

# ARTS ALIVE

THE SOUTHERN NEVADA MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS

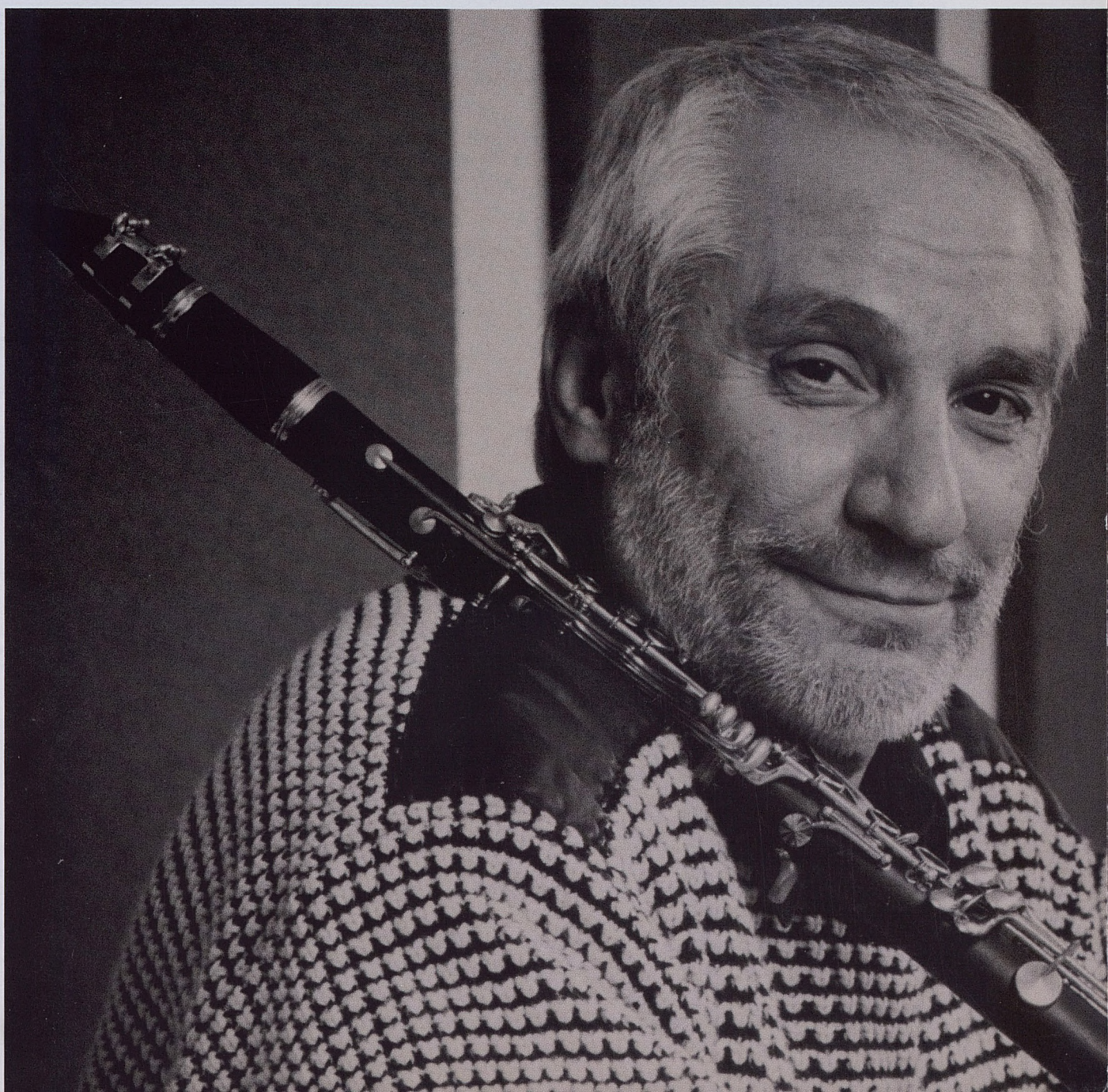
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ALLIED ARTS COUNCIL  
JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH 1991  
VOLUME 11, NUMBER 1

**Felix Viscuglia: "A Woodwind Saved My Life!"**

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**Patricia McConnell on The Artist as Shaman**





# THE HIGHWAY AS HABITAT

A ROY STRYKER DOCUMENTATION

1943 – 1955

*January 5 – February 17*



An exhibit of more than 100 black and white photographs documenting the road culture of the World War II. Sponsored by First Interstate Bank, the Nevada State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts, a state agency.

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*January 19 – December 1991*

Sponsored by the Nevada Humanities Commission and the Nevada 125th Anniversary Committee.

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# VANISHING POINT

by Patrick Gaffey

## What's happening to Arts Alive – and where's that cultural directory?

This issue we celebrate the start of the second decade of Arts Alive with its dismemberment and scatteration. Arts Council members should have already received the new Arts Alive Datebook and have recognized it as the old calendar, torn from the bowels of the magazine and sent forth alone into the valley of glitz. The sharp-eyed will have noted the cover date of this issue: "January, February, March 1991," and surmised its meaning.

As many know, the Council recently surveyed a heavy sample of its members, using a survey instrument crafted by Southwest Gas Corporation's Jackie Lanning, who also volunteered much time and expertise toward compiling and analyzing results. We hired a survey company which did a fine job questioning members by phone.

The results will be used in numerous ways, but mainly to help the staff better serve you.

Two opinions relative to Arts Alive came through clearly: You value the magazine's calendar information most of all, and your patience was wearing thin with the lateness of the past several issues. Discussions among board, the new Publications Committee and staff produced the following double-edged solution: The calendar to be separated and mailed each month; the Datebook is a small enough project to be put out dependably on time. Then, the rest of the magazine to be published quarterly (sounds much more distinguished) rather than bimonthly (actually semimonthly, a point now thankfully moot); we are hoping to be able to achieve timely

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*A profile of Felix Viscuglia, who describes himself as an "unknown quality," but who has quietly built a reputation as one of the city's top musicians. Good thing that clarinet saved his life.*

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*For thousands of years the shaman was at the center of many societies, a healer, showman, visionary and magician. Modern cultures have done away with the shaman and lost the magic and spirituality that gave his acts meaning. The author believes the person now best situated to serve shamanic functions is the artist.*

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*A freewheeling profile of UNLV Music Theatre specialist, a former street kid turned theatre professional, by a somewhat surly writer.*

## THE LIVELIEST ARTS

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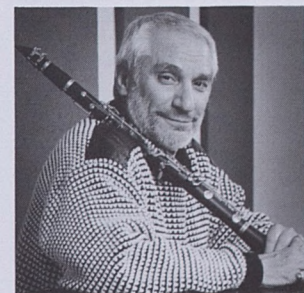
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ON THE COVER

Felix Viscuglia.  
Photo by Lee Zaichick.

Deadline for April-May-June issue is March 1.



# WHAT CAN ALLIED ARTS COUNCIL DO FOR YOU?

You know what AAC does for the community -- presents artists in schools through the Class Act program, saves Nevada's classic neon signs for the planned Museum of Neon Art, presents Jazz Month in May, the Choreographers' Showcase in February and art exhibits in the Allied Arts Gallery all year long, as well as promotes and publicizes our cultural community through Arts Alive and weekly media calendars.

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# THE LIVELIEST ARTS

NEWS OF THE ARTS IN SOUTHERN NEVADA

REPORT

## NEA: THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME

Congress drops "obscenity" proviso, but adopts a "decency" clause instead;  
meanwhile the Endowment is under fire from its own troops

by SCOTT DICKENSHEETS

The National Endowment for the Arts is alive and well, sort of, for now.

In late October, Congress approved a \$175 million, three-year reauthorization of the agency. Controversial obscenity restrictions were abandoned, but were replaced by language charging the NEA chairman to assure grants take into account "general standards of decency and respect for the diverse beliefs and values of the American public." Determinations of obscenity in individual cases will be left to the courts.

Instead of the traditional five-year life span, the authorizing legislation is only good for three, with yearly appropriations reviews, and includes a mechanism for recovering grant monies from recipients whose work is found by courts to be obscene. Also changed was the percentage of money given to state arts agencies, boosted from 20 percent to 25 percent in the first two years, and up to 27.5 in the third (see sidebar for the Nevada angle).

NEA supporters in Congress expressed disappointment with the package, some particularly concerned about the constitutionality of the decency clause, but said it was the best deal they could get, given the Endowment's wobbly public standing.

Well, it's not good enough, says Joe Papp.

Just days after Congress passed the bill, the powerful New York theatre producer turned down a whopping \$323,000 in NEA money, saying "decency" is just as slippery a standard as "obscenity," and that both were too artistically debilitating to work with. "Neither of them can really be interpreted," he said. Papp had earlier refused a \$72,000 grant.

And he is just the most visible art world dissident. In fact, the NEA is getting whacked nearly as hard by its rebelling constituents as it was by its opponents. In the year and a half since the NEA flap began, grant recipients

have noisily refused more than \$750,000 in Endowment offerings, while a number of institutions have publicly mulled the same action.

Two performance artists, Karen Finley and Holly Hughes, are suing the Endowment after being refused grants earlier this year. In an ironic twist, an NEA advisory board voted unanimously on November 2 to approve grants for the two. NEA chair John Frohnmyer, not bound by the panel's decision, hasn't said how he'll rule on the grants. Several other lawsuits have been lodged against the agency.

Shortly after that, nine of 11 members of an agency literary review panel resigned over the new decency clause, feeling it carried an "implied threat of censure." In their group letter of resignation, the dissenters questioned the constitutionality of the language.

On the plus side, now that Congress has removed content restrictions on grants, the agency has junked non-obscenity pledges put in place last year. The pledges provoked outcry among artists and a couple lawsuits.

Still, Papp feels the attacks on the agency and its own equivocations and waverings have fundamentally weakened the Endowment, perhaps beyond repair. "I knew the NEA would never be the same," he told the *Los Angeles Times*, "and it cannot be the same. I will have no association with it."

Since the Congressional action, NEA opponents have been quiet. Following the reauthorization vote, California congressman Dana Rohrabacher, a lead singer in the anti-NEA chorus, said he's bowing out of the fight - for now. He warned, though, that the battle could heat up during next year's appropriations hearing. And North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms, primary author of the NEA's troubles, was recently re-elected to a six-year term.

That sound you hear is the sharpening of swords. **aa**

## BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO US?

Thanks to provisions in the 1990 NEA reauthorization bill raising the percentage of Endowment money given to states, the Nevada State Council on the Arts will have an extra \$90,000.

According to Bill Fox, executive director of the Nevada State Council on the Arts, the NSCA's early intention is to add the money to the general grant pool, allowing the state to fund worthy projects they were unable to fund in the past.

He added, however, that the real fate of the money depends on the state budget process. The state government is currently in a belt-tightening period, with most state agencies being asked to prepare budgets reflecting five and 10 percent cuts. So far, the NSCA hasn't been asked to do that.

**Nevada Delegates.** The compromise NEA reauthorization legislation was contained in an amendment to an overall Interior appropriations bill. When it came time to vote on the amendment itself, Nevada Senator Harry Reid and Representative James Bilbray voted for it, while Representative Barbara Vucanovich and Senator Richard Bryan voted against. Vucanovich has generally opposed the NEA during the current controversy, while Bilbray has consistently supported it. The curious votes are those of Bryan and Reid, whose positions have been somewhat cloudy. For the most part, Bryan has backed the agency, though he hasn't taken a strong stand. Until the vote, Reid had been less supportive, expressing reservations about the NEA not having tighter content controls. No comments from either were available at press time. **-SD. aa**



THEATRE

# WITCH HUNT REVISITED

University Theatre looks back at a painful episode in American history

**Z**ealous congressmen, obsequious namers of names, moral gymnastics, sporadic displays of courage, the charged atmosphere of an inquisition...the communist witch hunts of late forties and early fifties had the elements of good theatre, and on March 7, the University Theatre will put it all on the stage of the Black Box Theatre.

Eric Bentley's drama *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been* is a documentary collage taken straight from the transcripts of the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings. In those days, the Red Tide was thought to be lapping at our shores, and the powerful committee grilled dozens of artists and entertainment figures as part of its attempt to purge the country of communists. The play presents a cross-section of witnesses to dramatize the range of reactions to

the committee's aggressive probing. Abe Burrows, Elia Kazan, Jerome Robbins and Sterling Hayden squealed; Larry Parks (the actor who rose to stardom in *The Jolson Story*) squirmed and tried to hold out but eventually gave in; Lillian Hellman and Arthur Miller refused to go along with the committee, Hellman rendering her memorable line, "I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions."

Bentley collapses many congressmen into three, and selects a few of the celebrity witnesses. Despite those dramatic changes, the play is textually faithful to the record.

Despite the play's resonance with current political issues, it was not chosen for that reason, according to its director, theatre department chairman Jeff Koep.

"When we chose it last spring," he said, "it

was because we thought it was a great way to train students to play real characters without making them caricatures. These are real people, as opposed to *The Glass Menagerie*, where you're playing people who might or might not be Tennessee Williams' family.

"What was interesting," he continued, "is that right after we chose it, this whole thing with Mappelthorpe happened, and the question became censorship and how far should Big Brother go. People might think this play is a museum piece, but I think it's a really current play."

He noted that the school is trying to organize a panel discussion prior to the opening, featuring local figures with connections to or perspectives on that era.

For more information, call 739-3353. aa

THEATRE

# A.R.T. PLOWS INTO MAMET, AGAIN

"Casting Mamet is as difficult as casting Shakespeare, and you have the same problem: the language."

**I**n March, Actor's Repertory Theatre will spring another David Mamet play on audiences. *Speed-the-Plow*, which opens March 22, follows last season's successful run of the playwright's *Glengarry Glen Ross*.

Why all this Mamet? "I don't think there is anyone quite like him writing today," says A.R.T. artistic director Georgia Neu. "He is truly unique, and I think he has moved theatre in a new direction, one that is specifically American."

*Speed-The-Plow* is set in Hollywood and features a producer, a studio boss and a secretary. In the play's Broadway run, pop star Madonna acted the part of the secretary. Critics were rough on her, but enthusiastic about the drama.

Mamet's work is typified by fast, jabbing dialogue and coarse language. "What I think he's doing," Neu says, "is that he feels we've given up our power because we don't think before we speak. So much of our conversation is like elevator music, so we don't say what we really think. Therefore we've lost our identity. "By using short phrases, the profanity

of the street, the repetition of key phrases, his dialogue is elevated into a kind of poetry, something that is greater than the sum of its parts.

"When we did *Glengarry*, we didn't know how people would react. We had a largely senior audience, and it was the most successful indoor show we've ever done." Received wisdom suggests you have to give seniors a bland diet, but Neu doesn't think so. "A lot of seniors have retired here because they were successful and intelligent. Their minds are still very much alive." She says it helps that although Mamet's work is dark, caustic and gritty, it's also very funny.

The key to staging Mamet, she said, is getting actors strong enough to memorize the material. "Actors can't paraphrase Mamet at all. It's incredibly difficult. Casting Mamet is as difficult as casting Shakespeare, and you have the same problem: the language. You can take many completely competent actors and give them Mamet lines, and they fall apart, they're stammering around, they can't get it. You need a special kind of actor. It's

hard, very hard."

As of this writing, Neu is negotiating with several directors, but is not considering directing it herself. "Directing Mamet is a challenge I've got somewhere in my future."

Neu's first experience of Mamet was a Theatre Exposed production of his play *Lifeboat*. "Like the best theatre, it presented a whole new way of looking at the world. It was an exceptional evening of theatre."

*Speed-the-Plow* will be presented in the Clark County Library's Jewel Box Theatre. "The library has been incredibly supportive," Neu says of the institution that has housed the company for several years now. "People complained about *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Charles Hunsburger (director of the library district) basically went out on his own, did some research, discovered the play had won a Pulitzer, and he backed us. Mamet's work is not about shock, it's about what language is."

For more information on the production, call 647-SHOW. aa



# SHARED INQUIRY INTO GREAT BOOKS

"Special group" investigates timeless ideas

by JEFFREY A. PORTNOY

Not all the fireworks in Las Vegas, intellectual or otherwise, emanate from The Strip or UNLV. For one special group, an evening at the Flamingo Library rivals other more celebrated Las Vegas diversions. Gathering for two hours on the second and fourth Thursday of each month, they eagerly trade slots, Elvis impersonators and the bar scene for the pleasures of reading and intellectual exchange. Sportsbooks are not the only books in town for these dedicated readers belonging to the Adult Great Books program.

While cadres of friends throughout the city may gather on a regular basis to discuss current bestsellers, throwing in the occasional classic novel to assuage collective guilt at having successfully circumvented the requirement during high school or college, such informal associations tend to concentrate on plot and character. In this video age, any group that encourages reading is worthy of admiration; the Great Books members, however, deserve special commendation for accepting a more rigorous challenge. The mandate of the Great Books Foundation, a not-for-profit educational organization established in Chicago in 1947, to its 2,000 adult groups is to explore for themselves the great ideas and enduring questions raised by the finest writers and thinkers throughout recorded history. Few groups could challenge the breadth of the Great Books reading list, a veritable hit parade of great poets, philosophers, playwrights and poets. The Foundation's agenda calls upon its members to grapple with the likes of Homer, Sophocles, Aristotle, Dante, Shakespeare, Gibbon, Flaubert, Conrad, Freud and Tolstoy, to name a few, seeking the various authors' perspectives on truth, reality, religion, death and love.

Although these writers may seem daunting at first, the shrewd reading strategy designed by the Great Books Foundation and the congenial participants make the material less intimidating. Some works, like Dostoevski's *Notes from the Underground* or Euripides' *Medea*, are read in their entirety; others, like Plato's *Republic* or Darwin's *The Moral Sense of Man and the Lower Animals*, are excerpted to highlight specific ideas. Thus the reading time for each session is kept to two or three hours to encourage participants to read and even reread a work prior to discussion.

The Great Books Foundation diverges from traditional academic approaches that emphasize historical and biographical context. For this group such research is taboo. Their approach stresses the individual's own

engagement with the text in the belief that the writer's ideas are as vital today as when they were written. The goal is to understand and interpret the work as if it was produced yesterday rather than in some antiquated era. The Foundation advocates a process called "shared inquiry," in which the members of the group rely upon each other to clarify, support and object to possible readings of passages and ideas until they are satisfied. They question each other, not to arrive at a single definitive answer, but to assist one another in forging a credible and defensible interpretation.

If the Foundation's schema is the skeleton of the group, its heart and mind truly belong to the people who participate. To each session they bring wisdom, wit and a willingness to share their insights into and difficulties with the text. For many in the group, conversation is the great delight, for in this exchange the members learn about others and themselves, exploring the rocky terrain of prejudices and values. The differences can often be profound. One member was depressed by Arthur Schopenhauer's essay on various religious views of death, calling it a "downer"; another found it "uplifting". Such reactions can be revealing. At times this vulnerability can be painful, but it also brings the tremendous rewards of self-examination and understanding.

Whether the individual members are highly talkative or quite reticent (reticence is accepted and not unusual), they must be willing to search their own souls and analyze their lives. Marcia Brendler, a devotee of Great Books who has participated in several states, recalls a woman from Las Vegas, a mother of seven grown children, who rarely participated in the discussions, choosing instead to listen attentively to the dialogue surrounding her. Then one night she broke into the discussion to announce that she, with the blessing of her children, was joining the Peace Corps. The group had helped her formulate new goals, and she was inspired enough to pursue them. Of course, most meetings lack that intensity of personal drama, but this story attests to the power of ideas and language to change people's lives.

Like any discussion among a group of a dozen or so, these sessions become freewheeling, despite the mandate to focus on an author's ideas. Dialogues tend to find their own direction, but when participants sojourn too far afield, Jane Macia, the capable group leader, returns them to the work at hand. Jane's agility in this situation

springs from her years as a teacher and her participation in the Basic Leader Training Course, a workshop held periodically around the country by the Great Books Foundation.

One need not commit to being a group leader to attend the training session. One avid reader in the group thinks everyone could benefit from Leader Training, claiming she finally learned how to read intelligently from this course, after a supposedly successful journey through the American educational system. She prefers, however, to avoid the strictures placed upon the leader, whose primary role is to facilitate the investigation by asking probing questions. Group leaders are dissuaded from expressing personal opinions for fear that they may unduly influence the discussion.

Jane's leadership is somewhat atypical; the Great Books Foundation encourages groups to have two leaders rather than one to share responsibilities and experiment with questions. Her singular dedication to the group suggests the power of her long-deferred dream of having the time and freedom to read and discuss with friends. As a leader, Jane is particularly adept at drawing the shy into the conversation once momentum has been established, allowing the reticent to respond to the contributions of the more vocal participants. She is also sensitive to those times when the debate becomes heated, often returning to close analysis of specific passages to cool the air.

The moments when intellectual sparks fly are particularly telling. Sid Goldberg, for example, an architect who at six months is a relative newcomer, says the group is "constantly delightful, even when we argue." Marcia Brendler enjoys the heat, especially when participants maintain a sense of humor. Work is serious enough, she says, and we need to argue in order to grow. Another woman often chooses to play the gadfly during discussion because she learns the most when the atmosphere is charged; her goal and that of the group, she explains, is not to convert, but to understand.

Sometimes not even the nightly closing of the Flamingo Library can halt the proceedings. The members, especially during the summer months, will occasionally adjourn to one of the restaurants across the street for coffee and more conversation. Despite these forays into the real world, participants tend not to socialize with each other beyond the biweekly meetings, but they are heartened to see each

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VISUAL ARTS

# ROAD PICTURES

Photos explore car culture of the forties

The Nevada State Museum and Historical Society will host *The Highway as Habitat*, an exhibit of documentary photographs of World War II-era road culture photographs, from January 5 to February 17.

"These pictures treat the subject in a lively narrative mode," says museum director Art Wolf. "Without abandoning documentary accuracy, they emphasize the people, the daily business, the social dimensions of the highway."

The photos recall an era in which American culture had recently been revolutionized by the automobile, and are populated by "an encyclopedic array of American folk-types, from truck drivers and construction workers to produce vendors, car-hops and vacationers," Wolf notes.

"The photographs portray a confident and united nation — a nation proud of its material prosperity and as yet oblivious to the massive problems bound to arise as a consequence of unlimited motorization."

The pictures were taken under the direction of sociologist Roy Stryker, who was well-known for his work with the Farm Security Administration.



The exhibit is funded in part by the Nevada State Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts and a grant from First Interstate Bank.

Several other exhibits will share the Museum with *The Highway as Habitat*, including a series of Las Vegas photographs by Winthrop Davis, shot between 1930 and 1934, which will be up through March 23.

On January 19, look for the opening of a major historical survey of an important era in Southern Nevada's growth, *World War II and the Emergence of Modern Las Vegas*. This show examines the impact of Nellis Air Force Base and the Henderson industrial complex, as well as the emergence of the resort industry at the war's end. Sponsored

by the Nevada Humanities Committee and the Nevada 125th Anniversary Commission, this display will hang for the entire year of 1991.

*America's Living Folk Traditions* opens March 2. It is a mammoth exhibit of work by winners of the National Heritage Fellowships, America's "Living Treasures." The show features 55 pieces of folk art and a series of performances that begin in March and last through May. Las Vegas is the first stop on the exhibit's national tour (the exhibit also received a write-up in the January *National Geographic*). Sponsors are the First Interstate Bank Foundation and the Nevada State Council on the Arts.

for more information on any of the exhibits, call 486-5205. aa

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VISUAL ART

# ISSUES OF VULNERABILITY

Mark and Deborah Masuoka were artists long before they were gallery owners

by SCOTT DICKENSHEETS



**B**est-known as operators of the Mark Masuoka Gallery, Mark and Deborah Masuoka were artists before they opened their high-profile commercial gallery. Each has seized on unique personal iconographies in their ceramic sculpture. For several years Mark has produced ceramic depictions of limbless human torsos, most riddled with holes. Deborah's basic image is, well....

**DEBORAH:** Giant rabbit heads.

Giant rabbit heads, six feet high and more, which begs the obvious question.

**DEBORAH:** When I began making art, it seemed like the most obvious thing to do. I had a rabbit in the studio. I think most artists choose information from their day-to-day lives and transform it in their work. It's a personal issue.

It sounds a bit odd at first, but it quickly becomes clear that for Deborah, giant rabbit heads are not a gimmick but an image

that, once probed, revealed a reservoir of meanings not suggested by the phrase "giant rabbit heads". Says Deborah, "It's an issue of vulnerability."

**MARK:** A six, seven foot rabbit.... It's intimidating. You don't know if you should be scared of it or not. It's taking the prey and blowing it up into the predator.

**DEBORAH:** Giving it power. I lived and worked in inner city Detroit, 60 percent unemployed, and I saw the violent, negative aspect of that life, and the vulnerability of the people who live there. The rabbit became a symbol of vulnerability, became a way for me to change it, to give them power, at least in the art.

Deborah says she started off doing very figurative work with a strong fantasy element. Alice in Wonderland, rabbits on stools, a world out of control, she says. "After about two years I had eliminated the form and just

used the head. I found humor in the fact of a rabbit head so huge."

**MARK:** When the size of the rabbit heads increased, the pieces started making more sense.

**DEBORAH:** The image took over. I simplified the form and abstracted the idea. I've been doing it for four years. It's an intuitive decision, to take an idea and push it, to do it as long as you need to. I feel a commitment to doing it, and I feel I haven't exhausted the possibilities. I feel a real commitment to the process. I could be doing this for 20 years or I could do it for one more year and move on to something else.

Also, I'm very interested in form, in how it hits the ground and moves through space. I'm very caught up in formal issues, in how the visualness relates to form and space. How fast it looked like it was going.

Beginning March 8, Deborah will exhibit some of her work in the Masuoka Gallery. Anticipating raised eyebrows at the appearance of nepotism, Mark insists, "It's not unheard of to exhibit in your own gallery," and adds that, as an artist, Debbie meets the same standards met by all artists who exhibit there.

**MARK:** Deb has really come into her own. I mean she has the work. It's unique, not just in ceramics, but unique in the world. I think her rabbit heads reach a universal thread which communicates to a broad range of audiences without being trendy and obvious. Her work evokes a physical and psychological presence with a feeling of a human existence. The bottom line is it's good work.

**MARK:** When Deb started doing rabbit heads, I started working with figures. I wanted to portray human emotions, human problems, social problems, so I picked the human figure. It's a pretty simple idea, really. I wanted to state some pretty personal concerns about art and life. I wanted each figure to be a self-contained narrative; the texture, the color, everything was a metaphor for emotion. It's one of the most difficult things for an artist to do, to take something you feel and translate it into a visual image—

**DEBORAH:** And hope someone else will feel it too.

Deborah seemed to feel Mark's pieces address some of the same concerns as her work, which may be an instance of shared perception derived from spending years working side by side.

**DEBORAH:** There is a vulnerability to these pieces, the way they have no arms or legs;





the holes in them...there is an openness, alluding to the spirit.

**MARK:** At first my figures were solid, all one color. Jun (Kuniko, Mark and Debbie's instructor, and later the first exhibitor at their gallery) said, "It's not doing anything." So I started putting little mouths on them, and it started getting out of control....(laughs)

And now they're full of holes!

**DEBORAH:** And that translated into the open eyes on my rabbit heads. That's another example of how we traded information.

Mark says he tried increasing his scale the way Deborah did, but it didn't have the beneficial effect on his work it did on hers. "The pieces lost relatability," he says. "They

were losing touch, losing intimacy. They had to be on a more eye-to-eye level."

**DEBORAH:** (Groping for words) Mark's work is about how he sees himself in relation to the human experience. His pieces peel away...exposing what's beneath the surface, which is the process of life. He takes the figure and talks about what it means to be human.

Mark has no plans to exhibit anytime soon. He wants to work without the spectre of an exhibit looming ahead, following the work to see where it takes him. He also has a continuing stream of gallery business to attend to, though he contends that doesn't interfere with his art very much. "It's no different than trying to make art and hold a teaching position," he says.

**MARK:** When we make art, we make art, and when we run the gallery, we run the gallery. It's a matter of getting quality time in the studio.

Quality studio time will be easier to come by soon, when they finish building a new studio. Deborah, for instance, hasn't done any work in Las Vegas; instead she's traveled to Omaha, Nebraska, where she and Mark went to grad school, where there is a kiln large enough to fire her pieces.

For more information on the exhibit of Deborah Masuoka's rabbit heads, or any shows at the Mark Masuoka Gallery, call 366-0377. aa



Misha Gordin

# SHOUT

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## LITERATURE

# JAMES CRUMLEY

Offbeat detective writer to read in Las Vegas

This is the opening to James Crumley's first novel, *The Brown Case*: "I came back into my office and there was my secretary — naked. And there was a note pinned to her breast and it said, 'Get off the Brown case!' 'What Brown case,' I said." Crumley wrote that when he was 12.

Crumley is now 50 or so, with four published novels to his name — *The Brown Case* not among them — including the cult favorite *The Last Good Kiss*, which also demonstrates Crumley's ear for a snappy opening line: "When I finally caught up with Abraham Trehearne, he was drinking beer with an alcoholic bulldog named Fireball Roberts in a ramshackle joint just outside of Sonoma, California, drinking the heart out of a fine spring afternoon."

On February 26 and 27, Crumley will be in Las Vegas for a reading sponsored by the Nevada State Council on the Arts. The first day he will be at the Culture Dog Bookstore for a book-signing party, the second day he will read at the Clark County Library on Flamingo Road.

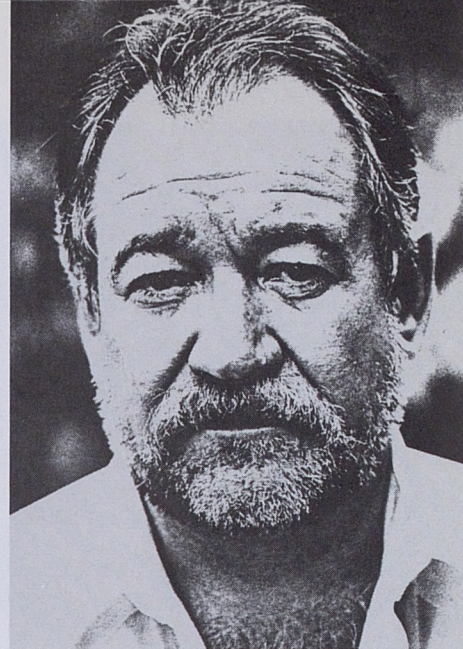
Crumley's first published book was a Vietnam novel called *One to Count Cadence*, which sold 10,000 copies, pretty good for a first novel. Then came *The Wrong Case*, his first detective novel, which is really an anti-genre book. *The Last Good Kiss*, his third book, was also an offbeat detective story, in which the murder didn't happen until the last couple of pages and, as Crumley noted, "you don't find out who did it, although you know who's responsible." That book netted

him a cult following. His last novel was called *Dancing Bear*, featuring the main character, Milo Milodragovitch, from *The Wrong Case*. Since then he has issued a collection of short stories and non-fiction pieces, *Whores*.

Crumley has been praised by *Time* for his surreal vision of Montana and the west. He writes in a style that's ridden around in his back pocket awhile, the edges smoothed off, comfortable creases laid in, worn but supple. His characters are that way too, like old leather wallets that have been well used but are still holding up.

Asked for his literary influences, Crumley mentions Raymond Chandler in an off-hand, of-course kind of way and then names "Durrell, Faulkner, Fitzgerald...and the Russians. I read constantly. My life is sort of made up around books. I started writing books because I was so attracted to them."

Consequently, Crumley works hard to dodge the stock props of his chosen genre. Not for him the surly, rock-ribbed tough guys striking noir poses as they ingeniously escape capture in time to get everyone together in the drawing room for the unveiling of the cliché.... His people are tired and cynical and given to boozy excess. C.W. Sughrue, main character in *The Last Good Kiss*, would rather fish or drink beer than track down a case, while Milodragovitch occasionally fortifies himself with toots of cocaine. Many of the people in his books are damaged goods. They drink hard and without much pleasure. But in Crumley's hands some of them have a tarnished nobility, and beneath



their flawed exteriors his main characters have a solid — though sometimes ambiguous — moral core. He has been trying to squeeze out another novel, featuring the main character of *The Last Good Kiss*. "I hope by next fall to have it done," he says. "I've just been unable to gather any free time to work on it."

A couple years ago, *Premiere* magazine polled 10 top directors about their favorite unproduced film projects. Two of the directors named movies based on Crumley novels. "Yeah, I got two out of ten, one-fifth of the list," Crumley chuckles. Still neither has been made.

"My books don't have the kind of clear-cut heroes Hollywood is looking for," Crumley says. "They are hard books to try to straighten out. (Director) Tim Hunter and I almost went insane trying to get a straight-line plot out of *Dancing Bear*. Of course I don't want a straight-line plot (in the books), but it's ironic that years later I'm the one trying to straighten it out."

Crumley has spent much of the last half-decade toiling in Hollywood, writing screenplays. Solo or in collaboration, he has penned adaptations of *Dancing Bear*; a British comic book, *Judge Dredd*; the non-fiction Vietnam book *The Tunnels of Cu-Chi*, (which was finished eight days before *Platoon* was released); he is currently polishing a screenplay of James McElroy's *The Big Nowhere*.

Unlike many writers, he hasn't found Hollywood a writer's hell. "Every sort of Hollywood horror story you hear about has happened to me in one way or another. But it's been tremendously interesting to hang around with people of egos that size who simply let it run rampant.

"I don't have any complaints about Hollywood. You have to be an adult about it. Some writers go down there with big egos and give us all a bad name."

For more information on Crumley's reading call 733-0313; for info on the book-signing, call Culture Dog Bookstore at 454-4800. aa

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*Miguel de Cervantes*

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# THE GOAL IS IN SIGHT

Progressive arts group gives voice to the margins



**B**lair Dagal and In Sight have a modest goal: "To put some color into a sterile society."

He laughs. Dagal is easily one of the nicest guys around, gushingly sincere and vastly energetic. A large, busy man, he almost always has a straw hat planted firmly on his head and a crystal stud earring in his nose. He says he feels connected to "a higher source, an unlimited creative potential. What I'm trying to do, in my own way, is enlighten the community about the importance of cultural growth through the arts." Man needs the arts, he says, and visa versa.

In Sight is his tool for social enlightenment, an infant arts organization dedicated to promoting progressive culture. In a remarkably short time, he has stitched together a network of artists and creative people who have been existing at the margins of the Las Vegas cultural community, some perhaps deservedly so, others not. Those aren't the kind of judgements Dagal is prone to make; in his eyes, any artist committed to doing work with passion and intensity deserves a chance to be seen or heard. "I believe anyone can tap into that unlimited creative energy," he says.

"There was nobody showing a lot of these people's works," Dagal said, "and that

inspired me. There was just a lack of an alternative from the mainstream, and I saw gifted artists and truly talented performers, and they were miserable, they were disconnected."

As of this writing, In Sight has produced three evenings of multi-media arts entertainment, featuring visual arts exhibits, music, poetry, theatre, you name it. In fact, the first event came before the organization. "It was a brainstorm," he said. "There was this huge space at Bert's 2nd Story, and we said, 'Let's do something!'"

One thing Dagal and company don't share with a lot of progressive, cutting-edge types is a contempt for the mainstream. To Dagal, that means negative energy, which is not what he or In Sight is about. In fact, a recent In Sight production served in part as a fundraiser for the Desert Sculptors Society, about as mainstream a group as you can find.

"We're not excluding the mainstream. We're interested in anything with a message or a feeling. I think you can have progressive, mainstream, whatever, and incorporate everything harmoniously."

Dagal came to town a year ago from Los Angeles, where he was involved in the city's underground cultural scene. Once here he started putting out feelers and artists of every persuasion came out of the woodwork. It happened rapidly, faster than Dagal could have imagined. Every person he talked to put him in touch with several others, spiraling outward, until it seemed like everyone you ran into asked, "Have you heard of this Blair Dagal person?"

Dagal is bursting with plans for In Sight, including some unusual dinner theatre productions, continuing shows, and maybe hooking up with other progressive culture groups in this country and abroad. He can,

without flinching, imagine a day when In Sight will take its productions on the road to Europe.

Yeah, but what's in it for him? "Money is not the motivating factor behind In Sight," he says. "I see some great work here and I just want to share that with people. Of course, I have nothing against prosperity," he admits, "I'd like to see our artists make a living through their work." He wouldn't mind supporting himself though In Sight, but doesn't see himself making stacks of money from it. Nor is it a vanity forum for his art, since he's not an artist.

So if he's not an operator and he's not an artist, what is he? He smiles. "I'm just a regular guy." Yeah. **aa**

## KIMBERLY McCALL-WARREN

**A**llied Arts office manager Kimberly McCall-Warren has left the organization.

Kim labored in these barren precincts for three productive years. Hers was a crucial position in our small but exceedingly busy office, requiring extraordinary organizational abilities, as well as the deft touch of a diplomat, the skills of traffic cop, the knowledge of a bookkeeper, the patience of a safecracker, the back of a stevedore and the attitude of a chain-gang boss. Kim had all this and more, and did her job like she had three hands. Thanks to her efforts, an impossible situation was rendered merely improbable, and the office ran pretty smoothly. On top of that, her opinion was commonly solicited in creative matters, and listened to.

Kim left in late November for the greener (and rainier) pastures of Seattle, where she will assist in her husband's business and attend college. She is missed. **aa**

### OBITUARY


## RALPH GARI

**R**alph Gari, a saxophonist who had worked in several showrooms around town, died October 30 in Burbank, California, at age 63.

After arriving in Las Vegas in 1951 with the Frankie Carl Band, Gari worked the showrooms until 1974.

Aside from hotel performing, Gari was an assistant professor at Long Beach State and represented the United States in the 1975 World Congress of Music. His playing can also be heard in several film classics, including *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Toys in the Attic*.

Gari is survived by his wife, ex-wife, four children and five grandchildren. **aa**



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# SELECTED SHORTS

## SINGING SWINGLES

Vocal group performs Bach to Beatles



The Swingle Singers will swing into Las Vegas February 19 for a concert sponsored by the Southern Nevada Community Concert Association. Swingle Singers, you ask? Hey, they have credentials, including performances with the London and Houston symphony orchestras, and the Royal Philharmonic.

According to Jan Neilson of Community Concerts, the Swingles vocalize the sounds of musical instruments. "They perform a blend of Baroque, Tin Pan Alley and jazz styles," she says. "Their scope is Bach to the Beatles."

"Most extraordinary musical event of the year," raved a critic in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. "They generate more enthusiasm in the audience than I have seen in years."

The concert will be at 8 p.m., in Artemus Ham Concert Hall; attendance is generally limited to season subscribers, though a donation to the Patron's Fund will also get you in. Call 648-8962 or 798-4321 for details. Memberships are \$30 adults, \$10 for students (through high school). Call the same numbers.

## NEW VIEWS

UNLV opens photo gallery

The UNLV art department has opened a new photography gallery on the second floor of the Alta Ham Fine Arts building. Hours are 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. weekdays. "The displays will offer students and the Las Vegas community the opportunity to view cutting-edge photographic images by photographers in various parts of the country," says Pasha Rafat, UNLV photography instructor.

Beginning January 28, the gallery will exhibit panoramic black and white images by Rick E. Juras, of Dayton, Ohio, and social documentary pictures by Bruce Bennet, of Rochester, New York. Colorado photographer Alicia Baily will show work beginning March 4.

For more info, call 739-3237.

## NEW MAN

New NSCA services director in place

The Nevada State Council on the Arts has appointed Donovan Michael Gray as director of services, replacing the outgoing John Shelton, who is now director of Reno's Pioneer Center for the Performing Arts.

Gray was recently director of the Western Arts Management Institute, and has worked with the Oregon Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts.

In his new position, he will be responsible for public information and technical assistance services to state arts groups. He will also work with Nevada's network of arts presenters.

"The Council is fortunate in having Mr. Gray join our staff at this particular time," enthused NSCA executive director Bill Fox. "Having a small staff means each member must wear many hats and wear them well."

## HALL-OF-FAMER

Wegner inducted into state literary hall of fame

UNLV instructor Hart Wegner has been inducted into the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame, the first Southern Nevada so honored, as well as the first foreign-born writer.

Wegner, who teaches German, comparative literature and film studies, was inducted on the strength of *Houses of Ivory*, his 1988 book of linked short stories set in Eastern Europe before, during and after World War II.

He and fellow inductees Virginia Coffman of Reno and the late Charlton Laird joined previous honorees Robert Laxalt, the late Walter van Tilberg Clark, Joanne de Longchamps and Sessions "Buck" Wheeler.

To included in the Hall, writers must be established, have written in or about Nevada, received critical attention and be judged by the committee to have produced quality work.

## MUSICAL MADNESS

P.D.Q. Bach comes to Master Series

One of the great musical satirists of our time, P.D.Q. Bach, will perform as part of the Charles Vanda Master Series on January 24, in the Artemus Ham Concert Hall.

In the guise of the mischievous Bach, Professor Peter Schickele has perpetrated such "classical" compositions as the Grammy-winning 1712 *Overture and Other Musical Assaults*, a Billboard chart-topper.

At presstime, the Master Series concert was scheduled to include such twisted masterworks as "The Howdy Symphony," "Royal Firewater Musick: Fuga Meshuga," and "Fantasieschtick for Piano and Orchestra."

*The New York Times*: "An evening with P.D.Q. Bach is a very funny show - even for



P.D.Q. Bach will perform Jan. 24, 1991 at UNLV. This promises to be a hilarious evening; composer Peter Schickele is re-knowned for such works as "Concerto for Left-handed Sewer Flute and Orchestra," but is also a serious composer.

people who like music but don't know why."

Musicians from the Las Vegas Symphony will aid and abet Schickele in his wackiness. For more information call 739-3801.

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Photo by Lee Zaichick.

Felix Viscuglia: "A woodwind saved my life!"





# Principal CLARINETIST AND THEN SOME

By BILL MOODY

It's an old musician's joke: How do you get to Carnegie Hall? *Practice*. For Felix Viscuglia, principal clarinetist with the Las Vegas Symphony and charter member of the Sierra Wind Quintet, it's an ongoing endeavor.

"I'm still trying to learn the clarinet," says Viscuglia, who performed at Carnegie Hall with the Boston Symphony. And he's only half joking. "You learn by teaching, sharing what you've learned." As a lecturer in the UNLV Department of Music, Viscuglia has a lot to share with his students.

For example, there's the 25 years with the Boston Pops Orchestra under the direction of Arthur Fiedler, and later John Williams. The Boston Symphony Orchestra (1966-1978), the Utah Symphony (1984-1987), European tours, a season at Tanglewood and solo performances at Carnegie Hall, Symphony Hall in Boston, as well as Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Add to that a varied background in film, television and jazz, Viscuglia has seemingly done it all. So what's he doing in Las Vegas?

"Good question," he says, laughing. Viscuglia laughs a lot, about the music business, his several marriages, and sometimes about the clarinet. "You have to if you play woodwind instruments. Seriously, I guess it was the blizzard of 1978 in Boston that did it, the weather. I detest cold weather, and I'd already done some work here."

In fact, Viscuglia had worked briefly in the Las Vegas Hilton house band. "That's strange work. You play some whole notes behind a singer, the string players have newspapers on the floor and all for great pay. Those that know will understand. Anyway, Joe Stivers convinced me UNLV was 'the oasis in the cultural desert'. To a lot of people I'm an unknown quantity here. *What has he done?* I could have stayed in the Boston Symphony, the fat cat, but I like to help things develop." Viscuglia shrugs. "I don't need the experience, and it's certainly not the financial reward. I've gone from big bucks to virtually nothing."

Teaching for Viscuglia has always been as much a part of his life as performing. The New England Conservatory of Music, Boston University, MIT, and the University of Utah have all availed themselves of his services over the years. He was also a clinician for the Selmer saxophone company. "It's a way of life for me," Viscuglia says of teaching. "I've been doing it since high school." He admits, however, that today's students are different. "There's not the same motivation, discipline, there was when I was coming up, but I'm adaptable to whatever teaching level I'm asked to do. I like the challenge of teaching and with the performance juries [students are required to perform before a panel of teachers] we have a built-in system here, we don't have to dance around the issue. Students quickly get sorted out if they can't cut it."

The Sierra Woodwind Quintet is Viscuglia's first love in performing these days. "It's first class all the way," he says of the group he helped found. The quintet has since won several national awards, and its leader, bassoonist Yoshiyuki Ishikawa, won the Governor's Arts Award. "He's the driving force for publicity and organization," says Viscuglia. The other members of the group make up the core of the Las Vegas Symphony.

Viscuglia is also one of the few classical musicians who can

successfully bridge the gap between symphonic music and jazz. He cites trumpeter Wynton Marsalis as a prime example of the new breed of young musicians, those able to move freely in both the jazz and symphonic worlds. "The interpretation of the music is just so different, but it's much more likely that a jazz player can play classical music than the other way around."

Viscuglia got his jazz start with a Marine band and credits the clarinet with saving his life. When his unit was shipped out to Okinawa in World War II, the band needed another reed player. While the rest of the outfit went off to battle, Viscuglia practiced. "You see why I'm still practicing."

Later he was playing tenor at Billy Berg's in Los Angeles. When he plays jazz, Viscuglia drops Felix and becomes Phil. "One night this guy brought a kid piano player in to Billy Berg's. He was a pretty good player, too. You know who it was? Andre Previn." Viscuglia himself has recorded and played jazz with the likes of Nat Pierce, Serge Chalof, Charlie Mariano and Clark Terry. While with the Boston Symphony he helped found "WUZ", the jazz quintet of the Symphony. "We were the darlings of Boston," remembers Viscuglia. "I still play tenor with Si Zentner's band once in a while, and I like going to the Four Queens when there's a good horn on."

But what about the popular so-called jazz players like David Sanborn and Kenny G.? Viscuglia shrugs. "With someone like Grover Washington, Jr., the standard is getting higher, but generally, the public just doesn't know what it likes or what they're doing," he says.

Whether the symphony public, at least in Las Vegas, does, is another question. The city has come in for some harsh criticism recently regarding the meager budget for the symphony, and Viscuglia agrees that for the orchestra to reach the level of other big city symphonies, more money is needed. "Audiences have to be educated," Viscuglia says of the Las Vegas scene. "It's a slow learning process on their part but it's getting better all the time, although schedules and funding need a good deal of improvement."

As the only member of the symphony to have played in one of the big five orchestras, Viscuglia is used to big budgets, financial rewards and the prestige of conductors such as John Williams and Arthur Fiedler.

So what else is there about Las Vegas? "Hey, if you want action, you've got it, even if you don't use it." For the most part, Viscuglia admits his main passion outside of performing and teaching is reading.

Now, as he puts it, Viscuglia is working on his fourth pension while continuing to teach and perform on the instrument he says saved his life. "The business has been good to me. I love to play and I love to teach. I shudder at the thought of stopping."

Not a likely scenario for Felix Viscuglia.

*Bill Moody, an instructor in the UNLV English Department, is a frequent contributor to Arts Alive, and is a musician himself, a drummer who can occasionally be seen pounding the skins in jazz clubs around town. aa*



# THE ARTIST as Shaman

by Patricia McConnel

## Before

you finally shrugged your shoulders and said, "Oh well, that's kids, I guess," you must have puzzled at least a little over rock 'concerts', wondered why so many are little more than ritualized emotional orgies performed by rock stars whose bodies are decorated with tattoos and jewelry designed to be offensive to the ruling class, whose hair styles look as if they are rat-infested, and whose extravagant costumes flaunt a funky, flamboyant pansexuality that drives fans into frenzies of desire and fan's parents into apoplexy. Most of the people attending are loaded. The audience doesn't care because music is not what the concert is about. It is obligatory that the concert hall be overcrowded and overheated, that the audience be packed and squirming like fish in a net and that there be psychedelic lights and driving drum beats. It is also obligatory that the musicians jump and gyrate like dervishes. The men and women on stage, who may or may not be decent musicians, who may or may not be decent people, are worshipped by the audience to the point of hysteria. Fans faint, scream, weep.

What is going on here, anyway?

A pagan ceremony more than fifty thousand years old, that's what. One that has completely lost its mystical, magical underpinnings.

The rock star practices showmanship; what the audience wants is shamanship. The audience's expectations are based on the fact that the rock star is doing a great many things that shamans do, but without understanding what he or she is doing. The audience participates actively in the rites without knowing what it is doing, either, and demands that the rock star be part god, part doctor, part lover, part savant and prophet. That is, they demand that he be a shaman.

## THE SHAMANIC TRADITION

A true shaman is indeed a healer, magician, savant, and prophet. In trance, he (or she) can leave his body and travel to other worlds to gain crucial knowledge and/or perform heroic feats to help his community. In these worlds he propitiates, negotiates with, or if necessary does battle with the obstreperous spirits who are responsible for troubles in the ordinary world. When someone is ill it is because a spirit has robbed him of his personal power or perhaps even his soul. It is the shaman's job to retrieve it. He may travel to the 'upper world' to seek the help of benevolent spirits, or to the 'lower world' to deal with the troublesome ones. He has a particular powerful spirit or animal familiar as his chief assistant.

Because of the dangers in traveling between the worlds, shamans must be people of exceptional courage and psychological strength. They take enormous risks, both symbolic and real. For example, a shaman trying to cure a serious illness may use his powers to take the illness upon himself, then wage war on the illness in his own body rather than in that of the patient. Self-sacrifice is a large element in the shaman's calling. True shamanhood is a life of service. We lost the rock star a couple paragraphs back, didn't we?

The person a shaman treats is expected to participate in his own healing. If the patient is not committed, does not perform his obligations wholeheartedly, he may not get well. An individual or an entire community may enter trance along with the shaman, may participate in his magic ceremonies. It's an ancient racial memory at work in the psyches of rock concert audiences.

Like our most gifted artists, the shaman is an ecstatic and a visionary. That is, he is adept at accessing extraordinary states of perception, insight, and emotion that are far beyond the normal human's capacity to experience. Such states are necessary for him to do his magic. He may or may not use hallucinogenic drugs to assist him in achieving such states. He may also use

*The rock star practices showmanship; what the audience wants is shamanship.*



fasting and solitary sojourns in the wild in conditions of extreme stress – the vision quest. He 'suffers for his art.'

True shamans actively seek suffering. It is the path to power. Jesus – the quintessential shaman – was not only a healer, a prophet and a magician, he also suffered greatly on our behalf: "Jesus died for our sins." (But he did not invent the death and resurrection trick. It has been a commonplace in shamanic cultures since as far back as we have records.) In our modern world where we are afraid of the slightest discomfort, we have difficulty understanding the necessity of suffering, but this is a very recent blindness. Religious ascetics, yogis, and shamans have always known its transformative power.

In many societies of the world, the shaman is the most important person in the community. In our society, a person claiming to have such powers is considered a lunatic.

## THE TOOLS OF A SHAMAN'S MAGIC

The shaman is a consummate showman, the likely ancestor of the rock musician. But he is also the likely ancestor of all our art forms. To work his magic, he drums, plays instruments, sings, chants, dances, paints (the earliest known cave paintings are thought to be magical in intent; today, sand paintings are important psychic tools of the Navajo medicine person), sculpts fetishes and totems, creates magnificent masks and costumes to intimidate or charm the spirits or to invite them to enter his body, uses ventriloquism to project the voices of the spirits and bring the wind into every corner of the tent, hypnotizes himself and his patient or audience, utilizes hallucinogenic drugs to enhance his power and his ecstatic visions (very literally "tripping" to the other worlds), performs magic tricks that make today's magicians look like they have three left hands, and, as the grand finale, performs the old death and resurrection trick – the origin of the magician's tradition of sawing a person in half onstage and then bringing her back to life and wholeness.

The shaman knows when it is necessary and appropriate to promote and alter state of consciousness, and how to do it. When hallucinogenic drugs are used – they are not used in all shamanic cultures – they are considered sacred because their purpose is sacred.

The mind produces its own hallucinogens under certain conditions of body chemistry. These conditions occur naturally during extreme physical exertion, which accounts for the "runner's high". Meditation, music, drumming, dance, certain light conditions, a sonorous human voice and a variety of other circumstances also trigger such states. Many artists and entertainers enter altered states of consciousness naturally while creating or performing. Audiences at any kind of performance can become "entranced". This is what is going on at rock concerts, where any or all of these triggers are in evidence, and the majority of the audience is receptively loaded.

## THE SECOND OLDEST PROFESSION

The tradition of shamanism goes back as far as the earliest archaeological traces of man; that is, for many, many thousands of years. Cave paintings, stone fetishes, and grave sites offer ample evidence that people have always tried to negotiate with supernatural forces.

What is most remarkable about this tradition is that it has stayed the same among nomadic peoples for all of history that we know about. Anthropologists agree that when social customs do not evolve and

also do not disappear, it means there has been no reason to change them because they work. In the case of shamanism, the oldest tradition in the world, it also means that its principles are deeply imbedded in our species memory. We carry the need for magic in our genes, and perhaps the techniques to accomplish it as well. Certainly there are many people who unconsciously access these techniques, and it is my contention that artists are the most likely to do so.

The worship of science and rationality has almost purged our society of a culturally-supported context for magic, spiritual healing, and contact with the spirit world (it doesn't matter if spirits are real or imagined, we intuit their existence), so this archetypal need – perhaps our strongest instinct after food, sleep, and sex – is starved. Our dominant organized religions no longer serve many of us because they have blindly purged themselves of exactly what we need: ceremony, mumbo-jumbo, and magic. The modernization of the Catholic mass is a prime example.

Yet, driven by an unconscious need we have no name for because we no longer have a context for it, we feel mysteriously fascinated by – sometimes obsessed with – certain charismatic figures and certain phenomena in art and culture. We demand that our rock stars, movie stars, writers and artists save our souls and our lives because they are the ones acting the most like shamans.

When we recognized a shaman we focus all our needs on him or her. The whole thing usually goes awry because both the adored and the adoring have no spiritual framework for what is happening to them. The adoring do not understand that their real need is spiritual. The adored does not understand that his primary calling is of service to his tribe, not service to his ego and his personal wealth. It was this quandry that drove poor Houdini mad, it was what destroyed Jack Kerouac. It was what caused poor Bob Dylan to remark once, "What am I anyway, some kinda Messiah walkin' around?"

What often happens to the reluctant shaman is that the call to service is so little understood, and therefore so frightening, that he is baffled, bewildered, and overwhelmed because he does not understand why his fans make such exorbitant demands on him. Thus he abdicates the most powerful responsibility he has – to use his personal gift to bring back from his creative trances the healing free-form visions of his experience. The strain may destroy him, drive him to drugs, outrageous egoism, or the safety of structured traditional religions. This is what happened to Little Richard (a born-again Christian), Cat Stevens (a born-again Muslim), and Mick Jagger (a born-again Hindu). Only a courageous and gifted few, like John Lennon, hear the call for what it is and expand to fill the mantle.

## THE MAKING OF A SHAMAN

In any shamanic culture, a youth who is moody, strange, a daydreamer, a misfit, or a maladapted outsider, is likely to be identified as a potential shaman. In some traditions shamans are distinguished by severe early illnesses or disabilities, either physical or psychological. Extended or acute suffering of any kind are believed to be the result of the theft of the soul by evil spirits. To survive, the prospective shaman must descend into the lower world to retrieve his soul. There he endures many trials and gains knowledge and wisdom, usually guided by a guardian spirit. If he survives he is deemed to be prepared for shamanhood, since by virtue of his success he is now an expert. He can make the journey to retrieve souls and cure

*Like our most gifted artists, the shaman is an ecstatic and a visionary.*



illnesses both spiritual and physical on behalf of others. This is the shaman's primary function.

In contemporary "advanced" societies, the misfits and outsiders – those with what we call psychological disabilities but what the shamanic cultures might call gifts – become actors, standup comics, musicians, sculptors, painters, poets, dancers, magicians, circus performers, and writers, as well as occultists, clairvoyants, doctors, priests or preachers, prize fighters and wrestlers, psychiatrists, stunt people, nuns or monks, spirit mediums, hypnotists, witches, drug addicts, tarot readers, lion tamers, handwriting analysts, satanists, astrologers and computer programmers.

The functions that used to be fulfilled by one person, the shaman, are now split up and divided among a variety of specialists, most of whom have never come into contact with shamanic ways of curing, empowerment, and magic. Yet intuitively, like the rock stars, they all call upon shamanic methods to assist them in whatever it is they think they are doing.

We no longer have the shaman's permission to be outsiders. We teach at universities, sit on arts advisory panels, display our art or give readings in the county library. Imagine Toulouse Lautrec teaching at Clark County Community College! Imagine Antonin Artaud directing a Neil Simon play for public television! Once we've arrived, though, we are allowed anything. Rock stars are expected to be ambisexual, drug-taking flamboyant rebels. Well-known artists and authors are permitted to be substance abusers and misfits. But we have to go through hell to get that permission. It isn't a society that says to us, "Oh, you don't seem to conform easily, you must be an artist," and then nurtures and encourages that nonconformity, finds a socially useful role for it as the ancient cultures did.

It hardly needs mentioning how many of our greatest artists, in whatever genre you want to name, have had extremely painful, traumatic childhoods. Louis Armstrong, Charles Dickens, Charlie Chaplin, Bessie Smith, Billie Holiday, Toulouse Lautrec – make your own list. Like the shamans, they have been through hell, survived, and come back with a creative gift.

It has become popular to scoff at the old dictum, "An artist must suffer for his art," but I wonder. Many artists not only suffer painful childhoods, but also suffer in the creation of their works, just as the shaman suffers in his trance, especially when they plumb the depths of their psyches to access their creative visions – another way of going to hell and bringing back the treasure, the prize, the gift, the soul.

## HOW ARE ARTISTS LIKE SHAMANS?

Let me count the ways:

We can find mediums to assist us in contacting the spirits of the dead, but they do not normally go into the underworld to make such contact, as shamans do. Nor do they wrestle with spirits on our behalf. The artist is the one who does that.

Actors achieve transformative magic every time they "become" their roles. Many use trance to help them get into character. Some become famous for performing a particular type of shamanic role – consider John Wayne, who saved us from all the bad guys, time and time again.

Actors in a thousand TV, movie and stage roles fight with demons of one kind or another – space aliens, drug czars, secret agents, monsters. We confuse the actors with the roles they play and project on them the more demanding role of shaman. Sometimes they exploit this projection, like Wayne, like Sylvester Stallone. This is perhaps the single most destructive perversion of the shamanic function. Stallone is the

quintessence of this syndrome. He goes into hell, does battle with the evil spirits, and in the process regains his soul – at least he did in the first *Rocky* (I haven't seen the others). And to the extent that we identify with him, he does it for all of us. So far, so good, in shamanic terms.

Where the Stallone movies do harm is that the emphasis is on violence, violence and more violence, justified by the rationalization that the hero has no other choice. Stallone perceives quite well a great deal of what we expect of him, but lacks perception of the shaman's obligation to serve his community and therefore abdicates his obligation to bring back from hell a truth (vision) that will liberate us. He does not suggest, for example, that there may be better ways to defeat the bad guys than by killing them. He does not suggest that we should be careful how we define who the bad guy is, and so for street gangs, for example, the bad guy is any member of another gang.

But not all stars have this blindness. I am excited about the emergence of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, shamans to the very young. Here they are, shamanic in a most traditional way, having received their initiation and training in the lower world (the sewer) from a power animal (the rat), to emerge transformed into shamans (ninja warriors) to do good for their community by battling malevolent spirits (the forces of evil). Their turtle suits could not be more shamanic!

Although the real life creators of the Turtles started out with the same old violence-based stories, they seem to have themselves been transformed once they realized their impact on the very young. For example, when the Turtles appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show, a child in the audience asked, "Where are your weapons?" A Turtle answered, "We have put down our weapons and taken up musical instruments." They sang and danced, and used the old preacher's technique of call and response to implant a character-building message:

Turtles: "Walk..." Kids: "straight!"

Turtles: "Talk..." Kids: "straight!"

Turtles: "Think..." Kids: "straight!"

Turtles: "Be..." Kids: "straight!"

Here, at last, is a group that seems to understand its shamanic role, a group that is changing and growing to perform their shaman's duties in a more responsible way. I would be interested to know how much of their technique is based on intuitive wisdom (read: memories carried in the genes) and how much is knowledgeable, deliberate use of ancient shamanic methods.

Sometimes it is the actor's personal life we project on rather than the roles she plays. Consider Elizabeth Taylor. The reason we adore her is not primarily because she is beautiful or a fine actress but because she periodically wrestles – publicly, in the pages of *The National Enquirer* – the deadliest demons: alcohol, drugs, potentially fatal illnesses, self-destructive food binges. We make her our proxy, then tell ourselves, "It's lucky I'm not fabulously successful and famous because look what happens to you. Tsk tsk." We love her for her suffering; it reconciles us with our failure to achieve our dreams. She does it so we don't have to. This is the shaman's job, but a perverted version of it. Elizabeth Taylor does not sacrifice herself to save our souls. She couldn't care less for our souls. We have many such sacrificial artist lambs: Judy Garland, Jack Kerouac, Janis Joplin, Truman Capote, Jim Morrison, Sylvia Plath – the list goes on and on and on.

Somewhere about the sixth grade, we learn that

*The shaman is the likely ancestor to all our art forms.*



"Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast." (I used to picture an enormous breast with fangs.) Musicians are trance-inducers. The best have to do nothing more than play their music. Others augment their spells with all kinds of shamanic tricks – consider James Brown and David Bowie.

Rhythmic repetition is well-known to assist trance induction, and bass tones are in the range of frequencies that produce alpha states in the brain, the states that are associated with euphoria and other pleasurable mood conditions.

Joseph Campbell, the mythologist, said, "If there is no drum there is no shaman." Drums are probably the oldest existing musical instrument, but they are much more than that in shamanic societies, where they are regarded as having mystical properties. The creation of a drum is often steeped in magic and ceremony, and it is deemed to have a spirit and a life of its own. In our anti-animistic society we have a hard time seeing spirit in so-called inanimate objects, but the drum has always been a spirit-companion and assistant of the shaman. The shaman uses it to call his spirit assistants, to induce trance, and to find his way back from the underworld.

No wonder, then, that drummers are key figures in rock groups. No more mystery about why the megabass feature in stereo systems, the technique that greatly augments the bass rhythms in a recording, is so popular. Bass tones and rhythms not only alter our brain chemistry to make us feel good, but also speak to a deep, archetypal memory going back at least fifty thousand years.

Chanting, with its monotonous tones, repetition, and rhythms, is closely related to drumming as a means of inducing trance and effecting magic. It is still used in every religion I know of, ranging from the call and response of American southern preachers and Catholic priests to the ages-old chants of Buddhism. Rap artists are, in essence, chanting.

Poet songwriters like Leonard Cohen, Paul Simon, and Van Morrison write lyrics that are not comprehensible to the rational mind, yet it's clear from the popularity of these artists that they are striking very deep chords somewhere within us. They are giving us magic incantations.

Magicians, stunt people and circus performers have evolved directly from the shamanic tradition. They emerged when Christianity drove the pagans and the shamans underground. The trickery and pure physical skill the shaman used to convince his constituency of his extraordinary powers, the present performer uses for the sole purpose of entertainment. But today there is no curing, no public service.

Painters and sculptors are visionaries extraordinaire. Many are in trance states when they work. Ideally, they access their unique creative vision and then give us the vision in a form that can be preserved and communicated to all. The original paintings and carvings were probably magical in intent. Contemporary art has lost a great deal of this magic.

## SO WHAT?

It seems to me that the shamanic, visionary element in art is precisely what defines it as art rather than mere design. My reading suggests that the very origin of art is the shamanic tradition. That the roots of art have been forgotten explains why a huge percent of the art displayed today is lifeless and boring. It also explains why so much music and theatre and graphic art relies on sensational elements in an attempt to make itself exciting.

Intense sensuality is an element in ecstasy, but

without the mystic exaltation, the rapture that goes with transcending the human condition, all you have is a sensory pigout. Without the element of service to one's community, shamanic power is self-serving and masturbatory.

Without a fully developed shamanic vision, we get whore/priestesses like Madonna, who degrade themselves by understanding only the whore part and not the holy part. We get Jack Kerouac, who went through hell to bring us his vision of America but was destroyed by the belief that the public adored him for the wrong reasons. We get rock concerts that mimic many of the elements of shamanic rites but leave the participants without personal empowerment, without any healing process except perhaps catharsis, which is only temporary. With the core of the mystical impulse unfulfilled (the desire to be healed, to be empowered spiritually, to transcend the self), the need for a fix soon returns.


It is the job of artists to be outsiders; it is our job to show society's face as well as our own in our personal House of Mirrors; it is our job to plumb the depths of our personal sickness and suffering, to go to hell and come back with the secret that will heal, liberate, enlighten; it is our job to risk upsetting the Jesse Helmses of this world with that message, as Mappelthorpe did. Sometimes it is our job to die in the effort, like van Gogh, like Virginia Woolf, because we risk too much, go too far, and cannot distinguish our lives from our art. Because we *should* not distinguish our lives from our art.

I don't mean to say that we should all jump into alcoholism, drug addiction, madness, and dedicated self-destructive living. That's just the point, that's exactly where so many contemporary artists are going wrong. Because artists don't recognize our ancient role as shamans, we are bewildered by our attraction to mind-altering substances and methods. We don't understand the ancient spiritual genesis of that attraction and so we are controlled by it, not the other way around. True shamans hold sacred their drugs and their ability to show us other realities. They use them to enhance their visions in the service of their community; they do not use them to destroy themselves. They use them to expand their consciousness, not to obliterate it.

It would be ridiculous to demand that the artist become a true shaman with the responsibility of healing all society's ills. All the artist is obliged to do is her art. However, I do believe that we must acknowledge the tremendous power we have to effect our audiences at a deep and mystical level, that we must learn all we can about it, that we must take that power seriously and use it responsibly.

Once we do that, we again become dangerous visionaries in constructive ways, like Dickens, like Dostoevski. Let us scare the bejeezus out of Jesse Helms and his consorts. Let us scream out that the emperor has no clothes – this has always been our job. Let's give the people visionary art that forces them to see the world and life and themselves in new ways. Let's have the arrogance and courage to say *Here's the truth that I, the artist, the outsider, sees, the vision I have brought back from my travels to other realities.* Let's be aware of the tradition we come from and start doing it right again.

*Patricia McConnel considers herself a middle-aged lunatic frinja turtle, and when she's not busy discharging the duties attendant to that title, she authors books (Sing Soft, Sing Loud, for instance) and writes a regular column, "None of the Above," for Arts Alive. The column will return next issue. aa*



*Artists must acknowledge the tremendous power we have to effect our audiences at a deep and mystical level.*





# FORMER STREET PUNK DOES OPERA

BY TIM LEARNED

**R**obert Brewer, UNLV's Musical Theatre Specialist, suggested his Alta Ham Fine Arts office for our meeting. His office is intrinsically collegiate: rectangular, cement-blocked walls, nondescript (Rebel Gray?) paint and enough office furniture to give it that cramped, scholastic feel. I sat facing Brewer on the visitor's side of the room in a director's chair (ironic but not uncomfortably so).

He's starting his second year in Las Vegas.

Spent most of the last 20 in New York City, cruised through Las Vegas about 17 years ago, did the 48HR tour on the way to Los Angeles. Didn't win anything, but "I didn't lose that much either. I remember my wife (Sharon) and I were leaving and her saying, 'Who would ever want to live here?' and lo and behold, here we are. It's the last place on earth I thought I'd find myself."

Though I didn't ask, after putting two and two together a couple of times, I've ciphered him to be around 44 years old. He was

born in Chicago, a few blocks from where Al Capone was dusted. "We referred to it rather romantically as Bucktown, a very tough area of Chicago. It's hard to believe, but I was a street kid, really." I quick-scanned, trying to erase 30 years from his face and frame, but I couldn't find that little rascal he said he'd been. Easier to believe him, I figured, than challenge him and risk a beating.

Safer instead to ask how a street kid found his way into the theatre. "I suppose heritage-wise, genetically it was through my



father. He died when I was about 12, but he had an interest in music and I remember very strongly having an interest in music with him. It was kind of our tie with each other." After his father passed away, he said it was an aunt and uncle who lived in New York who had the greatest influence on him.

"They took me to New York, where my uncle was an engineer, and gave me my first exposure to the commercial theatre, and that, coupled with everything else (leans forward and snaps his fingers) just said, 'Yes, I want to do this!'" Brewer leans back in his chair, his voice in overdrive, "I mean, then I was set, because once I saw New York and Broadway lights and real theatres and walked down Schubert Alley with them, oh everything, I mean, they really exposed me in a way and they knew it."

Then, while attending Weber High School, "I found by process of deduction that acting was the thing I excelled in. I had the leads in all the plays." Brewer credits a part-time director at Weber, Phil Calzaretta, for nurturing the seed "I always had in me.... I think since my father had passed away he really took an interest in me in a fraternal way."

After high school Brewer enrolled in at the University of Illinois. "When I went to Illinois, I went to the theatre immediately, thinking I was going to be an actor, and I graduated from there discovering I was a writer. I went to Penn State then on a Schubert fellowship in playwriting and I left there with an MFA in directing. So I went through all the facets, really, many a theatre, to arrive where I am now, kind of a director-playwright."

"I've been lucky in my career, I've been lucky from day one. Right after I left Penn State I went to Harvard and there I met Kevin Kline and David Stiers. They were my liaison to (John) Houseman (then artistic director at Juilliard School). I went right to new York having a faculty position at Juilliard, I was 22 years old. I was there until I was 25 or 26; awfully lucky."

He enlisted a top agent after Juilliard and freelanced. "I never really suffered in my career like some people have." He said there were some hard times when he didn't work, but overall the phone always rang. "I had my agent so I always had enough work to keep me going."

Now's as good a time as any to roll the credits; this list is by no means exhaustive, except when one has to type it: *Death in Venice*, San Francisco Opera; *Mary Dyer*, New York Lyric Opera; *Die Fledermaus*, Queens Opera Association; *Don Pasquale* and *Elixir of Love*, New York Grand Opera (in Central Park); *The Merry Widow*, University of Rhode Island Festival of the Arts.

No, I'm not finished: *That Championship Season* and *The Devil's Disciple*, Arizona Civic Theatre; *A Christmas Carol*, Actor's Theatre of Louisville; *When You Comin' Back*,

*Red Ryder?* and *Of Mice and Men*, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park. And for UNLV last year, *Tintypes* and *A Little Night Music*.

Still going, still going: He was also a guest artist for the E. P. Conkle Playwright's Workshop, University of Texas at Austin; guest teacher at the University of Rhode Island; worked in script development with new writers for the New York Shakespeare Festival; and certainly not last, was for five years the resident director for the Maine Opera Association. He has, according to his bio, directed over 150 productions.

Hard to imagine any turf tough worth his knuckles getting into all that opera. Turns out, against his will, his aunt and uncle made him listen up. "I hated opera. What kid doesn't say, 'I hate opera, I'm macho, I don't like opera,' right? And I went on after all that and directed opera."

When Brewer directed his first opera, *The Merry Widow*, featuring New York Met hall-of-famer Mary Costa, his aunt and uncle made the trip to Rhode Island. "They were so proud, because I really think they thought, justifiably, that they had a hand in the beginning of all this. Here I was directing opera – everything I said I wouldn't do, I was doing and loving it. And now, here I am heading a musical theatre program at UNLV. It's kind of curious the way everything is working out."

According to his bio, Brewer arrived at UNLV on a mission with a take-no-prisoners goal: "Creating the finest professional training program in musical theatre in the country." Struck me as a pretty strong statement; had to read it again to make sure he hadn't snuck a *read my lips* in there somewhere.

Brewer laughed, "I did say that, I remember saying that," like he was feeling the weight of a statement smacking heavily of PR. No spin doctor needed here, he spoke from a position of strength. "In my heart and soul I do believe we can do that. It's going to take us a few years, but I think we're already on the road to it. We've just started the MFA program and we've already had 30 to 35 inquiries from some very top students who want to come into the program."

Due to the effort of an excellent faculty and guest artists-in-residence like Davey Marlin-Jones, the program has started to roll. "We're already doing it subtly, but it's not going to be an overnight thing," Brewer explained. "The fact that we're in Las Vegas is going to be advantageous, because I think the support is here for us to create this program. I believe this town wants this program here...it takes a great deal of commitment. It's an expensive proposition, the difference between producing a musical or enough musicals and producing a play. I think we can get that support here."

Audiences. It was an unfair question. Brewer because I had nothing to lose by asking. Unfair because he had something to

lose by answering. Unfair because I know how thin-skinned some of you can be and how bellicose you can become when you perceive pot shots are being taken at Las Vegas in general and its cultural status in particular.

Brewer, looking down the barrel, knew the question was loaded when I laid it on the table. *What's the difference between a New York audience and a Las Vegas audience?* Initially he wanted to go off the record. Then he picked up the question, twirled it around on his index finger, felt its weight, and pointed it back at me. "Okay, I'll tell you off the record and then you can tell me if it should go on the record. I trust you, right? Is that fair enough?"

Plenty fair. If his answer offends you, then I question whether you're reading this magazine because you have a hearty interest in the arts or are just pretending real hard. There's a good chance he's not talking about you anyway.

"In general, the New York audience is far more sophisticated, far more sophisticated. They have seen a tremendous amount more. In New York there is a specific kind of audience that is tough! When it loves you it loves you like no other audience in the world, but they have seen a tremendous amount, they have heard a tremendous amount, they can differentiate. Generally, the audiences here are – and this is changing somewhat – easier to please.... We need to educate this audience. We just can't go ahead and give them what they want. God forbid we do that, then we're not helping them at all. But the audience here is changing."

Brewer said when he first got to town a year ago, one of the graduate students took him to see four local productions. "They were terrible," Brewer whispered, and when he looked around the theatres, "every seat was filled and everyone stayed!"

(In college he directed one of Beckett's plays. "It was just horrendous. I mean, there were so few people sitting there at the end I could have invited them over for dinner.")

Brewer said he walked away from those four productions thinking, *This town is hungry*. "This town, five, ten years from now, is going to take off culturally. It is. It's demanding it. I said, 'They're ready. We have to build this department up quickly for them.'"

But don't get the idea Brewer thinks he has the only show in town. "There are people here who are already getting there. We have the Nevada Opera, the Nevada Dance, we have New West, we have the Rainbow Company – other theatres that are culturally contributing and getting better – people like Brian Strom, Bob Dunkerly, Georgia Neu. These people are trying to build their theatres, and I think that's great."

"I don't think any of us are in competition. I think we all want the same thing and I think



we can all benefit from each other. I think good theatre, strong theatre in this town will be supported, because people want it and there's a market for it."

How do you go about selecting an MFA candidate? "I don't think graduate school is for every student. It's important that we admit students here who we can help, not necessarily (students) who can help us. I think we have to say, 'What can we do to help that student in the three years of his training program so that when the student leaves here, that student can go on and work in the commercial world.'

"Finding somebody and saying, 'Boy! What we could do with that student in three years,' that's a reason to admit a student, that's somebody who can be terrific. 'The voice is almost there, there's a voice there!' and then everybody gets all excited and the gameplan is set."

A gameplan for the exceptionally talented student is rare. "I don't think that's necessarily what grad school is about. I think that's somewhat deceptive. If we can't help the student then we're just kind of exploiting them, and I don't think that makes any sense whatsoever in terms of our program. It's a mutual aid situation we're looking for here." Brewer is a hungry teacher; he likes his talent raw.

Up at 5:30 every morning Brewer is, loving the fact that it is a new day, a fresh day. "I look forward most to the students and everyday student growth, watching it happen, thinking that maybe in some small way I may be contributing to that. It's what I think teaching is all about, the most exciting thing for me and my *raison d'être*." (In truth he said "reason to be here," but I had a quarter of French at one of the colleges I passed through and I've always wanted to use that. This is an arts magazine after all, and if *Français* ain't high culture, what is?)

"The students here are great, they're talented, but more importantly they're good kids. And that surprised me. I didn't know what to expect here, what I would get in terms of students. But their hearts are in the right place and I find them very supportive and very genuine. You're straight with them and right back, they're straight with you."

Classes are great, he said, but going one on one with the students is his favorite challenge. "Tonight at 8:00 I'm coming in to

work on a scene with two kids who I really, genuinely think have something to offer. And I'm looking forward to that. It'll be fun to see if I can make it work and see if I can help them."

More fun in my mind was the little incentive package he'd put together.

"I told them if they were really good that I would take them out for a beer. Which they were all crazed about, that they were going to go out with their teacher for a beer. I mean, where do you get to do that except college?" (Talk about a teacher with *his heart* in the right place.) "I remember my professor taking me out for a beer, it was a big thing, you know? So I'm going to take them out for a beer and I'm looking forward to it. That'll be fun." Now I hear a street kid talking.

**It was an unfair question, because I had nothing to lose by asking and he had something to lose by answering.**

Brewer thinks Las Vegas is the ideal place for students to go to college. "In some ways, it's the perfect college town. Where else can you have a meal for \$2.95 and have a great meal. Kids don't go hungry here. It's not like some universities, you know? The weather's great, it doesn't get too cold." Had to agree. When I think of what 99 cents didn't buy in my college towns and the breakfasts it can buy here – does Dr. Maxson have his recruiters stress this?

"Kids who come here from out of town love it, love it. It's a tourist town, people are very kind to each other. There's a kindness here, it's habitual to say good morning to everyone and the students love that. There's a nice feeling of respect for each other here. I like Las Vegas." Brewer has spent too much time in New York City or I live on the wrong side of town.

But more important than cheap grubcakes and good vibes is being in the desert. "Las Vegas is perfect geographically, because as large as it may seem, we are, as you well know, somewhat isolated, and that's a plus. It gives the student...it allows the freedom to explore, to take risks and finally, hopefully,

to make some creative, exciting, imaginative decisions." This in opposition to working in New York, which he likened to a pressure cooker. "You do anything in New York – to a certain extent it's a very small town when it comes to theatre, and people hear immediately – it can have national influence or it can hurt you."

Sometimes I know the information I'm looking for, but the only way I can get to it is with a stupid question like, *Does the physical nature of a theatre influence how you stage or direct a production?* Because he didn't smirk or raise a mocking eyebrow, Brewer is either an accomplished actor along with his other talents or a reformed street kid who has learned to be gracious.

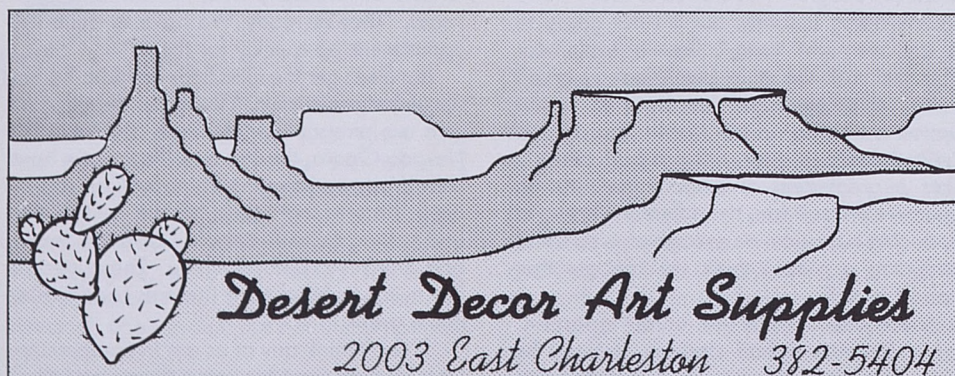
"Oh yes, assuredly. The relationship of the piece in terms of my intent to the audience. The relationship of the audience to the space is very important to me, the character of the theatre, how I'm going to control that or use it to my advantage. I'm thinking of *Romance, Romance* while I'm saying this, which I'm going into rehearsals on soon.

"I'm concerned with the Judy Bayley in terms of its intimacy and how I'm really going to play it small and down and focused so the audience will focus...somewhat like I did with *Night Music*, but stronger, because *Romance, Romance* has only four characters and I really want those relationships to burn."

Opening night? "I'm very nervous. Very nervous, but not because I'm concerned about the product. I'm nervous because there's nothing I can do. If life is a series of actions strung together, then it is the most actionless moment for a director. Work is the passion, the rehearsing, the process is what's exciting – opening night, for me it's over. It's not nearly as exciting as working on it. (Once it starts), I can't stop the show. You know? But the work is never over I think." He said "I think" but it sounded more like "I hope."

Even with all of his success as a director, I couldn't let go of the Schubert fellowship. Which did he prefer, directing or writing? "I'll tell you, that's a good question. Right now, I prefer the writing. But you see, my job here hasn't allowed me – and I don't mind that – I came here, when I was hired I knew I was going to be directing. I'm looking to do two big shows next year, *Kiss Me Kate* and *Amadeus*, that looks like what they're suggesting for me. I don't really have the time to give to the writing that I want to give, because I'm kind of burning inside to do it and I prefer it. But I do love the directing. I love directing more than anything else, outside of the writing. And then the classes and least of all committees." aa

Tim Learned, former editor of Las Vegas City Magazine, admits that "photos of naked women, tastefully posed, mind you, are as close as I've come to the arts in three decades." These days, he adds, he writes mostly because "it interferes with insanity." Good reason.





**Vanishing Point from page 3**

publication under the new schedule and, if feeling more confident a year hence, to return to the semimonthly arrangement.

Since we're on the subject of timeliness, a word about the *Southern Nevada Cultural Directory*. A compendium of valuable information about available artists, arts organizations and arts services, started by the Junior League, it was last published by Allied Arts in 1979. About 18 months ago we decided it was badly needed and started work on a new edition. Despite knowing the overstriving AAC staff was already overstressed, overstretched, overstrained and overstrung, we committed to you, our members, that it would be published around (ha! ha!) February, 1990.

We underestimated the work involved. We didn't realize we would have to move our offices during the year and undertake the creation of a new gallery. But now that we are about a year late, we are closing in on completion. The finished book will be 5 1/2 by 8 1/2 inches and extremely useful, and present an impressive picture of our arts community. A year ago we had our artists, organizations and arts businesses submit information about themselves for this publication (only members will be included). We are trying to update it as we finish. If you never submitted information for this purpose, or if that information has changed, please notify us in writing *immediately*, and we will

attempt to get the new information included. Some thoughts: Did your address or phone number change? If you are a musician, did you include a line like, "currently with the Hilton orchestra?"

Back to *Arts Alive*: It will not be possible to buy advertising in the *Datebook* alone. Rates for full, two-thirds and half page ads in *Arts Alive* will increase, and those ads will be complemented by smaller ads in each of the three calendars published during the period covered by the quarterly in which those ads run. (Got that?) Charges for smaller magazine ads will remain the same.

So: The monthly *Datebook* should provide more complete and accurate listings of an arts scene that will *not* stop burgeoning. Always thinking of your welfare, we are trying to set up an arrangement with a manufacturer whereby we could provide members with artistic refrigerator magnets (the Plastic Pieta; the Magnetic Mona Lisa) to facilitate posting our more calendarlike calendar.

And: We promise to work harder to make *Arts Alive* even more Arts Alivelike as it plunges relentlessly into its second decade. aa

**Great Books from page 8**

other at bookstores like Albion or Culture Dog or at cultural events around the city.

Although many in the program have been at it for years, the membership here is particularly volatile since Las Vegas is a

transient town. While a core of stability is necessary, some turnover prevents stagnation as new people join or visit for a session or two. Some current participants would like to see even more new blood, especially younger adults or students. The price of participation is reasonable; for \$20 one can purchase three paperback volumes of readings and a study guide from the Foundation (Jane Macia keeps a small supply on hand). For the hesitant to commit or those on a tight budget, the Flamingo Library has the three books on reserve, and most of the readings are readily available in other editions. No other fees or dues apply.

That Las Vegas has one Great Books group is significant, but several members lament the fact that a town this size does not have more. They would like to see a group for those who work at night, as many do here, and for those who do not drive except during the day. According to the Foundation, a population this size could easily support five to seven groups. As one member puts it, Las Vegas, who pride themselves on 24-hour access to glittering entertainment, are depriving themselves of the most rewarding diversion of all if they deprive themselves of reading.

Jeffrey A. Portnoy is associate director of UNLV's Honors Program and lectures in the English Department. He is newly arrived from Atlanta, and is no doubt frequently asked by Philip Roth readers if he has any complaints. aa

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# New Barrett Gallery created by volunteers



Jay, Maureen, and Patrick Barrett.

When the new Allied Arts Gallery next to Marshall's opened in November with Jose' Bellver's *Eating Potatoes with Van Gogh*, patrons were surprised and pleased at its dramatically improved look. Those patrons who had seen the empty storefront a week before were stunned and disbelieving. "I didn't think there was any way you could have this ready in time," said AAC Trustee Eva Flores. "It looks terrific."

When the council's old location at 3710 Maryland Parkway had to be torn down to make way for Boulevard Mall expansion, the mall management, which had generously donated that space for three years, worked to arrange the new space at 3750 even while scrambling to relocate several paying commercial tenants. Thanks to corporate executive Joel Blaisdell and new mall manager Carmen Urioste, AAC's new donated headquarters is not only 1000 square feet larger, but faces Maryland Parkway for higher visibility.

As the staff began moving furniture, files and supplies into the new space at summer's end, Trustee Derrell Parker, both a visual artist and interior designer (D Parker Interiors), created a design for interior walls to delineate gallery space and offices. The resulting plan angled offices and a conference room against the building's orientation and stepped walls down around the new offices in Southwestern architectural style.

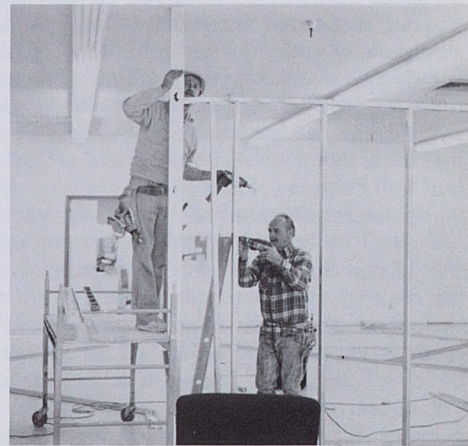
Board and staff had decided that it was time to go all out and create the best possible gallery space, befitting the art now produced in Southern Nevada, but there were no funds to execute Derrell's ambitious plan.

That was when Trustee Maureen Barrett volunteered to chair the newly created gallery committee and to see that, somehow, the work would be finished on time. Maureen enlisted her husband, Jay, president of Marcor Resorts, Inc., and brother-in-law Patrick Barrett, chief financial officer of Hansen Mechanical Contractors. Mike LaSalla of C&L Development was recruited to coordinate the work; he and C&L's Ken Dixon undertook to get the walls built and unleashed the unstoppable Dave Wagstaff on the crisis.

In an object lesson on how the Las Vegas community works, one local business after another jumped in. The new location was soon swarming with people like Murphy of Marcor Resorts and plumber Scott Brown of Hansen Mechanical, who began creating a new, handicapped-equipped restroom. Dynalectric Co. of Nevada sent electrician Ken Anderson to rewire the space, wire the new walls and install the gallery's track lighting. M.J. Dibiase Contracting, which had done the same thing for the gallery's two previous locations, supplied all the required drywall. Cimarron Materials of Las Vegas, Inc. provided all the metal studs. Custom Floors supplied flooring materials. The crack

team of Brian Barrett, Andy Lam, Dennis Lam and Jacob Turner devoted extensive time and energy to rejuvenating existing tile floors.

After the highly successful Bellver exhibit, admiring Trustees began to assess what had been accomplished. The result was a decision to honor everyone who had contributed by naming the gallery, for as long as it remains in this location, the Barrett Allied Arts Gallery. A number of trustees noted the appropriateness



Dave Wagstaff and Murphy during construction.

of the name, particularly in light of Maureen Barrett's well-known devotion to the visual arts in Nevada. An important member of the board of Reno's Nevada Museum of Art, she continued as an active member even after moving to Las Vegas, where, in addition to serving on Allied Arts' board, she is a trustee of the Nevada Institute of Contemporary Art, a first vice chair of the Las Vegas City Arts Commission and an important supporter of the arts exhibitions at the Nevada State Museum and Historical Society in Lorenzi Park.

"This is the way this gallery should have looked all along," said AAC President Judy Kropid, "and Jose's work looks wonderful in it. We want to thank everyone involved; they did such an excellent job." She noted that having a separate conference room was especially important, because it saves the gallery from having to do double duty, and removes the physical disruption of tables and chairs.

And now there is actual gallery furniture. Attorneys George Kelesis and Dominic Gentile donated furniture from their offices which looks like it was designed as gallery furniture, then Jay Barrett donated an attractive marble table. A few details remain to be finished; Derrell is arranging for some furniture to be recovered, some walls still need a second coat of paint and Patrick Gaffey keeps wandering around with spackle and a putty knife, filling and smoothing imaginary flaws.

But the Barrett Allied Arts Gallery is now a real gallery, and if you haven't seen it for yourself, the Valentine's Art Auction February 5 might be a good time. Art viewing for the Auction will begin at 6:00 pm. that day; at 6:30 a plaque will be installed, thanking all involved, and the Barrett Allied Arts Gallery will be formally dedicated. aa



# CHOREOGRAPHERS SHOWCASE

Set for February 16 & 17

*The 1991 Choreographers Showcase will be held at Charleston Heights Arts Center on February 16 and 17, at 2 p.m. both days. • Auditions for the Showcase will be held January 20, in the Las Vegas Dance Theatre studio. Call Gwen Gibson at 564-2184 or Mary Coxson at 361-7162 for audition information. • The Showcase serves as a forum for dance works that might not otherwise find an audience, according to organizers Gibson and Coxson, directors of the Allied Arts Council dance division. • "Local dancers and choreographers use the Showcase to present something different," Coxson said. "Traditionally, a lot of showroom dancers participate in it because they can explore creative areas that they can't explore in their hotel jobs." • The Showcase is sponsored annually by the Allied Arts Council and the City of Las Vegas. For more information, call 731-5419.*

aa

## Class Act Adds to Roster

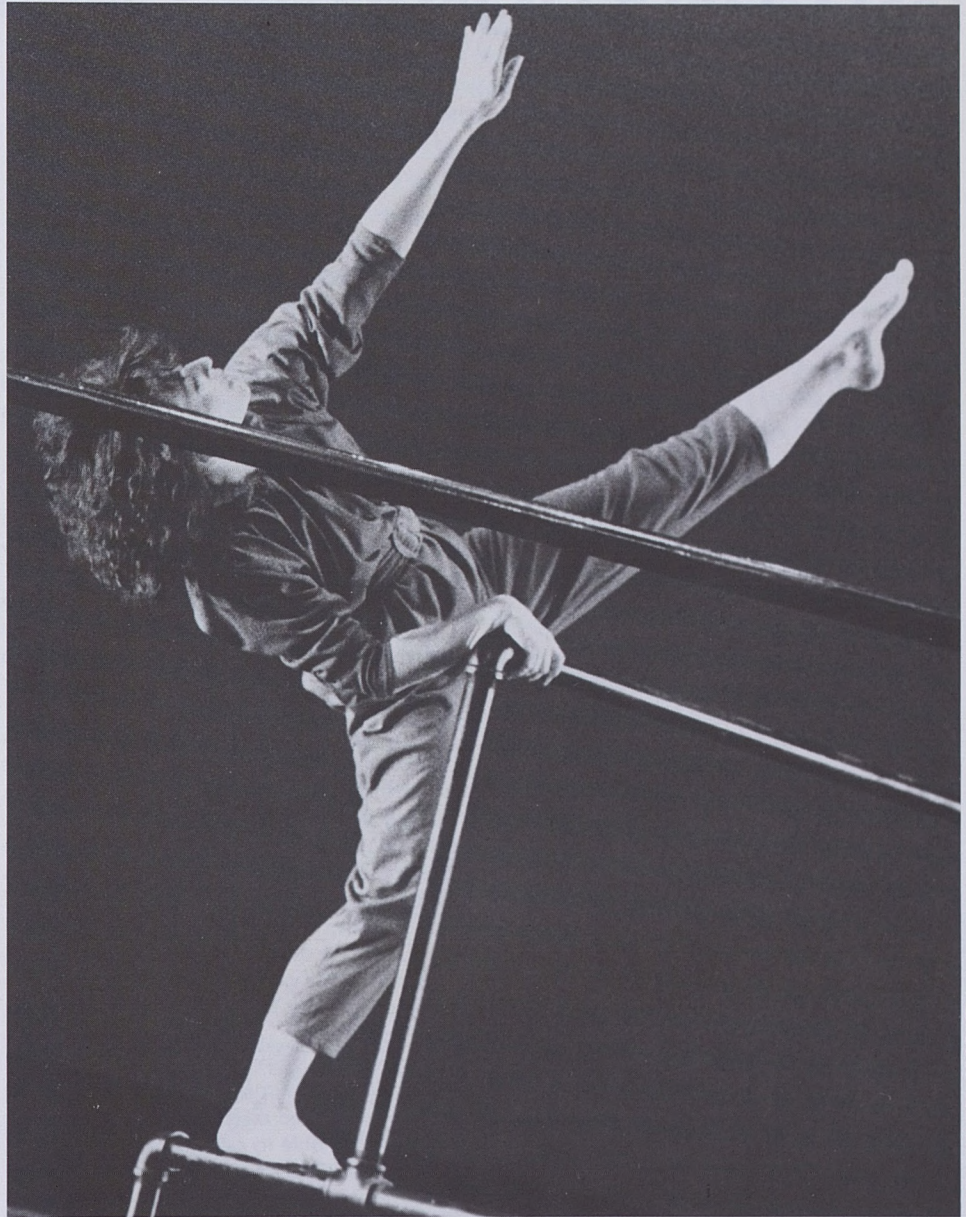
The roster of performers in the Class Act program has grown to ten acts, ranging from classical music to theatre to visual arts presentations. Class Act is a live-arts-in-the-schools program created by Allied Arts, the Junior League of Las Vegas and the Clark County School District. Allied Arts staffer Bineke Kiernan administers Class Act.

Following auditions in November, musical theatre performer Elijah Schuster and sculptor Mauro Possobon were added to the core line-up featuring the Barclay Strings Ensemble, the Las Vegas Percussion Quartet, the Desert Arts Brass Quintet, the Sierra Wind Quintet, the Polynesian Folk Dance Ensemble, the UNLV Dance Construction Crew, storyteller Marsha Cutler and animator J.P. Somersaulter.

The list may be further augmented after a second round of auditions in mid-January.

Each act is scrutinized by two panels before being admitted to the program. One panel judges the applicant on artistic merit, the other on educational content.

For more information on Class Act, call 731-5419. aa



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# GALLERY SCHEDULES

## LOCAL, INTERNATIONAL SHOWS



### GLASNOST ART

The Allied Arts Gallery will open 1991 with an exhibit of paintings, etchings and prints by Lithuanian artists. The show opens January 7, with a 5 to 7 p.m. reception.

Titled *Glasnost*, the exhibit has been culled from the private collection of Dr. Leonid Germaniskis, a Lithuanian citizen living in Las Vegas, and will be on view through January 29.

Soviet contemporary art represented by the works in this show have gained a new currency in the Soviet Union, thanks to the loosening of cultural restrictions under Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms.

According to Dr. Germaniskis, Lithuanian art differs from recognized Soviet social realist art in that it has a deep strain of mysticism derived from Christian and pagan symbols. Lithuania was among the last European countries to be Christianized, and the art in his collection reflects the influences of several sub-cultures.

"Given the dramatic changes taking place in the Soviet Union," said Allied Arts Executive Director Patrick Gaffey, "and the prominent roles played by artists in making those changes - Lithuania is now led by a musician - we think it's important to show work by artists who helped open Lithuania. And we're excited to be able to offer our gallery patrons a broad, international perspective."

### VALENTINE AUCTION

The second annual Valentine Invitational Auction will be held February 5, in the Allied Arts Gallery.

Work by 50 local and national artists will be up for sale. Participants include James B. Pink, Jose Bellver, Minnie Dobbins, Brent Thomson, Andrea Banks, Michelle Fricke, Kim Fink, William Barker and Valorie Hill.

The reception starts at 6 p.m., the auction at 7. There will be refreshments. Free ones.

Works submitted for auction will hang in the Gallery through February 11.

### CLIFF SEGERBLOM

A career-spanning retrospective of artwork by Boulder City artist Cliff Segerblom will open February 12 in the Gallery with a 5 to 7 p.m. reception.

Segerblom was well-known for both his painting and photography. He started the photography program at UNLV, and taught watercolor painting there as well.

He is particularly recognized for his renderings of rural landscapes and small towns, but one highlight of his career was a 1969 series of watercolors depicting the splashdown of Apollo 12, the principal painting of which now hangs in the National Air and Space Museum. He also served as chief photographer for the Hoover Dam project.

Aside from his artistic pursuits, he spent 20 years as Boulder City justice of the peace and 16 as a municipal judge, also in Boulder City.

He received a Governor's Arts Award in 1984, and was given a Professional Outstanding Achievement Award by the UNR alumni.

The Segerblom retrospective will be up through March 1.

### ED INKS

Work by sculptor Ed Inks will be exhibited in the Gallery March 5 through 29, with a reception for the artist 5 to 7 p.m. opening day.

Inks has recently been hired as an instructor in the UNLV art department. Much of his recent work reflects his experiences in Africa: his contribution to the recent UNLV faculty exhibit (which can now be seen at McCarran airport) was a pile of charred elephant tusks.

For more information on Allied Arts Gallery exhibits, call 731-5419.

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# AAC, NEVADA POWER TEAM UP FOR ENERGY PROGRAM

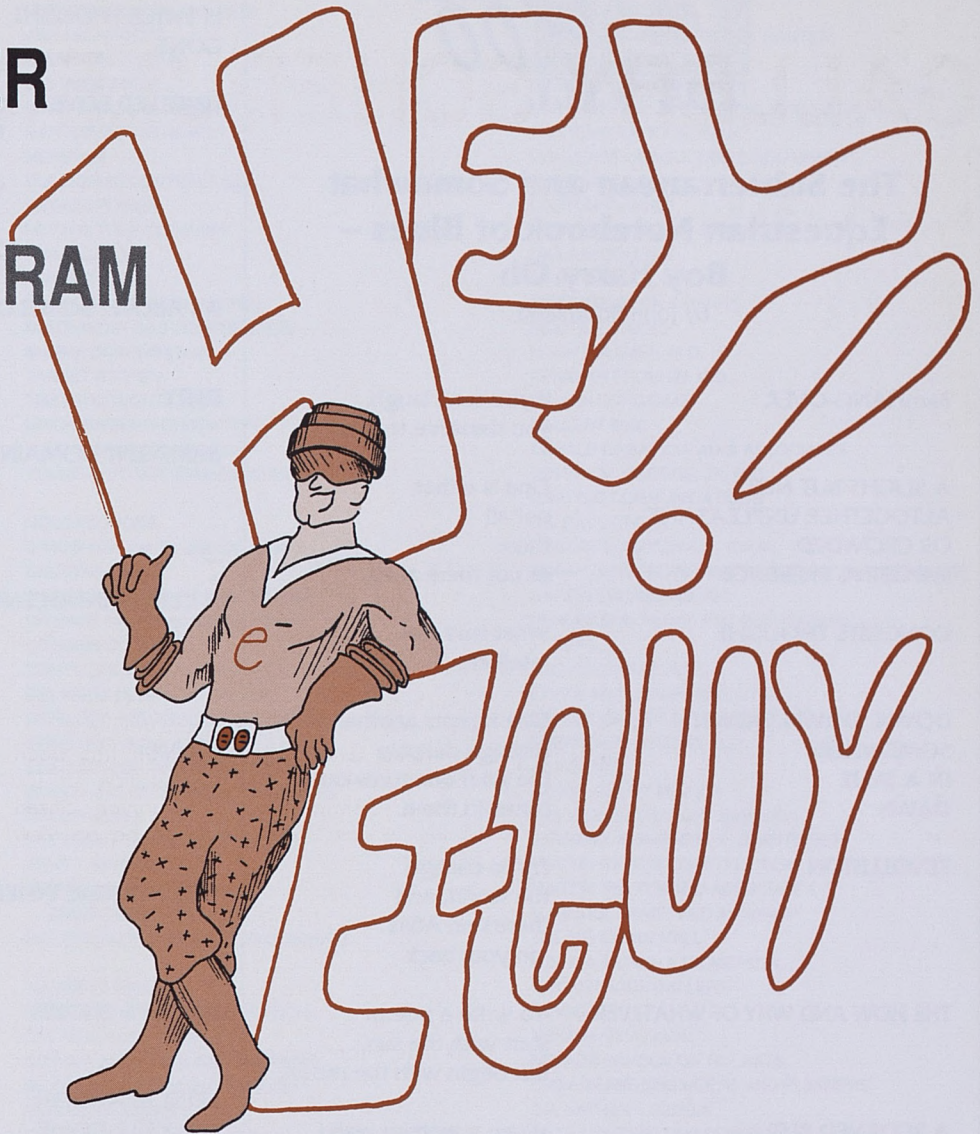
Hey, E-Guy!, a musical theatre program educating elementary students about electrical power, will be touring local schools from January to mid-March under the auspices of Allied Arts Council and Nevada Power.

Conceived and written by Mark-Louis Walters, Hey, E-Guy will go to 80 schools for a total of 160 performances.

The play involves "a young skateboarding dude" named D.C., who wants to sing and rap, but the batteries in his boom box are dead. He can't understand how this could be. That's when the E-Guy enters the picture, the Energy-Guy, slightly grumpy from all the demands made on electricity. In a wide variety of musical styles, D.C. and the E-Guy explore the sources of electricity, its production, conservation measures and safety precautions.

"An important aspect of this program," says Jean Norton, Allied Arts' development director, who is overseeing the program, "is that it is providing paying work for half a dozen local theatre people, including actors, costume designers and set designers."

Nevada Power is footing the bill for the production, and provided technical information and assistance. Previously, Nevada Power employed out-of-town theatre companies to deliver its conservation and safety message to local schools. **aa**





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