

ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS



LINDA ANN CHOMIN

Orchestra brings a little of Paris to life

Most of us only dream of visiting Paris, museums like the Louvre or the dark and smoky cafés where Impressionists congregated to discuss their work.

This magical city and the country of France spawned a great deal of beautiful music as well. Composers such as Camille Saint-Saëns and Maurice Ravel gave the world "Carnival of the Animals," "Boléro," and other memorable music.

On Saturday, March 10, the Livonia Symphony Orchestra will make it possible for you to sail away to the city on the banks of the Seine when it presents "The French Connection," a concert focusing on composers born in France and those who spent their lives there. So come visit the city where Henri Toulouse-Lautrec created his paintings and lithographs of the colorful dancers at the Moulin Rouge. You won't have to go any further than Carl Auditorium at Churchill High School in Livonia.

Featured musicians

Guest pianist Laura Kargul and organist David Wagner, along with the orchestra, will take you away to this cultural and intellectual center of international fame.

Kargul, who grew up in Redford, first came to international attention when she made her European debut in the Netherlands in 1986 shortly after receiving a doctorate in piano performance from the University of Michigan. She is now director of keyboard studies at the University of South Maine where she has been a member of the faculty since 1989. She will perform Cesar Franck's "Variations Symphoniques."

"It's a one movement piano concerto written in 1886," said Kargul who made her American debut with the Redford Civic Symphony Orchestra at age 13. "Franck spent his life in France. The piano and orchestra are equal partners, almost chamber music like. At times I'm accompanying the orchestra and at times they're accompanying me."

"It hasn't played a lot. Pianists adore this piece and many great pianists have recorded it. It's a ravishingly beautiful piece with very romantic moods."

Around the world

Conductor Volodymyr Shesniuk is making a habit of programming music from cultures across the

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French connection: Guest pianist Laura Kargul will join the Livonia Symphony Orchestra for an all-French concert.



Masks uncover faces of homeless

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
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Robert Steele remembers the hardships of living on the streets in the late 1960s. He is using those memories to communicate the experience through a broken-plaster mask mounted on a distressed piece of plywood.

A designer at Exhibit Works in Livonia, Steele is one of 24 employees taking time to create masks for an auction to benefit COTS, the Coalition on Temporary Shelter, in Detroit. The Corridor Designers and Modelers from DaimlerChrysler and Ford Motor Co. along with celebrities like Rosie O'Donnell, Ted Nugent and Queen Latifah have painted more than 165 masks to raise money at the gala event Saturday, March 10, in the Detroit Yacht Club on Belle Isle.

"I could relate to the homeless issues. Being without a home is not a fun thing to be," said Steele of Huntington Woods. "I wanted to make a statement about the angst and pain; that's why I broke the mask and rubbed it with dirt and ash and hollowed out the eyes. COTS is a great cause and I wanted to make an appropriate statement."

Artistic approach

Steve Hough, like several of the employees at Exhibit Works, went with a more artistic approach to the company project. Hough, who grew up in Livonia and graduated from Stevenson High School, is director of the business, which produces exhibits for auto and trade shows as well as museums. One of their most recent projects was creating an interactive exhibit and signage for the National Amphibian Conservation Center at the Detroit Zoo.

"The purpose was to do something that someone would want to buy and to give something back to the community," said Hough, whose mask was inspired by the "Color Field" paintings of Mark Rothko. "And it

looked like a fun project for us to get involved with. People from every department participated. It was good for us to break out of the mold at work and be creative at the same time."

Exhibit Works designers and employees didn't have any problem reawakening their creativity. They incorporated everything from wood to feathers in the masks, which range from vibrant red to stark white. Designer Paul Richardson placed his mask inside a cardboard box, frequently a dwelling for many homeless people struggling to survive the streets. Viewers gaze through a glass globe into a paint can inside the box. The thick glass distorts the face at the bottom of the can.

Sandor Koteles, director of graphic design and a graduate of Plymouth-Canton High School, colored his mask silver and encircled it with wood. He agrees with Hough that artists as well as COTS benefited from the project.

Freedom of creating art

"The best part of the project was that it wasn't commercial, that it was fine art, not for a client," said Koteles. "For the freedom of that was refreshing."

Kevin Patten placed his mask inside a briefcase and slipped it in a COTS brochure. Eric Strobel, a Southfield resident who created art for fund-raisers for the Villa Gallery, joined with his wife Cheryl to use a decoupage technique on their mask.

Monique Cavin embellished one of the plaster faces with gold paint and feathers giving it a tribal look. Laurie Lubinski, a long-time Canton resident now living in Brighton, used a black background for the gold leaf with eyes in the shape of hearts. The mask, with all its pleasantries, is in sharp contrast to the life of a homeless person.

Helping

"It was nice to know it would help someone," said Cavin. "I'm not financially able to give money but I could do this."

Farmington Hills designer Ballerie Allen has given money to COTS for the last eight or nine years and believes the shelter is providing services that everyone needs. Today, Allen is just one of 26 DaimlerChrysler designers and modelers who created masks for the auction. Her mask was inspired by Japanese dolls. As a designer, she's almost exclusively in cars. The project allowed her to use a new medium while rekindling her creativity.

"Most people are just a paycheck away from homelessness," said Allen, a graduate of Wayne State University. "Most of us have a poor conception of the people helped by COTS. They help everyone - children, families."

Sara Adams donates to different organizations by playing her trombone at fund-raisers. A clay modeler from Lake Orion, Adams hadn't painted in 10 years before creating a mask. She incorporated waxed paper and farina to give a bark-like texture to the work.

"I enjoyed doing the mask because I hadn't painted for awhile but also it was nice to be able to do for charity." That's exactly why Curt Bailey became involved with the auction when it began three years ago. In the past the Birmingham businessman has painted masks and done odds and ends to make the event a success.

"I've spent a lot of time down at COTS," said Bailey, president of Sundberg-Fair, a company which helps people create and invent new products. "The thing that really appeals to people about helping

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EXHIBITION

Artist communicates beauty with vibrant color

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Girija Viswanath apologizes for not being able to express herself in words as she walks from painting to painting in the mini-gallery inside her Bloomfield Hills home. Vibrant red bouquets mingle with bright yellow sunflowers.

Flowers are one of Viswanath's favorite subjects. Daylilies, bird of paradise and carnations fill the walls. More sunflowers pop out of a terra cotta vase. It's apparent by looking at the landscapes in one corner of the space, that she also savors Michigan autumns and springs, and the way leaves change from green to yellow.

On display

Without words, Viswanath communicates in paint a love for her new country as well as India where she was born. She's come a long way from the Jackson Pollock-like drip paintings she did when she first began to paint in 1991. More than 60 of the mixed media and acrylic works created in her current style will go on display today in the fine arts gallery at the Livonia Civic Center Library.

All of the works were painted within the last five years.

"I love color," said Viswanath. "One of my



Floral fantasy: Girija Viswanath's inspiration to paint flowers like these comes from a garden she remembers tending while growing up in India.

strongest themes are form or shape, and color. It's the background where I came from. The sun is always shining and women wear colorful saris. That's how I really fell in love with color."

"When I was growing up we had a little garden. In the morning I loved to go out and pluck the flowers. My mother did meditation and took the flowers as an offering to a God. Flowers are fragile. They won't last long so I want to capture their tenderness in my paintings."

Viswanath captures the fragility of those flowers with a most unlikely medium - Caran d'ache, a water soluble crayon made by a Swiss company, on a most unusual surface - sandpaper. She learned the technique in a class at the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center.

"I started doing it dry," said Viswanath, "but then came up with my own technique by experimenting with water and gel. I started to fall in love with it when I mixed it with water. It almost

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