

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

## Looking beyond the slippery shine at the auto show

It's not wise to lean against any car at this year's North American International Auto Show. It's not because security is tight. Or because the cars are beyond reach. It's the slippery shine. Leaning on a side panel can be like an unexpected trip down a steep hill on a freshly waxed snowboard. And besides, it's not cool to think of a car as a mere prop, simply a means of transportation or a convenient reciting spot. This is Detroit. Crusin' isn't a sport, it's a way of life. Each car is a fiefdom awaiting its king or queen, prince or princess.

**Four-wheel aesthetics**  
In the capital where cars are manufactured, promoted and sold, the auto show is set on holy ground. A modern-day Mecca. The site whereby followers of industry trends make their annual pilgrimage to oogle at the upcoming year's styles, and futuristic models.

Beyond the rattling talk about "market segments," performance standards and advertising gobbledygook, there's the aesthetics of show, which range from subtle to compelling to over-the-top.

"Each exhibit is an artistic expression for building loyalty for the brand," said Robert Albitz, vice president of creative for George P. Johnson Co., which designed a dozen of the exhibits in the show.

The founder of the Auburn Hills company, George P. himself, worked for Henry Ford in designing the first auto show during the mid 1920s. If any company has been responsible for equating "dream car" with the American Way, it's the Johnson Co. Each display, said Albitz of Lake Orion, is designed with marketing objectives and a "keep it simple" philosophy in mind.

A team of designers at Johnson examine how color, lighting and space all work together to focus attention on a car.

In some cases, the exhibits are sophisticated presentations straight from the sales showroom with interactive kiosks and videos presented on large LED screens. Other times, the car exhibits create an attitude that goes way beyond a comfortable ride.

**Completely blurred**  
George P. Johnson's exhibit of a Jeep Sport suspended perpendicular on a pile of rocks simply makes the point for those leading a rugged, sporty lifestyle. Clearly, attitude.

"The lines between communication and art is completely blurred," said Albitz.

"Our clients expect customers to have a consistent 'brand experience.' From a design standpoint, it might be difficult to distinguish a brand when so many of the cars look alike. Obviously, that's why ad agencies get paid the big bucks. Some of the 'attitudes' are worth considering. For instance, Jaguar blends lifestyle with engineering in their slogan.

Please see CONVERSATIONS, C2

## Where everybody knows your name

A first-hand account of the work, rewards of community theater

BY SUSAN TAUBER  
STAFF WRITER  
stauber@home.com.net

Barbara Ann Gowans of Birmingham recalls one particular community theater production she was working on as the music director.

It was a Nancy Gurwin production of "Snoopy" about 10 years ago. Erin Dilly played the role of Peppermint Patty. Susan Foster was Sally and Danny Gurwin was Snoopy. Those names may not have meant much to anyone besides their relatives and friends back then. Today, those names mean important roles in major shows.

Dilly has the female lead in the new musical, "Martin Guerre." Sutton Foster is cast as Eponine in the Third National Touring Company of "Les Miserables" and Gurwin opens soon in "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" in Chicago, according to Gowans.

The person who played Linus in that same "Snoopy" production is Kevin Lee Branshaw of Novi.

While his name may not be on marquee across the country like those others from the "Snoopy" cast, theater is a major part of his life. Community theater, that is.

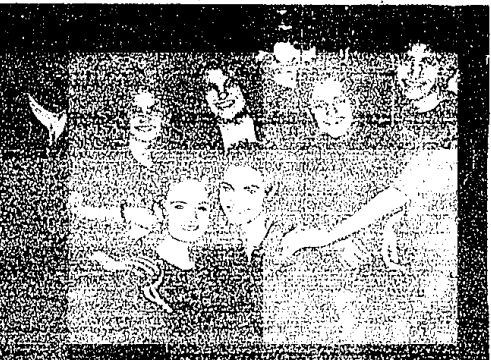
**Flex time**

"I belong to at least eight theater groups and do four to five shows a year," he said during an "Oliver" rehearsal at The Village Players in Birmingham. Branshaw has the lead role of Fagin.

"I can't stay away from auditions. I've traveled as far away as Kalamazoo to perform in a show," he said. Branshaw works at a job with flex time, he said, so he can do community theater. Because being in a community theater show, which offers no financial benefits, requires more than attending three or four multiple-hour rehearsals a week.

It means working on lines, music and dance routines at home looking for certain things to enhance a costume, trying to fit in a regular life around rehearsals.

It means spending every available



A Dickens twist: Acting in The Village Players' production of "Oliver," taken from the book, "Oliver Twist," are (left to right) Jack Miller, Jeffrey Hyke, Patti Roney, Phillip Matta, Brad Thomasma, and in front, Rebecca Hyke and Courtney Thomasma.

hour at the theater until opening night beginning with "Hell Sunday" — that dreaded 12-hour day every community theater group endures when lights, sound, music, props, scenery, curtain calls and the actors run through the show all together at least once, if not twice, for the first time.

"Hell Sunday" isn't a pretty sight. People leave the rehearsal exhausted, sometimes discouraged, but hopefully elated.

And the week before the opening guarantees that most children in the show will complain bitterly in the mornings that they're too tired to go to school.

**Behind the curtain**

Parents have to decide what to do — let them get a few extra winks of sleep or make them go to school, thus taking a chance the darling will get

Please see THEATER, C2



Strange relations: Thom Griffin, (left), Cheryl Schonherr, Laura Raich and Chip Wiswall rehearse for St. Dunstan's "The Foreigner," which opens this Friday.

**Upcoming Shows**

The following is a round-up of community theater groups in Oakland County and the remainder of their season.

**Avon Players, 1122 Washington Road, Rochester Hills** — "Made in the USA: Encore!" Jan. 21-23 and 27-29; "Moon Over Buffalo" March 3-5, 10-12, 16-18; "Sweeney Todd" April 28-30, May 5-7, 12-13, and 18-20.

**Clarkston Village Players, Depot Theatre, 4851 White Lake Road** — "Westend Comedy" Jan. 20-22; "Jack and the Beanstalk" Jan. 29-30; "Comedy Two Nights" Feb. 4-5; "A Case of Ubel" March 10-11, 15-16, 23-25; "Merry Night" April 15; "A Bad Year for Tomatoes" May 12-13, 17-20, 25-27; "Miss Appled" June 2-3.

**Farmington Players, The Barn Theater, Farmington** — "Of Mice and Men" each week end the month of February; "The Second City on Tour" March 3-4; "Kiss Me, Kate" in the month of May.

**First Theatre Guild, Birmingham, First Presbyterian Church, 1669 West Maple, Birmingham** — "Pied Pipers of Hamelin" March 24-26, March 31, April 1-2.

**Rigdale Players, 2052 Long Lake Road, Troy** — "Oklahoma" March 10-11, 17-19, 24-26, March 31, April 1-2; "Moon over the Sewery" May 5-7, 12-13, 18-21; Mid shows: Easter show - April 25-16; TBA - June 23-25.

**St. Dunstan's Guild of Cranbrook, Cranbrook Educational Community, Birmingham** — "The Foreigner" Jan. 21-23; 27-29; "Foxfire" March 17-19; 23-25; "Damen Yankee" June 2-3, 8-10.

**Stagepartners, 415 South Lafayette, Royal Oak** — "Cinderella" Jan 20-23, 27-30, Feb 4-6; "Forever Plaid" Feb. 25-27, March 2-5 and 10-12; "Barefoot in the Park" March 24-26, 30-31 April 1-2, 6-8; "Wing & I" May 12-14, 18-21, 25-28, 31, June 2-4; "Sylvia" June 16-18, 22-25.

**Village Players, 752 Chestnut Street, Birmingham** — "Oliver" Jan. 21-23; 28-30, Feb. 4-5; "Sherlock Holmes" March 17-19, 24-26, March 31 and April 1; "Forever Plaid" May 12-14, 18-21 and 26-27.

Other community theater groups: Teddy Bear Productions at the Jewish Community Center, Lakeland Players, Bloomfield Players, Fontaine Theatre IV, and Rising Stars, for ages 10-14, sponsored by the Bloomfield Hills Parks and Recreation Dept.

## EXHIBIT

### BBAC showcases work by region's most influential artists

BY FRANK PROVENZANO  
STAFF WRITER  
provenzano@home.com.net

Simply being recognized has become all too important for many of today's artists. In a contemporary art world often times suffering from self-absorption or an obsession with provocateurs, the long-term influence of an artist is overlooked.

But that's hardly the case at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center. As grassroots participation in the arts continues to flourish based on the unprecedented number of people joining arts organizations, today's most influential artists can be found in classrooms teaching art.

Many of the artists who teach at the BBAC have shaped the sensibilities and talents of students, from those picking up their first brush to those refining their skills.

classes during the year, the BBAC has become a regional town hall for artists and a veritable showcase for the work of student work.

Through the end of January, however, the focus will be on the works of 58 of the faculty teachers, whose paintings and sculptures fill the expansive 25,000-square-foot of the art center, which was renovated and doubled in size two years ago.

Most of the faculty members have deep roots in the region. Many are graduates from local university art programs.

well as a reflection of the range of mediums taught at the center.

The exhibit features works by well-known artist/teachers, including Danielle Bodine, Karen Halpern, Lester Johnson, Gail mallymack, Joe Maniscalco, Leslie Masters, Charles McGee, Jo Powers, Robert Schefman, Linda Soberman, Mary Stephenson, Kaiser Svidan, Andrea Tama, Nancy Thayer, Russell Thayer, Donna Vogelheim, Robert Wilbert and Karen Wydra.

Clearly, the exhibit demonstrates an impressive technical proficiency. But the exhibit also makes a resounding statement about the depth and range of local artists who have mastered and continue to experiment with their cho-

both a showcase for these artists as

## Yo-Yo Ma sold out, but more Bach to come

BY NICOLE STAFFORD  
STAFF WRITER  
nstafford@home.com.net

Tickets to hear world renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma perform a contemporary commission of Bach's Goldberg Variations at Ann Arbor's Hill Auditorium are long gone.

Ma's Thursday recital, the first in nine years in the area, sold out in October. But, fans of the Goldberg Variations need not despair.

Pianist Murray Perahia will soon perform the original composition and five other Bach works at Hill.

Perahia's performance also is the first of six Bach programs being presented by the University Musical Society to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the composer's death.

"I would say there's a growing interest in Bach. There certainly is a great resurgence of interest in the early music movement," said Sara Billman, the society's director of marketing and promotion.

"How things would have been performed in Bach's day has become of more interest."

Bach is believed to have written the Goldberg Variations for his student Johann Gottlieb Goldberg to perform for a Dresden court. Goldberg was the court's private harpsichordist.

"The piece, an aria published in 1741, explores a vast emotional palette, from explosive joy to deep contemplation, and illustrates a wide variety of musical styles."

"I think with Bach, just like with Mozart, there is something in it for everyone," said Billman. "And, for people who are just starting (with classical music), it is very accessible, very beautiful music."

Perahia's performance, which also features Bach's Four Chorale Preludes, is slated for 8 p.m. Feb. 16. Tickets are \$16-55.

- The Bach series also includes:
- Violinist Christian Tetzlaff performing Bach's solo violin work on Feb. 20.
  - Trevor Pincock and The English Concert presenting Bach's complete Brandenburg Concertos and a 24-hour Bach marathon with additional concerts by the University of Michigan School of Music faculty on March 11.
  - The Michigan Chamber Players performing Bach in a free concert on March 22.
  - A dance performance set to Bach's Musical Offering by the Trisha Brown Dance Company on April 12.
  - The UMS Choral Union and Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra presenting Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* on April 16.

For additional information about the University Musical Society's Bach series or to obtain tickets, call (734) 764-2638.



Hung up: Artist/teacher Andrea Tama finds a place for her painting, one of nearly 200 pieces in the BBAC's faculty show.

Please see BBAC, C3