

## CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

### Searching for a balance between literal and abstract

There's a thin layer of ice on the small, spring-fed pond outside of Patrick McCay's 150-year-old farmhouse in Franklin.

While he could rather easily capture the stillness with a brush, paint and canvas, McCay resists the temptation to replicate the image of early winter.

The notion of mere landscape painting doesn't hold McCay's attention. And it's not because he couldn't create a striking representation on canvas.

During his formal education at the Glasgow School of Art in the early 1970s, McCay learned painting from the portraitist who claims a hefty fee for his renditions of Britain's Royal Family.

A portrait that McCay hurriedly painted of a female student leans against the wall in his studio. He picks it up, noting that it only took about 45 minutes to capture the expression of his subject.

He knows that he, too, could probably be attracting big money painting portraits of the rich and famous.

But for now, McCay sets down the portrait and turns to his own work. His style, he explains, is somewhere between the literal and abstract.

**A striking chord**

Whether in the academic world or as he stands before a canvas, McCay faces the challenge confronted by every contemporary artist: How do you create something truly original?

"Everything that can be done has been done to a canvas," he said, staring at a



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Play of light: Patrick McCay in his studio in Franklin.

series of his latest lushly painted work inspired by the form of a piano.

"I really don't know anyone who's doing this."

Originality is only one of the features of McCay's recent work, currently on exhibit at a gallery in Toledo. He refers to his canvases as having "residual references" and "clues" to draw the viewer into his work.

"When people 'make connections,' there's an energy about the work," he said.

Too literal and people will look past the paint and think they're staring at a photo. Too abstract and people will feel disaffected. Somewhere in between, he hopes, there's a connection with the artist.

McCay granted rights to the image from his painting, "Concerto in Red," to be used for a scholarly book about piano compositions. And recently, he's been contacted by people from the Baldwin piano company for a painting to hang in their corporate headquarters.

The piano motif, he admits, has struck a popular chord. (Pun not intended.)

Please see CONVERSATIONS, C5

# Lessons from 1999

WHERE THERE'S ART...THERE'S A STORY

BY FRANK PROVENZANO • STAFF WRITER  
fprovenzano@homecomm.net

Year after year, there's no disputing the notion that everyone has a story to tell. Any journalist worth a paycheck can find a story by scratching away and asking a few probing questions. To find a person willing to sit down and talk honestly about their lives, however, shouldn't be taken for granted.

The following are some of the people whose stories appeared in the Arts & Leisure section during the last 12 months. Some of them challenged us with their views, others inspired us with their stories. All of them, for one reason or another, had a lesson to offer.

And for a brief moment in galleries, offices, shops, they opened their lives and talked about what was beyond their yearning to explore their chosen art. Thanks for the stories and coffee.

Frank Provenzano, Staff Writer

## People of the Year

**Monsignor Anthony Tocco of St. Hugo of the Hills, Rev. Norman Pritchard of Kirk in the Hills, and Rabbi Daniel Syms of Temple Beth El** who joined together to raise money for the Great Lakes Chamber Music Festival. The three not only inspire their congregations, but when together, prove to have uncanny comedic timing.

**Lesson: Appreciate cultural and religious differences.**

**Stewart Francke**, songwriter, who struggled to overcome his year-long illness from leukemia. Francke established a nonprofit to help raise money and awareness for those who can't afford a bone-marrow transplant. In the meantime, he wrote and produced a new album, "Swimming in Mercury."

**Lesson: Character is the most noble attribute.**

**Barbara Verdugo, Susan Frye and other parents behind the Oakland Youth Orchestra**, whose organization offers opportunities for students to learn about music. Members are from 31 local high schools. Not a single note would be played if it weren't for parents coming together to write press releases, and raise money.

**Lesson: Sacrifice made for kids is its own reward.** Geoffrey Sherman,



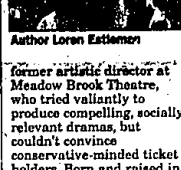
STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Singer-songwriter Stewart Francke



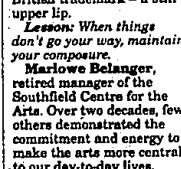
STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Marlowe Belanger, retired manager of the Southfield Centre for the Arts



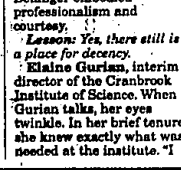
STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Author Loren Estleman



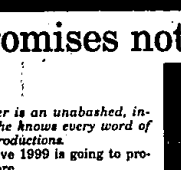
STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Elaine Gourlan, former interim director of Cranbrook Institute of Science



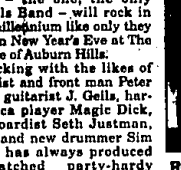
STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Sculptor Joseph Weener



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Artist Louis Masters



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Glen Mannisto, editor of "trait," the newly established literary quarterly



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Joseph Weener, sculptor and teacher at Center for Creative Studies, Weener,



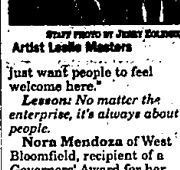
STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Elaine Gourlan, former interim director of Cranbrook Institute of Science



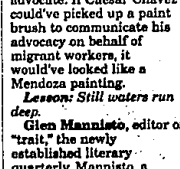
STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Sculptor Joseph Weener



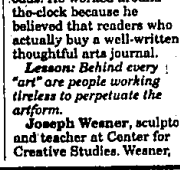
STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Artist Louis Masters



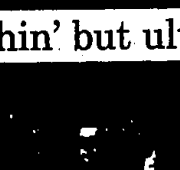
STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Glen Mannisto, editor of "trait," the newly established literary quarterly



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Joseph Weener, sculptor and teacher at Center for Creative Studies, Weener,



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Artist Louis Masters



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Glen Mannisto, editor of "trait," the newly established literary quarterly



STAFF PHOTO BY JIM JACOBEL  
Joseph Weener, sculptor and teacher at Center for Creative Studies, Weener,

who looks more like a wrestler than a sensitive artist, doggedly pursues meaning in art. For Weener, there are no "chance" meanings in his sculptures. His intent and sincerity continue to inspire students and arts writers.

**Lesson: Art should be appreciated by everyone.**

**Leslie Masters**, one of the most influential art teachers in the region. The 40-year retrospective of Masters work at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center was appropriately entitled, "Beyond the Rainbow."

**Lesson: Creating a meaningful life is the greatest work of art.**

**Heldi Van Arnum**, founder of I-CAN, an online resource for people with disabilities. Van Arnum, a quadriplegic after a shooting accident 17 years ago, is a gun control advocate. She dedicates herself to alleviating the inconveniences for those with disabilities.

**Lesson: Never give up.**

**Eileen Monteiro** of West Bloomfield, whose paintings were on exhibit at the African American Museum in August. From still life to depictions of Somali children, Monteiro infused her work with a refreshing honesty. "I see myself in my work."

**Lesson: Beautiful spirit translates into beautiful work.**

**Louis G. Spisto**, former president of the Detroit Symphony, who headed back to his New York City roots to head the American Ballet Theatre. In a year-and-a-half, Spisto energized the DSO programming and concert schedule, while deflating elitist attitudes.

**Lesson: Music is the universal language.**

**Graham Beal**, new director of the DIA. Despite the protestations of censorship from the artist of a "shock art" exhibit, Beal stood his ground, and essentially pointed the spotlight at the purpose and emptiness of derivative shock art.

**Lesson: To understand contemporary art, study art history.**

**The Callaghan-Lynch Clan** who got together for a St. Patrick's Day concert and did what they usually do—sing, laugh and honor their familial relationships. That's a lot of singing and laughing from an immediate family that includes 18 siblings.

**Lesson: A close family makes the best harmony.**

Please see LESSONS, C5

## Cherished fairy tale presented as opera

ALICE REID  
STAFF WRITER  
areid@homecomm.net

As best as Dina Kessler can recall, the idea for her and Patricia Willington to start Great Lakes Lyric Opera was when both were on a bus ride through the upper peninsula while touring with the Michigan Opera Theatre's traveling company.

"I think I looked at Pat and said, 'Why don't we have this on our area?'" said Kessler of Royal Oak.

That query planted the seed for the family-oriented opera company that makes its premier on Tuesday, Dec. 21, with a performance of the classic children's tale, "Hansel and Gretel," at the Southfield Centre for the Arts.

"We'll be performing it in English rather than German. We'd like the audience to get exposed to the music without having to pay attention to subtitles," said Kessler, who plays Gretel to Willington's Hansel.

The 1893 Engelbert Humperdinck play was also chosen because it's often performed around Christmas, has a small cast and can easily be cut down to an hour to accommodate shorter attention spans.

"We're also pointing out lessons like don't talk to strangers, obey your parents and how to work together with siblings to solve a problem. The play is old, but the message is timeless," said Kessler.

It's a little scary, too. The witch, Pamela Schiffer of Rochester, plays the part with a combination of humor and fright. The set, costumes and props are also expected to be quite lively.

Both Kessler, a featured performer with the Michigan Bach Festival, and Southfield resident Willington, who has appeared with opera companies throughout England, Belgium and the United States, are veteran singers and performers in the Detroit area.

The duo plans to put on two or three shows a year, including adult operas. By spring, they hope to hold auditions for their next production. They expect to take the current production of "Hansel and Gretel" into Detroit schools.

Willington's brother, John Ginier, who owns a production company, provided an initial sum to get the company started. And Kessler plans on applying for grants as soon as their first production is behind them.

"We're not in this to make a lot of money," said Kessler.

Starting an opera company in the northern suburbs was a way that both Kessler and Willington could stay near their young children, keep performing and have control over the production.

"That's what it's all about," said Kessler. "We're doing what we want to do."

What: "Hansel and Gretel," a holiday musical presented by the Great Lakes Lyric Opera  
When: 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 21  
Where: Southfield Centre for the Arts, 24350 Southfield Road, Southfield  
Tickets: General admission \$5. Recommended for children over 5 years old. Call (248) 424-9022

## MUSIC

### J. Geils promises nothin' but ultimate Y2K House Party

BY JIM TOTI  
STAFF WRITER  
jtotti@homecomm.net

**Disclaimer:** This reporter is an unabashed, in-your-face J. Geils fan. Yes, he knows every word of Peter Wolf's rapping song introductions.

Forget Y2K New Year's Eve 1999 is going to produce D.K. and a whole lot more.

Bassist Danny Klein and the other five members of the greatest party band in the land—the one, the only J. Geils Band—will rock in the millennium like only they can on New Year's Eve at The Palace of Auburn Hills.

Rocking with the likes of vocalist and front man Peter Wolf, guitarist J. Geils, harmonica player Magic Dick, keyboardist Seth Justman, D.K. and new drummer Sim Cain has always produced an unmatched party-hardy excitement.

This one promises to surpass the rest.



Rockin' in 2000: The J. Geils Band looks a bit older, but don't dare tell them that they're mellowed.

"We are totally focused on rocking the city of Detroit," said Justman, taking time out during a recent rehearsal.

"We're committed to rock the Motor City because we have special appreciation for our fans there."

"We know Detroit is just a great music city with a lot of crazy fans and we wouldn't want to be anywhere else on New Year's Eve."

Reuniting for a mini tour last summer after 17 years of going in different directions, the band found out they still contained the hard-driving energy and enthusiasm that rocked the world for millions of their loyal fans.

"It's like we never left," said Klein when asked about being back together on stage for the first time since 1983. "We just wanted to play together again."

And play together they did as three sold out July shows at Pine Knob brought back memories of the late '70s and early '80s when five and six consecutive nights of electrifying dancing on the ceiling, dancing on floor bluesy rock 'n' roll kept everyone coming through the door.

It was always, as only Wolf can command, a House Party.

Please see MUSIC, C5