metro Detroit remains culturally fragmented while other major cities thrive.

There's a strong likelihood, according to one arts industry analyst, that the proposed theater in Troy could draw audiences away from Meadow Brook Theatre, and other major downtown Detroit venues.

The subtext is alarming. The campaign by the city of Troy is not strictly a case of supporting the arts as much as a case of supply and demand.

The goal isn't aesthetics, but profits. Nurturing the arts?

How else can you explain a Troy city official's reported comments that "people don't want to go to downtown Detroit... and (the project) will nurture arts in the suburbs."

The arts? How and when did the city of Troy discuss nurturing the arts? A recent proposal to erect public sculptures along the median of Big Beaver was resoundingly cast aside by the city council, said Sugrue.

When the Troy Arts Council asked the city council for \$5,000 to support

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REINTERPRETING American history

Exhibits reflect diversity of African-American artistry

Editor's Note: The following story is a round-up of several exhibits honoring Black History Month.

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER
fprovenzano@ec.homecomm.net

Ivan Stewart, Joe Dobbins, Sr. and Joe Dobbins, Jr. Gigi Bolton, and Norman Lewis.

Five African American artists whose common feature may only be that their paintings are on exhibit during a month that honors their cultural heritage.

Calling these distinctly different artists solely "African American artists" fails to consider their talent apart from their skin color.

It's like qualifying the contributions to 20th-century art of Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence and Jean-Michel Basquiat

because they are African Americans, not just significant American artists.

"I'm an artist, I don't think of myself as strictly an 'African American artist,'" said Gigi Bolton, whose exhibit opens this week at Moore's Gallery in Birmingham, and also at Hudson's in Northland Mall.

"These are obviously African Americans (in my paintings). But is it only for African Americans? I don't think so."

First-hand account

Dealing with history, for any artist, is never an easy subject, especially in the age of multiculturalism.

There's the amalgamated mainstream view of history documented in popular text books. There's the academics' concerns about the minutiae of historical personages and events.

And then, there's Ivan Stewart's striking first-hand account.

Stewart of Southfield, a retired school teacher with a prolific paintbrush, has set out to no less recreate American history in his dynamic portrayals of courageous and artistically gifted African Americans.

"I'm a documenter of African American history," said Stewart. "(But) I'd rather use the term 'American history.'"

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Portrait of an African American woman by Gigi Bolton



"Love and Guidance," Joe Dobbins Jr.



"Soulful Moment" by Ivan Stewart



"Men of Goodwill" by Joe Dobbins Sr.

Fine Art Exhibits During Black History Month

- "Black History: The Art of Ivan Stewart," through Saturday, March 20, Creative Arts Center, 47 Williams St., Pontiac, (248) 333-7849.
- "Two Generations of Artists: Joe Dobbins, Sr. & Joe Dobbins, Jr.," through Monday, March 15, Umoja Fine Arts, 16250 Northland Drive, Southfield; (248) 552-1070. Reception for the artists, 1-6 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 14.
- "Images e-x-p-o-s-e-d," paintings and collages by Gigi Bolton, through Feb. 19, Moore's Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 647-4662. Bolton's work is also featured through Monday, March 15 at Hudson's in Northland Mall, Southfield.
- "Master Painter Norman Lewis, 1909-1979," through Saturday, Feb. 27. N'Namandi Gallery, 161 Townsend, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700.

Stan Kenton Tribute

WHAT: The Johnny Trudell Big Band honors Kenton's music in a concert presented by the Michigan Jazz Festival and the Alumni and Friends of Clarencville Foundation. Featured guests are Kenton alumni Jerry McKenzie (drums), Bob Lymperts (trumpet), and Chuck "Rhapsody in Blue" Carter (baritone saxophone).

WHERE: 3 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 21. Clarencville High School Auditorium, 20155 Middlebelt Road, between Seven and Eight Mile, Livonia.

TICKETS: \$15, and available by calling (248) 474-2720/(248) 437-0458/(248) 473-8933.

Jazzy bands recapture Stan Kenton's musical magic

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER

Stan Kenton would have loved to hear the Clarencville Jazz Series was not only being revived but features a warm-up band of young jazz musicians from Harrison High School in Farmington.

In his later years, Kenton promoted jazz and big band music to the young by establishing "Kenton Clinics" and performing at colleges and universities around the country.

Johnny Trudell's 19-piece Big Band is the main act that the Harrison High Jazz Band opens for Sunday, Feb. 21. Kenton alumni Bob Lymperts (trumpet), Jerry McKenzie (drums), and Chuck Carter (baritone sax) along with the rest of Trudell's band will recapture the magic of the songs Kenton played for sell-out crowds at Clarencville in the 1970s. This is the first in a series of three concerts. Tributes to Count Basie and Woody Herman take place March 28 and May 16. Proceeds go to the Clarencville Schools Alumni and Friends Foundation to further music programs at the high school in Livonia, and to the Michigan Jazz Festival taking place July 18 at the Botsford Inn in Farmington Hills.

"We're going to have five saxes, five trombones and five trumpets recreating the sounds of the original Kenton orchestra," said Trudell, a professional trumpeter for more than 40 years and a member of the Fox Theater orchestra.

"While he wasn't as popular as Benny Goodman and others, Kenton was innovative and created interest in the music in schools by doing clinics. We're opening with the Harrison jazz band because it's in keeping

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Stan Kenton

DANCE

Metro area: A home away from home for Dance Theatre of Harlem

Tiny dancer: Plymouth Salem Freshman Tim Hannon, (left), attempts to hold ballerina Courtney Wilson of Africa and help her maintain her balance while spinning her, while announcer Tyrone Brooks of Virginia DeWitt, Va., explains the moves.



STAFF PHOTO BY PAUL HUEBNER

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER
fprovenzano@ec.homecomm.net

For the fifth consecutive year, the Dance Theatre of Harlem hasn't been constrained by the Music Hall stage.

In fact, it's February, expect to see Dance Theatre of Harlem dancers at schools throughout the area, including Plymouth Salem High School in Canton, Laher High School in Bloomfield Hills, West Bloomfield High School and Seaham High School in Birmingham.

The tour of local schools by the legendary dance company serves as a prologue to their five-day public performance at Music Hall, which begins Tuesday night and runs through Sunday.

During a three-week period prior to the concert, dancers lecture, and teach how ballet can help students develop discipline to succeed in more than grand-plié, and entrechats.

Outstanding, the outreach program, "Dancing Through Barriers,"

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WHAT: Dance Theatre of Harlem
WHEN: Tuesday-Sunday, Feb. 16-21
WHERE: Music Hall, 350 Madison Avenue, Detroit, (313) 963-7622

- Program A (8 p.m. Tuesday & Thursday, 3 p.m. Sunday)
- "Allegro Brillante" by George Balanchine
- "Le Corsaire" by Marius Petipa
- "The Joplin Dances" by Robert Garland
- "Firebird" by Jon Taras

- Program B (8 p.m. Friday, 3 p.m. & 8 p.m. Saturday)
- "Bugaku" by George Balanchine
- "South African Suite" by Arthur Mitchell and Levine Naidoo
- "Sessanka" by Thynn Mantsoe

TICKETS: \$31.50-\$41.50; (313) 963-2366