



STYLING PHOTO BY JIM JACKSON

Riding on faith: Stewart Francke has translated his struggle to overcome leukemia into insightful messages about the joy of living and the despair of suffering in his new CD, "Swimming In Mercury."

Francke from page E1

from his sister, Kit Reece of Troy, last October, a six-week stay in the hospital and about seven months of recovery in his Huntington Woods home, Francke, 41, has re-emerged as an ordained apostle of faith. His voice — once so weak that he had to build up his strength by practicing scales — is more passionate and urgent.

While he often catches himself before he gets "preachy," Francke is keenly aware of his time and place. And the lessons of the past year are strewn throughout the 11 tracks.

From the opening homage to his wife, Julia, "Keep Your Faith, Darling," to his wondering about those who would crucify the prince of peace, "For Want of a Nail," to a compelling anthem for father and sons, "Swimming In Mercury" is hardly a rumination of death and fear.

On the contrary, Francke's bouncing, driving melodies are a Springsteen-esque reaffirmation that it's not a sin to be glad

you're alive.

With Francke, don't expect the typical MTV-version rock musician. He readily recites a passage from Emerson, ponders the simplicity of Bach's Sonata, and contemplates the meaning of pop culture and rock and roll. A former award-winning music writer for the *Metro Times*, Francke has interviewed many of rock's top performers.

He easily recites pop music history and tradition. One track on his new CD, "Prowlin'," is a nod to the inspiration from Motown greats.

"Rock and roll is a living and breathing art form," he said.

And the focus in "Swimming In Mercury" is clearly on living.

"My whole record is about faith," he said. "It took great faith just to produce it."

For Francke, life has become an allegory. The past year, a parable. The future may be unknown, but the path is far

from unclear.

"I caught a bad break, but it's what you do with breaks," he sings in the enduring, "Letter From Ten Green." Francke composed the words of the song as a letter to his two young children during the bleak days quarantined in the hospital.

The lyrics read as a fatherly sermon: "Trust your talents from being a gift from above/Stay in the light/Give your life to helping others and loving deeply/Have a humble respect for all living things/Believe in other people/They're good, more often than they're not."

It's a message many fathers should study. It's a message seldom heard in today's commercial sound-alike pop market.

Then again, to know the secrets of life, one has to walk through the den of death.

Thankfully, there's one soldier who has lived to tell the story.

Joseph from page E1

Ditto for Michael Osmond. Osmond, whose wife, Beka, also plays one of the wives in the show, carried the family tradition of "Joseph" to the utmost extreme when their first baby, Suzannah, was born on opening night of "Joseph" in Dallas 16 months ago. Just a few weeks back, history practically repeated itself when Sarah Ann was born.

"Beka's due date was around Sept. 15, when we would have been in Minneapolis," says Michael. "But it worked out perfectly."

We had two weeks off to rest up before starting the tour on Sept. 14. Sarah Ann was born early on 9/9/99 — we're really excited about that date."

Beka and Sarah Ann joined up with Michael and Suzannah in Minneapolis, before heading to Detroit's Masonic Temple with the entire cast and crew.

Proud grandparents Alan and Suzanne will keep an eye on the Osmond 3rd Generation girls backstage and Suzannah's Barbies and inflatable Barbie chair.

"Our family can't get away from 'Joseph,'" jokes Michael. "It's a fun, family-oriented show. And we just enjoy it. It's got a good message that everyone can relate to."

What could be next for the Osmond Eight?

"We're kind of bouncing around the idea of 'Seven Brides for Seven Brothers,'" quipped Michael.

Seems as if they won't have to do much rehearsing to get the brothers' roles down pat.

Cannonball from page E1

Being a human cannonball wasn't something he pictured himself doing. Myers performed in school plays in high school and wasn't sure what he wanted to do with his life. Acting was something he was considering and clowning.

In 1989 he earned a diploma from Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Clown College, but he wasn't asked to join the show. He was hired by the Clyde Bentley Cole Circus, which tours the East and Gulf Coasts, and met former daredevil and canon consultant Elvin Bale.

Myers took his first shot at this career in 1993 and began to consider it.

"I did more theater and acting," he said. "Then Elvin told me they had a woman but needed a guy for the show."

The thought of traveling around the country with Rin-

gling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey was appealing, so Myers began training for the job with Bale.

It takes a special person to be a human cannonball.

"You have to have a sense of balance," said Myers. "You don't want someone clumsy or who walks stiff. You have to be graceful, cat-like. My parents had a trampoline since I was 8 years old. I have good 'air sense' I know where my body is in relation to the ground."

Human cannonball is not a job for a big person. Myers is 28, 6-foot-7-inches tall, and weighs 145 pounds.

Logistically, it's easier for a person of medium height to be thrown by the canon," he said.

But like any other job, Myers does have his off days.

"Some days I'll be distracted by life and it goes by so fast, like

a flash, and boom, it's over. Other days, I'm really focused, and it goes by in slow motion."

Being shot out of a canon is not something you have to rehearse. He's done it so many times that it's become repetitious. To prepare, Myers lift weights, runs and stretches. He also visualizes a perfect outcome.

"I picture myself doing everything perfect in my head," he said.

Still an actor at heart, Myers compares Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey to a Broadway show. The Three Ring Adventure, one hour prior to show time, which allows families to interact with the performers, is one of his favorite things.

"People really love it," he said. "It's something you can't do anywhere else. You get to meet the cast before the show."

Local production of 'Death of a Salesman' will be on PBS

If you haven't been on the edge of your easy chair waiting for the season premiere of Detroit Public Television's BACKSTAGE PASS, I won't hold it against you.

After all, the show never really went away for the summer, as it continued to bring you fresh music performances and an update of cultural activities around town.

It's also common in TV to offer a cliff-hanging season finale. That's just not our style. Oh, I suppose we could have gone with something like "Who shot Willy Loman? Tune in to 'Death of a Salesman' on BACKSTAGE PASS." When you found out that we were speaking in video terms and the answer is a camera operator you've never heard of, you wouldn't be pleased with the

deception.

Nevertheless, the season opener to premiere Sunday, Oct. 3, at 7:30 p.m. on Channel 56 is tempting.

It features the gripping drama of the Theatre Company's production of "Death of a Salesman" at U.D. Mercy, the exciting and unpredictable music of Edgework in Ann Arbor, and the thrills and chills without spills of Dance

Nonet at St. Columba Catholic Church in Detroit.

Thanks for your indulgence on my annual blatant plug.

It has been fifty years since Arthur Miller's "Death of a Salesman" first opened in New York City, and after a half-century of many noteworthy productions on stage and small screen, it is considered the quintessential American play. However, its age and familiarity to theater audiences do not limit its relevance or appeal.

The truths that emerge about family life in "Death of a Salesman" are universal. Audiences have an opportunity to become deeply involved with the character development of individual family members.

It is especially captivating to see the way the sons are able to get a penetrating look into their parent's lives," says Blair Anderson, the Wayne State University theatre department director who hosts the BACKSTAGE PASS

segment.

It was somewhat unusual for The Theatre Company to select such a mainstream play for its season opening run from Oct. 8 - 24 at U - D Mercy's McAuley Theatre.

Innovative but lesser-known off-broadway type productions have been the company's niche, one that has been rewarded by a very committed and loyal audience.

The Theatre Company's practice of casting professional actors with students has paid off in consistently high-quality productions. "Death of a Salesman" should benefit from the guest directing of Geoffrey Sherman, who departed as Meadow Brook Theatre's artistic director earlier this year.

"It will be interesting to see the touches that the British-born director applies to the play. But, then again, everyone wondered how this story rooted in capital-

istic America would be received during a recent run in China, and it did gangbusters in Beijing," says Anderson.

You'll find just about anything that you're looking for during the local fall theater season. Other October

events include "The Merchant of Venice," directed by Gillian Eaton, at the Hillberry Theatre, "The Immigrant" at the Jewish Ensemble Theatre, and the Jeff Daniels comedy "Escapade in the Moonlight" at the Gem.

With so many different offerings in the performing arts available this fall, the cliff-hanging suspense comes in making your decision on what to see and do. We'll try to help.

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