

CONVERSATIONS

FRANK PROVENZANO

Remembering how M.L. King changed history

The newspaper reports in the days after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. offer a telling reminder of how far we've come. And perhaps, how far we have to go.

Back in April of 1968, it was common to refer to two Americas: One black and the other white. It wasn't unusual for a suburban Detroit newspaper, for instance, to talk overtly about the two Americas. One week after Martin Luther King, Jr. was fatally shot, an Eccentric newspaper reporter wrote: "The impact struck white Birmingham... as it did the black districts of Detroit, Washington and other cities."

"It was, to most people, a great American tragedy."

Most people had it right. But the tragedy was not only King's death, but the unchallenged, unchallenged racist attitudes.

Cultural diversity
Back in 1968, many local residents who may not have marched alongside King, nevertheless realized the rightness of his message. Days after his death, a standing-room only crowd gathered for a memorial service at Christ Church Cranbrook.

Three decades ago, political rhetoric was filled with references about "ours" and "theirs."

Since then, progress has been measured by the level of disdain for that type of racial characterization.

Look around. Social progress appears in a multiracial and multicultural landscape, where diversity, not superiority, is the goal.

But while a great speech might be a rallying cry for a noble cause, inevitably it is a mere outline, not to be mistaken for actual change.

Since King's death, American society has not become less violent. Racial divisions haven't lessened, but have grown rigid.

And while opportunities for minorities have certainly grown dramatically in 30 years, it's still a struggle for women to receive the equivalent pay for the equivalent work of their male counterparts.

Yet still, the strength of King's message resonates. Social progress is always a possibility.

DSO's tribute
Like King's dream for a diverse and rich cultural tapestry, the appeal of music transcends racial and cultural barriers.

Two years ago, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra created a special one-day celebration to honor King. Last year's event was so successful that the DSO is already considered in the forefront among major orchestras in honoring King.

"It seems particularly important in an area with a large African American population to celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr.," said Charles Calmer, program director of the DSO. "But, of course, our celebration is for a great American, someone who stood for integration, nonviolence and peace."

"His message is timeless."

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Polished: The Stuttgart Ballet, which makes its Detroit debut at the Detroit Opera House this week, is offering up sensuous, seductive, contemporary dance.

A Moving Seduction

EVENTS PROVIDE OVERVIEW OF HISTORY, STYLES OF DANCE

BY NICOLE STAFFORD
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To simply say the Stuttgart Ballet is one of the most respected and oldest ballet companies in the world - dating back to 1609 - might leave the wrong impression.

To add that the German-based company wooed audiences with technical precision and beauty still wouldn't conjure up the full picture for those interested in attending their local debut this week at the Detroit Opera House.

Stuttgart's current contemporary repertoire is known for giving dancers a challenging beauty and amazing precision, while seducing their audiences.

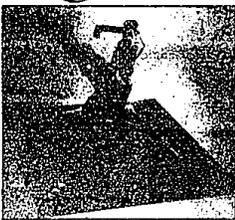
"Because of the athleticism and the movement and the dealing with relationships - male and female dancing together - and the costumes, it is very seductive," said Bradley Stroud, director of dance at Michigan Opera Theatre, presenters of the concert.

"With a lot of contemporary dance, you don't know what's going on, and it's not fun to watch," said Stroud of Birmingham. "This is so beautiful, even those audience members who don't know much about contemporary dance will enjoy the performance."

Of the six azzizing pieces slated to entice Detroit audiences, one, entitled "Delta Inserts," comes from choreographer Kevin O'Day, a native of Detroit.

O'Day, who has performed with several nationally recognized companies, including the American Ballet Theatre, the Jeffrey Ballet and Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project, is known for keeping his dancers in constant, kinetic motion within the space of the stage.

Set to gritty, electronic, blues-based music by American composer John



Moving splits: "Dancing Figures," a bronze sculpture by Richard Hunt, is one of many dance-related exhibits that will be on display Jan. 22-April 23 at the Wright Museum of African American History and the Detroit Historical Museum.

King, "Delta Inserts" explores love and war between the sexes and gender roles at the close of the 20th century. O'Day shifts between pitting his dancers against one another and unifying them in action. And, the effect is a dramatic and turbulent display of athletic prowess.

While several pieces from the company's Detroit program are set to music by classical composers (Brahms, Shostakovich, Vivaldi and Bach), and the marks of classical ballet are ample throughout the wide-ranging production, Stuttgart takes a turn towards performance art with "Dos Amores."

Taking love in all its forms, particularly the phenomenon of falling in love, as its subject, "Dos Amores"

incorporates six silver pendulums and 12 dancers into the choreography. Two poems written by Chilean poet Pablo Neruda overlay contrasting musical selections, sparse percussion and baroque by Vivaldi.

Unlike most New York City-based dance companies, which are attracted to straight, clean lines and quick movements, the Stuttgart embraces hallmarks of Western European dance, lyrical beauty and emotion.

"(Stuttgart) is a different vocabulary, a totally different movement," said Stroud. "You recognize a lot of classical ballet in this, but it's contemporary. It's a good indoctrination for anyone who has not seen a lot of contemporary dance."

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Perspectives on dance

- **Stuttgart Ballet:** Sensual ballet works including "Delta Inserts," choreographed by Detroit native Kevin O'Day, and three American premieres. **Detroit Opera House,** Detroit, 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, Jan. 13-15; 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 16. Tickets \$17-62. Students from local dance studios who contact DOH receive two tickets for the price of one. Call the box office, (313) 237-7464 or TicketMaster, (748) 645-6668.
- **Babe Miller Company:** Challenging cultural identities through post-modern dance - **Power Center for Performing Arts,** Ann Arbor, 8 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 15. Tickets \$16-32. Call (734) 764-2538.
- **When the Spirit Moves:** Exhibit of dance as a subject of African American art and conveyor of history - **Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History/Detroit Historical Museum,** Detroit. Exhibit opens Saturday, Jan. 22, and continues through Sunday, April 23. Hours are 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday. Admission \$5 adults, \$3 children. Call (313) 494-5800.

EXHIBIT

Peeling away layers of skin utterly surreal

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
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With an exhibit entitled "Skin," there's an expectation that there'll be something more than an examination of dermatological differences.

True to that promise, "Skin" at the Cranbrook Art Museum offers an intimate, surrealistic and utterly bizarre view of the various artistic uses of fiber.

"Skin" isn't a tepid show of embroidered quilts and colorful fabric. Nor is it an esoteric grumbling about why fiber artistry should be considered as a legitimate fine art, not a mere craft.

Actually, "Skin" isn't about fiber at all. Rather, it's simply an exhibit of works by four international artists who explore sexuality, tactile impressions and awkward self-revelations.

While this isn't a show of lasting impressions, the humor and eccentric twists are certainly worth contemplating.

The exhibit opens with Dorothy Cross' display of teats from a cow under covering a pair of stiletto high heels. (What happened to the cow is unknown.) Cross became fascinated

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Bound: The photography of Yael Davids reveals startling images.

with the uses for udders when she saw a dried udder being used as a sieve in her native Scandinavia. The symbol of fertility in Cross' work, however, is more grotesque than engrossing.

In her least evocative piece, Cross reaches for an uneasy contrast by subtly placing the shapes of female genitalia on several long pipes set on the floor.

Ford makes an unprecedented donation to arts

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
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On the same day last week when the auto industry reported a year of record-breaking sales, Ford Motor Co. made an unprecedented donation to four regional cultural institutions.

In contrast to the billions in reported year-end corporate revenue, the \$12.7 million gift from the Ford Motor Company Fund might have appeared somewhat paltry.

But there wasn't anyone complaining from the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Zoo, Henry Ford Academy and Detroit Science Center, recipients of the auto giant's generosity.

The formal announcement was held Thursday at the Detroit Science Center featuring top executives from Ford, Wayne County, Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer and representatives from the recipient organizations.

The DSO and Detroit Zoo will receive \$5 million each, while the science center and Henry Ford Academy will be given \$1.5-million and \$1.2-million, respectively.

The money will support educational programs at the various cultural institutions. A symbol, according to Ford Chair William Clay Ford, Jr., of the corporate giant's commitment to providing educational opportunities to the 800,000 school-age kids in the region.

In recent years, corporations have moved away from funding cultural events toward supporting educational initiatives and community outreach programs.

"It's a gift, contribution and an investment, and we expect a return (on our investment)," said Joe Nasser, president of Ford. "Making connections with the community leads to strong, successful enterprises."

Clearly, positive public relations with the community translates into good business for corporations. Yet dollars from the private sector shouldn't be considered a substitute for ongoing public funding to support operating budgets for the region's cultural institutions.

"Private funding complements other types of funding," said Peter Cummings, chair of the DSO. "Ford is enabling institutions that are already engaged in outreach (programs) to attain a higher level of service."

The \$5 million received from the Ford Fund will support a partnership between the DSO and the Detroit High School of Performing Arts. The funds will be used over a five-year period.

"Most corporate gifts deal with specific needs, but revenue from a cultural tax would support a consistent flow of funds," said Detroit Mayor Archer.

The proposed regional cultural tax, which would support 14 regional cultural institutions, is currently being negotiated between arts groups and county commissions of Oakland and Wayne counties.

Proponents are aiming for the initiative to be on the August ballot.

Peeling away layers of skin utterly surreal

"She sees seduction and repulsion something that can be very close," said Hofmann, curator of exhibitions at Cranbrook Art Museum.

Perhaps with a show like "Skin," seduction lies beyond the surface. After all, the obsessive quality of Cross' work does indeed set the tone for the work by the other artists in the show.

There's no missing the point in Yael Davids' work. While Davids, a performance artist, isn't in the flesh-and-blood at the museum, there's plenty to see of her in photos and video from her opening night exhibit. (We're talking plenty of human skin.)

The performance involved Davids and two others. One person sat wearing a jacket that was also attached to the chair. Another person stood against a two-sided wall with his face pressed in a hole in the surface. His face protruded from the other side.

Meanwhile, Davids, a former dancer, appeared naked and contorted beneath a chair. From a curled position whereby she

Please see SKIN, C2