

TIM CAHILL ON RICHARD WILEY'S LATEST NOVEL

# ARTS ALIVE

THE SOUTHERN NEVADA MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS

\$2.75

ALLIED ARTS COUNCIL  
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## THE NEW WORLD ORDER



## SPECIAL THEATRE SECTION

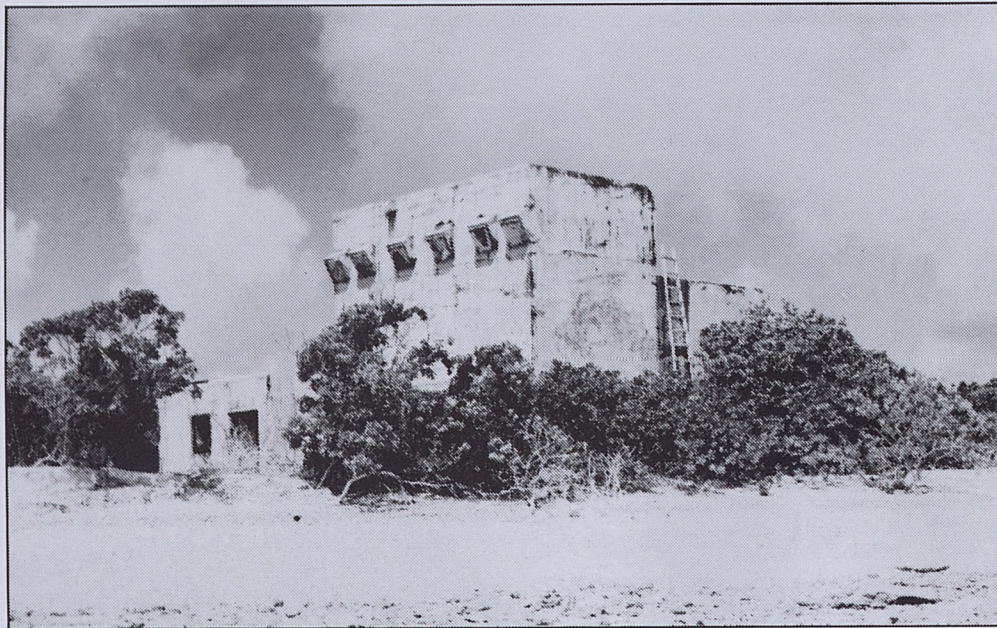
NOBEL LAUREATE WOLE SOYINKA

DO ACTORS BENEFIT FROM COMMUNITY THEATRE?

Plus: John L. Smith on The Blues in Las Vegas, Patricia McConnel and more.

THE NEVADA STATE MUSEUM AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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# COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER GOIN



*Photo station bunker complex, Bikini Atoll*

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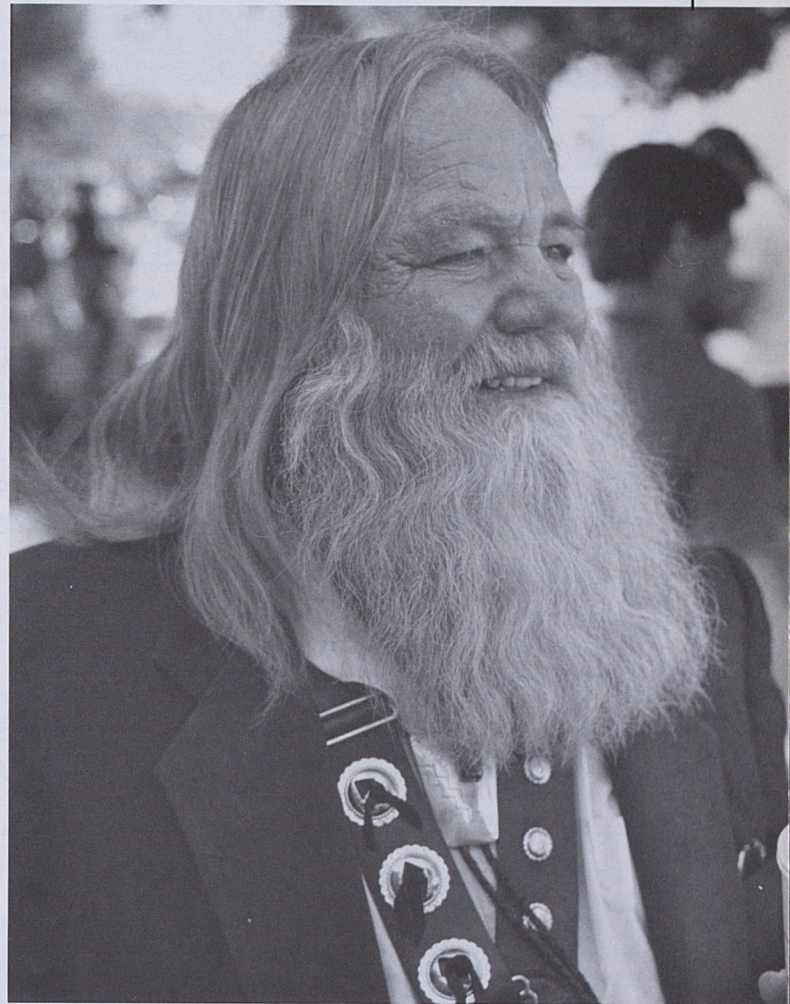
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Bobby Mercereau, Blues Man. Photo by John L. Smith.  
Story on page 22.

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Georgia Neu. Photo by Charles Morgan.  
See Story on page 15.

# 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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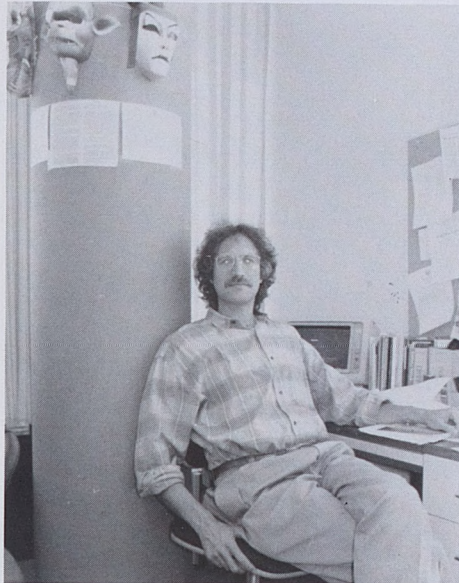
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# THE CONTRIBUTORS

Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian playwright, novelist, and teacher, was in town recently, and JEFFREY A. PORTNOY, below, the assistant director of UNLV's Honors Program, conducted the interview which begins on page 19. "I wasn't really familiar with his work," Portnoy said, "but I took a crash course." The result is eloquent, lively, surprising.



A serious blues fan, *Las Vegas Review-Journal* daily columnist JOHN SMITH was a natural choice to assess the state of the music in Las Vegas (see page 22).

TIM CAHILL, a contributing editor of *Rolling Stone* and a founding editor of *Outside*, whose byline has appeared in dozens of magazines, reviews Richard Wiley's new novel this issue. Cahill's books include *Buried Dreams*, *Jaguars Ripped My Flesh*, and *A Wolverine is Eating My Leg*. His latest book, *Road Fever: A High Speed Travelogue*, chronicles his record-setting drive (with partner Gary Sowerby) across South and North America.

Our unofficial Boulder City correspondent, FRAN HARAWAY, this issue offers a short profile of artist Brent Thomson. Haraway is a reading teacher in the Clark County School District. By her own admission she leads a "thrill-filled life" with her husband, two children, a couple of cats, and a boa constrictor named Emily.

SCOTT DICKENSHEETS, who penned the cover story on Georgia Neu, was recently upped from associate editor to managing editor of *Arts Alive*. He says his ultimate literary goal is to "redo *Moby Dick* in a lovely postmodern floral motif."

Reno's MICHEAL SION, on the other hand, had never heard of *Arts Alive* when we asked him to profile Bill Fox, executive director of the Nevada State Council on the Arts. Sion is a reporter for the *Reno Gazette-Journal* and a freelance writer.

KAMY CUNNINGHAM continues her unique brand of personal journalism with this issue's behind the scenes look at UNLV's compilation play *West!* Her manuscript for this story had the cryptic notation "hyperactive gerbils" in one corner. Cunningham, a UNLV English instructor, is a frequent contributor to *Arts Alive*.

JOHN POWERS checks in with the first of a series of commentaries on the local theatre scene in this issue's special theatre section. He is a product of UCLA and has worked both sides of the camera in Los Angeles and Las Vegas. After fronting and producing a rock band in the seventies, he was elected president of the Southwestern University School of Law in L.A. Between jobs he teaches acting, writes screenplays and is at work on a book "emasculating the hypocrisy of the War on Drugs."

In this installment of her column, "None of the Above," PATRICIA McCONNEL considers people who say, "I could have written that if I only had time." She is the author of *Sing Soft, Sing Loud*, a book of fiction about women in prison, based on her own experiences. Patricia says, "So far, no one has been anxious to say they could have written this book." Her prize-winning short story, "The Aviarian," appeared in the January issue of *Neon*, the journal of the Nevada State Council on the Arts.

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MANAGING EDITOR *Scott Dickensheets*

DESIGN/PRODUCTION DIRECTOR *Lailani Austria*

CONTRIBUTORS *Kamy Cunningham, Sylvia Hill, Patricia McConnel, Bill Moody, Jeffrey A. Portnoy, John Powers, Mary Whalen, Lee Zaichik*

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### PROFILE

# TRANSFORMING VISION

Poet, artist, mountain climber – Bill Fox brings a lot to his job

by MICHAEL SION

*our first tent  
pitched in a field  
the farmer plows  
up to our feet  
and turns*

*his bullock shadows  
the whole tent*

*so tired  
we could be  
turned under*

–From William L. Fox's book, *Time by Distance*, his poem "Sildunga," set during a trek in the Himalayas.

"My second wife once looked at me, we were talking about something, and I said, 'Could you excuse me for just a minute?' " says Bill Fox. "And I got up off the couch, went into another room and wrote down a poem. And I came back and sat down and we resumed the conversation. And she looked at me and said, 'I can't believe that. You're sitting here talking to me, but there's always part of that is just somewhere else. Doing something else.'

"You can't turn that off!" Fox says. "I mean, you're born with it, it doesn't go away Or you cultivate it very carefully."

Such is the lot of a prolific artist. Constantly churning. *Transforming.*

Now four times divorced (we note this in passing, no implication intended) at 41, William L. Fox – poet, sculptor, publisher, lifelong transformer of reality – is positioned, as executive director of the Nevada State Council on the Arts, as a key conduit of funds to other artists-transformers in the Silver State.

He buys them time with grants, tossing them a lifeline to drag them them to a haven of (if only temporary) creative freedom.

This seems right. Fox *understands* the compulsive yearning to produce art.

He has lived it. He can *explain* it.

For example, the boyish-looking Fox used to appear yearly before a cynical class of creative writing students at a Reno high school.

First, he'd destroy the myth that poetry is only produced by effete artists. Fox spoke as a rock climber and a man who's trekked the Himalayas three times.

"And that's what they're curious about," he says. "'OK. We've established, Bill, you're a normal human being. We can relate to you. We can talk to you about music, we can talk to you about basketball, whatever. OK, tell us about this process of changing things.'

"And then that's when you say, 'Well, you know when you say something "is like"? Well, if you take out the word "like," that's another

step in the transformation and you're moving from a simile to a metaphor and let's learn how that happens. And no I don't care about spelling and grammar. What I want to do is work with you on how these transformations happen.'

"And sometimes, I mean, a spark goes off and you realize, one of those kids, or several of those kids, are never going to stop transforming."

*the monkey eats an orchid  
thirty feet above camp*

*we have little to offer  
after that*

*and yes  
he leaves  
without any of us noticing*

–Fox's poem "Puiyan."

"If you've ever been to an arts event in Nevada, chances are either we funded it or they applied to us for money," Bill Fox says of the NSCA. "Everything from folk arts...saddlemaking, through performance art in the desert."

The NSCA – like its counterparts in other states – began in 1967 when the federal government decided to fill a void created by sparse private patronage in this country.

"Before the council, there was the Nevada Museum of Art, which was then called the Nevada Art Gallery; Reno Little Theatre; some private art galleries; my small press (West Coast Poetry Review), and a handful of things going on in Las Vegas, and that's about it," Fox says. "There were certainly wonderful individual artists who were here in all disciplines. But there wasn't much in the way of organized activity."

The NSCA – with an annual budget of about \$1 million culled about equally from the federal government and the state legislature – gives artists a leg up.

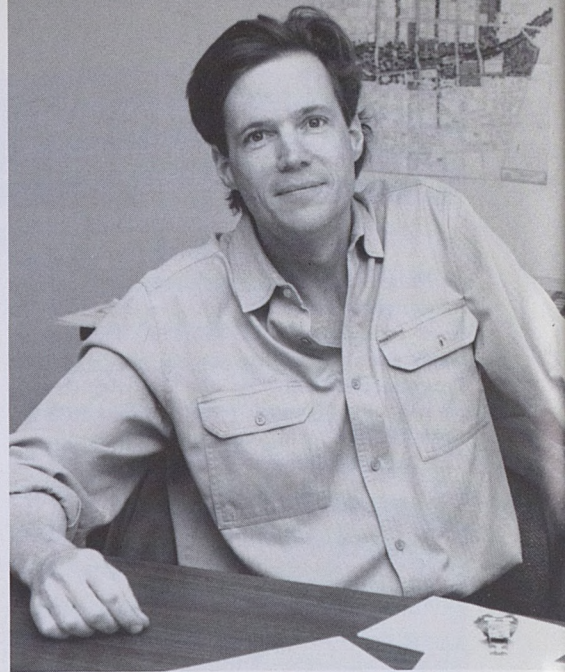
In the early 1980's, classical pianist Laura Spitzer wanted to tour the state and give concerts in small towns like Gabbs, Ely and Elko – where no grand pianos existed.

With an NSCA grant of about \$3,000, Spitzer and a tuner trucked a piano throughout the state, and has since traveled the west and been written up in *Reader's Digest*.

California photographer Richard Misrach now has a traveling exhibit on the cratered Bravo 20 bombing range – a site Misrach wants turned into a national monument as testament to man's destruction of nature.

"He became part of the Artists in Residence program," says Fox.

"I think that's a very significant project that we helped fund, because it makes people



Bill Fox. Photo by Donovan Gray

look at the landscape differently."

To transform mentally.

*cold and opaque  
the corpse of a snake  
belly up  
in the gorge*

–Fox's poem "Dudh Kosi" ("Milk River").

Bill Fox became deputy director of the NSCA in 1980, while serving as visual arts critic for Reno newspapers. Even then, his arts resume was as long as *The Illiad*.

An only child, Fox wrote his first book at age three. On a Sunday morning, he took a paper, folded it up, made a book, drew maps in it, and wrote the only words he could write: "The End."

The transforming had begun. Credit genes. Fox's mother, Janice, had published a book of poetry as a teenager.

In the halcyon late sixties, Fox hung out with artistic Reno high-schoolers – and started writing poetry madly.

By 1969, a year out of Reno High School, the 19-year-old Claremont College writing major had 200 poems under his belt, and had been published in local newspapers, literary magazines, and even *Seventeen Magazine*. Fox had switched majors from astrophysics because he hated the math (obviously not inheriting his physicist/engineer father, Bert's, gift).

Fox had also sold his swift MGB after his insurance company learned he was racing it.

A lad of words – and action. Reno's own little Hemingway.

By his sophomore year at Claremont, Fox was editing and publishing *The West Coast Poetry Review*, a nationally recognized journal.

Ten years later, a 29-year-old Fox had been a magazine editor in New Zealand, poet-in-residence in Nevada and Washington state, published five books of poetry (including one nominated for a National Book Award), exhibited sculpture (including the pioneering "concrete poetry" – words turned into an object) and graphics across the US, Canada and Europe, directed the poetry program at the Squaw Valley Center for Literary and

See page 25.

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VISUAL ARTS

# THE ROMANCE AND FANTASY OF THE DESERT

Artist Brent Thomson looks for the magic spots

by FRAN HARAWAY

A visit to Brent Thomson's gallery is an encounter with space. Creamy walls provide a background for prints and paintings which share their desert genesis. Mauves, pale blues shading to cobalt, the myriad shades of sand and stone predominate in scenes which often feature a spiny cactus or rough-walled adobe home set against the serenity of the far horizon. To us, they are desert scenes – momentary, eternal, or both – but to Thomson they are “magic spots” – special places he conveys with a minimum of lines and curves. Those magic spots are out there waiting to be discovered, but to unearth them, one must be alert to what the artist calls their “clarity, their details.” “When you walk in the desert and think of all the romance and fantasy you’ve read, that sort of thing is what gets me,” he says. The inspiration from being there...makes me create an illusion on paper...to let other people feel that.”

Finding a magic spot involves being in the right place and the right time. Shadowed cracks webbing the parched Death Valley earth, the midnight moon silvering a mountainside, a lonely dog guarding a deserted pueblo – sights like these provide the magic, what Thomson calls, “the things that make you sit there and go ‘Wow!’ ”

Although his inspiration springs from scenes in existence or memory, Thomson is not concerned with portraying reality. “It’s not so much that it’s real but that it interprets well,” he explains, adding, “I want to create substance that is the illusion of reality.”

It was the reality of the desert sky at night that brought Thomson back to Nevada. His 12-year sojourn in Boulder City was preceded by his birth in Calgary, Canada, and led him to Phoenix, Las Vegas (where he graduated from Clark High School), Newport Beach and Goodsprings. He recalls, “I used to lie in bed in Newport on cold, dreary, drizzly evenings,

and I’d think of the dry nights with all the stars. I wanted to drive out into the desert at night and look at all the blue.”

In 1976, when he moved to Goodsprings, he bought an intaglio press and began creating hand-pulled original prints. A move to Boulder City in 1978 enabled him to open a combination print shop and gallery in which he displays not only his intaglios and monotypes, but his oils and acrylics as well. The gallery, in Marshall Plaza on the Nevada Highway, is managed by Connie Thomson, who is establishing her own reputation as a custom framer. One of her most consistent clients is her husband, who affirms, “A perfect frame can maximize a work’s impact.”

While Thomson is pleased that his Southwest themes are in vogue, he says that he was interpreting desert scenes long before they became fashionable. “My interest in Southwest art evolved from a Carlos Castaneda awareness in the late sixties and early seventies – the exploration of nature.” Does he feel he took advantage of the present trend? “The only thing I would say I hopped on the bandwagon about was going to Santa Fe to see great ruins and artwork that was incredible. What I did then was take what they (the ancient Indian tribes) must have been inspired by and used that in my work...then take from what they were inspired to do – design, elements of their culture – to superimpose and blend together in an image that tells an overall story in a contemporary look.” The Brent Thomson imagery is influenced by “Indian blankets, beautiful plateaus, the way the sky swirls across the desert – things of that nature that obviously inspired them to create their culture.”

Thomson insists his art is, in part, “entertainment for the eye,” but even entertainers need to pay their bills. The business of marketing and selling his work is a subject he meets head on. “This is something

that you have to deal with way down in your psyche,” he admits, “because you know you have to make a living.” He adds, “You can’t ignore the fact that you had a hot item last week, but if you let that control you totally, then you’re not letting yourself have fun. You say, ‘What was it about that thing that made it sell?’ Usually, what doesn’t sell is not attractive.”

“Attractive,” according to Thomson, is, “...clean, pristine – a thing that, when you walk up to it, you have to have it. There are things that are special, that have magic in them, so you can tap into that.”

This practical approach to his work is evident in the artist’s decision to become a printmaker. He had been doing pen and ink drawings which sold well, so he considered expanding into prints. “I researched posters,” he explains, “and decided to buy a press. Then I researched the ratings of printmaking in the arts and found that what stands out as the most creative is the one where the artist actually cuts the metal plate with his hands.” This combination of printing and pragmatism has obviously paid off.

A Brent Thomson print, then, is a magical, attractive subject interpreted by a self-confident artist. It is this self-confidence that allows him to experiment, that prevents him from repeating himself. “If I keep doing the same thing,” he explains, “I’ll be cheating myself, because experimenting is what gives me the inspiration to keep going.”

If he sits down in front of a blank piece of paper without an idea, he looks at his collection of photographs and artifacts for inspiration. “You can never be new,” he says, “because everything has been done before.”

Finally, an image comes. “When I’m doing my imagery, it’s a cauldron of myself that’s just kind of bubbling there, and, all of a sudden, the carrot floats to the top. That’s it!”

Brent Thomson is a man who discusses his own work – the business and creativity of it – with enthusiasm and pride, but he is equally comfortable when sharing his thorough knowledge of art history. He can hold forth effortlessly on the beginnings of lithography, the influence of Georgia O’Keeffe on current painting, or the effects of Mexican Indian cultures on modern art trends. He sees his own intaglios and monotypes of the desert Southwest as part of an ongoing creative process which began when the armorers of the Middle Ages rubbed soot into the engraved lines of breastplates and imprinted the designs onto pieces of cloth. Moreover, he is convinced that Southwestern art is more than a fad. “There’s no end in sight,” he promises. “What people don’t realize is, it’s new to some, but, really, it’s been around forever.” aa

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# Yolanda Sharpe

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"Maureen's Pond," oil, gold leaf, aluminum leaf on canvas, 1990 72"x 72"

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"On the Way to Binghamton," oil on canvas, 1991 60"x 96"

## MUSIC

by SCOTT DICKENSHEETS

# COMMUNITY CONCERTS

*Las Vegas' oldest cultural group heads into the nineties*

"Why am I doing this? Sometimes I think I must be crazy," Jan Neilson cackles. But she's not, of course. She's talking about her long-time work with the Southern Nevada Community Concert Association, work that sometimes seems about to overwhelm her. But she perseveres. The question before her is why.

"I'm a concert addict," she answers, "and I just want everybody to be exposed to it."

Since 1937 - Community Concerts is the longest continuing arts organization in Las Vegas - the group has imported a variety of concert performers through its association with the Columbia Artists booking agency. "Columbia Artists provide the talent and management direction, although we can book from other booking agencies (last year's concert by the London Ballet is an example)." Columbia Artists has similar programs in 800 American cities. Admission to the concerts is limited to season members.

When Neilson first got involved with Community Concerts, in 1964, performances were held in the Las Vegas High School auditorium, which had less than 1,000 seats. They were very well attended. "To get a membership then, you had to wait for someone to die," she says. There was no problem selling

memberships in those days because there was so little competition.

Things have changed somewhat. Community Concerts now mounts performances in the much larger Artemus Ham Concert Hall, and there's a lot more competition now. Add to that the general pinch the arts are feeling in the recession, and the times are a bit rocky for the city's oldest cultural group. Neilson remains optimistic.

"I'm such a believer," she says. "We've managed to keep our costs down; season memberships are still only \$30, \$10 for students. We don't have any paid employees, nobody takes anything out of the organization. And if we don't have the money, we don't spend it."

She noted that the organization, like a number of others, is attempting to groom future audiences by providing additional performances for local students whenever possible.

"Children are not going to concerts anymore, and I think that's because their

parents don't. That's the generation we've inherited. When I was young, schools made the push to get involved in the arts. No more. We're also getting active with retirement communities."

Neilson has been working on behalf of Community Concerts for nearly 30 years, but she says there are volunteers who have been at it longer, as well as a few original charter members - from 1937, remember, before World War II - still committed to the cause.

This season, old and new members alike can see *The Cole Porter 100th Birthday Party Review* (September 25); pianist Lincoln Mayorga (October 16); the Druzhba Soviet Dancers (February 20); L'Orchestre de Chambre de Montreal (March 22); and the Dallas Brass (April 23). Membership information can be obtained by calling Pat Madera, 648-8962.

"I was one of those who came to town and bitterly complained that there was nothing to do," she says. "But like I said, I'm a concert addict, and I like to help people get involved." **aa**

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*Miguel de Cervantes*

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## SELECTED SHORTS BUDGET BOOST

*Legislature increases NSCA budget to more than \$1 million*

As the Nevada State Council on the Arts heads into fiscal year 1992 - beginning July 1 - it will carry with it a budget of over \$1 million, thanks to increases granted by the state legislature.

According to NSCA executive director Bill Fox, the agency's budget will be \$1,083,701, up from the last year's \$830,633. A rough breakdown shows about half the budget going to grants, 20 percent to other programs (community development, artists-in-residence) and approximately one-third to cover agency overhead, salaries, memberships in professional organizations, etc.

"The amount going to maintaining the agency is actually pretty stable," Fox said. "Most of the increases are going to direct program costs."

A breakdown of the program costs:

### GRANTS:

FY'92: \$576,700. FY'91: \$375,428.

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

FY'92: \$89,725. FY'91: \$46,000.

### ARTISTS-IN-RESIDENCE:

FY'92: \$70,800. FY'91: \$62,300.

### FOLK ARTS:

FY'92: \$42,000. FY'91: \$32,000.

Fox characterized Community Development as a "kitchen sink" category, a catch-all for projects not easily funded under the other classifications.

The category below, Fox says, reflects salaries, agency maintenance costs, membership in professional organizations, air fare and a variety of other costs. The figure is lower this year than last, Fox notes, because printing costs are now covered under Community Development.

### OTHER:

FY'92: \$294,476. FY'91: \$314,905.

As of press time, it was unclear what, if any, effect the possible passage of AB520, the cultural bond legislation, would have on the agency's budget. **aa**

## ART-A-FAIR

*Thirty eight pieces chosen for 17th annual art competition*

David Powers' ceramic sculpture, *Children Dancing Unaware*, took first place in the 1991 Art-A-Fair, the annual visual arts competition sponsored by the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District.

An untitled collage by Merrilee Hortt came in second, and Debbie Bellver's assemblage, *Virgin of Pain*, won third place.

An untitled photograph by Edward H. Opsitos was given first honorable mention. Other honorable mentions include Erin Bakke's ceramic *Couch Wanda*; Jennifer Safko's mixed media *Icon I*; *Crucifix*, a painting by Gregory S. Barnab; Georgia Hall's lithograph, *Down Memory Lane*; and Josh Rosencranz' *Gakki Man*, a sculpture.

Purchase awards were given for the following pieces: Brad Burch's print *Glyph I*; Lance Cheung's photo, *Jennifer*; C. Terry Klouda's steel *Angle Iron*; *Not a Joyful Tear*, a pen and ink by Tony Trigg; Sarah G. Vinci's photo, *Bubbles: The Transience of Human Existence*; and Mark Vranesh's mixed media piece, *Red Rock #2*.

Other artists whose work was juried into the exhibit are: Chuck Arnett, Shari Borkin, Treschya Bowe, Bernice Breedlove, Paul F. Brown, Ginger Bruner, Cheryl Davis, Stewart Freshwater, Randi Joe Grantham, Charlene Baumert-Kell, Lenore Kerner, Angela J. Lewis, Allen Lytle, Melinda Murray, Peggy A. Ruehler, Nancy M. Sloan, Lisa E. Stamanis, Jeanne Voltura, and Maria Wurtz.

In all, sole juror Susan Anderson (associate curator of the Laguna Art Museum, in California) selected 38 pieces from the 313 submitted for the 17th annual Art-A-Fair.

A selection of the chosen artworks will be shown in the Green Valley Library through August 4, then it will move to the Spring Valley Library, August 7 through early September; from there it's on to the West Las Vegas Library, where the exhibit will hang from September 11 through October 22. **aa**

## THE ART OF VEGAS

*Masuoka Gallery examines the uses of Las Vegas in contemporary art*

*Viva Las Vegas*, an exhibit in the Mark Masuoka Gallery (through August 4), will take a look at Las Vegas through the eyes and work of eight contemporary artists.

"Las Vegas imagery is in the mainstream art world," Masuoka says. "It's out there. We should be addressing it here; it's in our own backyard. I'm surprised this hasn't been done before."

*Viva Las Vegas* takes a unique triple-viewpoint approach to its glitzy subject. Some of the work is by local artists, "to examine how the environment affects artists who live here." Some is by artists who have worked here temporarily, as artists-in-residence, "people who have been exposed to the city for a shorter period of time." Still more is by artists who have lived here but moved away, "but who have kept doing art relating to the area."

In assembling the show, Masuoka reviewed work from 40 local artists alone, plus numerous out-of-towners. He finally selected eight: Robert Beckmann, Jeffrey Bissell, Scott Bell, Robert Brady, James Doolin, Anthony Hernandez, Charles Morgan and James Pink. (The Preview Gallery will also host an installation by Mary Ann Bonjourin, *EZ Keepers*.)

"It's not easy to have eight artists do the same trick," he says. When the work started coming in, he began to understand that the task of examining Vegas imagery in art was

too big, too complex, for one exhibit. He plans to make it an annual summer show. "This year, it turned out that all the artists are men," he laughed. "Maybe next year we'll do the women's point of view." The potential variations, he said, are many.

The imagery isn't limited to garish neon or gambling, either: Hernandez, for example, ventured into the surrounding desert to photograph shooting sites.

Eventually, Masouka hopes to put together a touring exhibit based on this theme, in much the same way that Arizona exports pre-packaged exhibits of its in-state artwork. "There is responsible art being done about Nevada and about Las Vegas," he says, "and that is hard for some people to believe."

The exhibit catalog features an introduction by noted critic David Hickey, who compares driving west on Tropicana Avenue to viewing ancient Roman ruins in North Africa. "And at that moment...the image of that dead Roman world came to electric life around me - all of the risk and spectacle, the hope and despair, the hustle and the muscle of a great secular empire displayed itself in symbolic order..." **aa**

## THE REVIEWS ARE IN

*What does the Times think of Sierra Wind Quintet?*

Ever wondered what kind of reviews are given the city's top cultural performers when they tour out of state? Here, then, are excerpts from reviews of the Sierra Wind Quintet in New York and Boston.

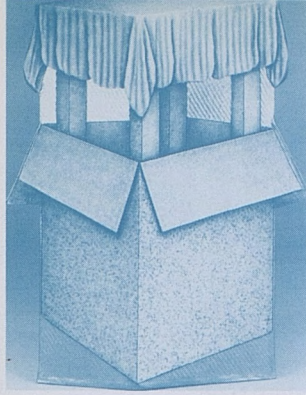
"The Sierra Wind Quintet, which played a fascinating collection of recent music...discourages the usual image of Las Vegas as purveyor of sin, bad taste and tough college basketball," wrote *New York Times* critic Bernard Holland on January 14.

He described the Quintet's individual skills as "ranging from competent to very good," adding, "it is the sense of style and mutuality of ensemble that makes this such an attractive group." He praised the ensemble's performance of Gyorgy Ligeti's "Six Bagatelles," and termed Walter Blanton's "Portrait of Monk," "interesting" and "harshly effective." Alvin Etler's "Quintet II," says Holland, is "earnest, competently made, dutifully contrapuntal and a little dull."

On the whole, however, a positive review.

The next day, in the *Boston Globe*, critic Richard Buell praised Sierra's "skill and brio," particularly in regard to "Six Bagatelles," as well as their "range of musical understanding." He also had kind words for "A box of views," the Barney Childs composition that is the title cut from the Quintet's most recent recording. Mel Powell's 1984 Quintet "seemed terse and well-knit if you were paying keen attention but was probably gnarled if you weren't."

"The only disappointment," he wrote, was Blanton's "Portrait of Monk," which was doomed by the impossibility of "transferring the inimitable strangeness of Thelonious Monk to a woodwind quintet. The result was tirelessly perky, which, alas, is also to say that it never once came close to swinging." **aa**



The Moira James Gallery,  
"Boxed Table" by Louis Marak

## MOIRA JAMES IN ORANGE COUNTY

*Local gallery to participate in Orange County Artwalk*

The Moira James Gallery has been invited to join the 1991 Orange County Artwalk, a prestigious Southern California arts festival, as one of the few out-of-state participants.

Moira James will exhibit work by ceramicists Rudy Autio, Jim Leedy, Tom Coleman and Frank Boyden. In addition, gallery owner Robin Greenspun will give a lecture titled, "Contemporary Crafts vs. Fine Art: Have We Finally Erased the Line?" Tom Coleman will also give a talk.

The Artwalk takes place September 7 and 8, in the South Coast Plaza, in Costa Mesa. Call Moira James for more information, 454-4800.

aa

## McCOLLUM NEW DEAN

*Interim dean given permanent job*

A temporary appointment became permanent in May as artist Mike McCollum was named dean of UNLV's infant College of Fine and Performing Arts after serving as its interim director for the past year. He topped 45 candidates from a national search.

McCollum, who has previously taken several turns at the helm of the school's art department, will now guide the development of the art, music, dance and theatre departments.

The selection "represents the best mix of creativity and administrative ability," said UNLV president Robert Maxson.

McCollum received the Governor's Arts Award in 1988, and has exhibited his ceramic sculpture, paintings and prints around Las Vegas, Nevada and the U.S. aa

## CITY ARTS COMMISSION MAKING CHANGES

*New members oversee old projects*

As the installation of its first major public artwork approaches, the composition of the Las Vegas City Arts Commission has changed considerably in recent months. The last two original members, president Angie Wallin and former first vice president Patrick Gaffey (executive director of the Allied arts Council), have completed their four-year terms and been replaced by architect Steven Carr of JMA Architects and Engineers and Patricia

Mrchese, Superintendent of Clark County's Cultural Affairs Division.

First vice president Maureen Barrett will serve as acting president until commission elections in September. The rest of the current commission is: arts patron Bonnie Hannifin Glusman; Bill Marion, regional director for Senator Harry Reid; Mark Masuoka, an artist and owner of the Mark Masuoka Gallery; Joanne Nivison, chief of the city of Las Vegas Cultural and Community Affairs Division; Pasha Rafat, an artist and UNLV art professor; advertising executive Roger Scime; and physician Dr. Carl Williams, Jr.

In its four years, the body has commissioned a \$100,000 artwork for the south face of City Hall and is now working on a major project for Circle Park on Maryland Parkway, south of Charleston. Although the City Hall commission was awarded to nationally known artist William Maxwell, the City was not able to complete arrangements in time for the period Maxwell had reserved in his schedule, so it could not be installed until his next free period, which isn't until October. Many expect Maxwell's piece to be both subtle in its effects and dazzling in its techniques.

Small pieces projecting from the face of the building will create shadows at different times of the day outlining desert fauna and a large, ambiguous symbol which will simultaneously refer to an overhead view of City Hall itself, to the look of radar screens at Nellis Airbase, to the international warning sign for atomic energy, and to the Indian symbol for the Ghost Dance, which originated in Nevada but swept the Indian nation in the belief it made one impervious to the evils of the white man.

In the channel edging the building, the water surface will be made to open magically in the shapes of lizards and snakes. Similar shaped will be lightly routed into the sidewalk so they will only become visible as puddles after the infrequent rains.

In the next few weeks, a pamphlet prepared by a subcommittee chaired by Barrett will be printed, a self-guided tour of public art in Southern Nevada. "We were amazed and delighted," she says, "to realize how much public art we really have here. We tried to list only the most important work, but we ended up with about forty pieces or outdoor collections." The brochure will include maps of art locations; the maps will be keyed to a list of Southern Nevada art galleries, both commercial and non-profit. aa

## BULLETIN BOARD

■ The Nevada State Council on the Arts is looking for art works to be presented as 1992 Governor's Arts Awards. \$2,500 will be given to the winning submission to produce five pieces. Application materials must be postmarked by July 15.

Interested Nevada artists should submit six to 10 slides of relevant recent work and a one-page proposal for the award, which may be in any two- or three-dimensional medium. since 1992 marks the 25th anniversary of the NSCA, proposals that address/utilize "silver" - literally or metaphorically - are encouraged. Contact 1-688-1225.

■ The Nevada State Council on the Arts is also preparing a Las Vegas Folk Arts Survey, and are interested in hearing from any folk artists working in a traditional craft - African-American gospel singing, for instance, cowboy saddlemaking, Armenian cooking, Korean dancing, Mormon quilting. Two folklorists will be in town in the fall collecting information. Call Jon Boardman, Las Vegas Cultural and Community Affairs, 386-6511, for details.

■ The Las Vegas Science Fiction Association is seeking science-fiction and fantasy artwork for its November VegasCon. Interested artists should leave a message for Ken at 733-7470.

aa

## OBITUARY

*Singer-songwriter Jack Ackerman dies at 66*

Singer-songwriter Jack Ackerman, a familiar face in the Las Vegas music scene, died in late April in Los Angeles. He was 66.

In his songwriting career, Ackerman co-wrote more than 50 songs with Billy Preston, many recorded on Motown and A&M. he also penned tunes for Judy Garland, Frankie Avalon, Buddy Greco, Skitch Henderson and others.

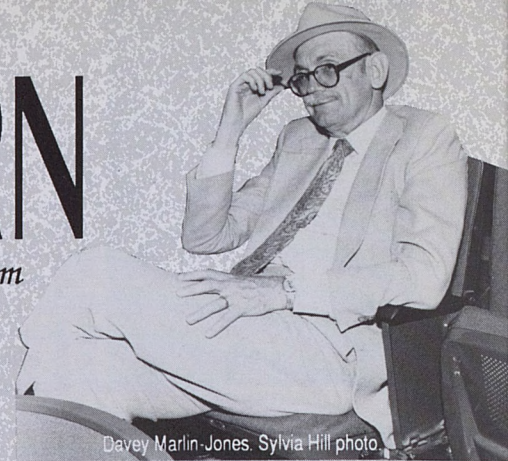
Ackerman was also an actor, appearing alongside Frank Sinatra in *The First Deadly Sin*, with Ben Gazzara in *Capone*, and in most of John Cassavetes' films.

At the time of his death, Ackerman was putting together a movie to be filmed in Las Vegas. aa

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# A PLAY IS BORN

By Kamy Cunningham



Davey Marlin-Jones. Sylvia Hill photo.



West. Sylvia Hill photo.

Writers step into other people's worlds. You don't want to reside, permanently, in any of those worlds because permanence means belonging and belonging means involvement. To write, you have to be detached.

So, you're always a friendly trespasser. You observe, feel, think, ask questions, and then leave – to go back to *your* permanent world, the typewriter, the computer, or, in a few old-fashioned cases, a sheet of paper and a pen.

I recently stepped into the world of the theatre in order to do this backstage piece on UNLV's *West!*, a work made up of a number of playlets, most by UNLV M.F.A. candidates. (Actually, a more appropriate title for this piece would be *A Lot of Little Plays Are Born.*)

Stepping into the theatre world was physically difficult. First, because they don't want you underfoot, either backstage or onstage, since they're trying to put a play together – although I did notice they were always under each other's feet. Second, whenever I'm near a stage, I injure myself. I either fall off of something or into something.

Stages are treacherous places. They end abruptly when you don't expect them to; menacing ropes dangle everywhere; wires coil themselves around your ankles; things that look like harpoons hang on the walls, lending a touch of dungeon decor. (The "harpoons," I discovered, are "bracers," and they prop up "flats," the pieces you see scenery painted upon.)

But that's not all. Heavy pieces of stage scenery roll around, threatening to take off your toes; huge lights in black casings look like they're about to fall on your head, enough to give anyone a Chicken Little complex.

*West!* was rehearsed and put on in the Judy Bayley Theatre, and despite all the dangers, it's a pretty impressive place. The stage, and the backstage areas, seem huge, almost cavernous. One actor said, "Naw, this isn't so big. Wait'll you go somewhere where they put on opera – three times this size, with a set on stage and two in the wings, waiting to be rolled on."

My enthusiasm wasn't dampened. The Judy Bayley may not be Lincoln Center, but apparently it's not too shabby, because director Davey Marlin-Jones said, during one rehearsal, "I've played towns smaller than this stage."

I decided to use the "innocent eye" approach when writing this. No looking up theatre information in the library. Everything drawn from direct, primary experience. My dazzled, innocent eye found something commensurate with its expectations: a spiral staircase that runs up, up, up, in the back right-hand corner of the stage. Not just any old staircase, this marvelous spiral stretches up into nowhere, or oblivion, or infinity (imaginary clouds wreathing the last few steps). I didn't ask for a long time what it was because I wanted it to remain tantalizingly undefined. But, to move from the metaphysical to the practical, when I could no longer hold definition at bay, I finally found out it leads to the "grid," a huge metal latticework that stretches from wall to wall, way, way up there. Now, the grid is what everything seems to hang from, including "maskings," black curtains that hide banks of lights from the audience.

Black is the color motif of the blank stage. Featureless and quiet, waiting, in the words of assistant director Anastasia Devere, for something to be "created out of the darkness."

Rehearsals for a full-length play take about six weeks. I came in about a third of the way into the schedule, stepping from a bright, windy, sunny April afternoon into all that blackness.

Rehearsing involves what's called "blocking," "working," and "running." Blocking is a "clunky" word (Devere's adjective) for outlining the actor's movements and gestures on the stage.

On this particular day, I watched director Marlin-Jones and actor Todd Espeland block "Over a Barrel" (written by Charles R. Supin), a touching, tragicomic piece about a forlorn, bewildered rodeo clown who's been knocked around inside a barrel by bulls over the past 23 years.

It's a very physical piece, and Espeland, who's lithe and wiry, bounced, rolled and banged all over the stage. But blocking involves more than these broad sweeps of movement. It means choreographing the nuances and shades of hundreds of small gestures, gestures that will "attenuate a moment of tenderness" (Marlin-Jones' words) or slice a piece of violence through the air. It's extremely detailed work,

a process of starts and stops and hesitations, of subtle refinements and adjustments.

Blocking creates an unusual feeling of *deja vu*, of slowness, of seeing a moment repeated dozens of times. It reminds me of animation. You've all seen those Disney artists on TV, superimposing cel upon cel, drawing upon drawing, to create a twitch of Bambi's ear or a flick of Tinkerbell's wing. Well, that's blocking – animation done with people.

Marlin-Jones "directs," in the sense of supplying almost every gesture. And he offers philosophical underpinnings. For example, I heard him murmur things like "create pain – don't tell us it's there," and "no audibles – every time you find a piece of truth, hide it."

On this day I also watched Marlin-Jones and actress Kymm Gantt block another of the playlets, "Show Girl" (written by Marlin-Jones himself.) In it, a worn out Las Vegas show girl, who's been baring herself to the world for 20 years, muses about her life, her lost dreams, and "the last G-string from Pompeii."

Being fond of dialogue about hopelessly yearning after dreams, I quickly grew fond of "Show Girl," but it was subsequently left out of the production because of space limitations (too many playlets all struggling to be shown at the same time). This omission gave rise to some thoughts about making a play (or a novel or a painting or any work of art): how many choices there are and how you can change the whole contour, shape, and flow of a play by what you leave out, or put in. And also by how you order the flow – the playlets of *West!* only slowly took upon themselves an order, a movement from one to the other.

*West!* presents certain images and myths of the west, and it mixes dream and reality to show us a past we have lost, or never had. Killers, cowboys, heroes, Indians, and saloon girls are in it. "The Great Western Land Pirate or the Genuine Love of the Kid's Life," by Red Shuttleworth, paints

See page 24.

West. Sylvia Hill photo.



# THE NEU WORLD ORDER



Photos by Charles Morgan

*By Scott Dickensheets*

Climbing toward the **big time** with "that damn Georgia Neu."

Consider the picture of Georgia Neu singing on a bus. In Cincinnati. In a striped dress, bare midriff, left hand up on the rail, she's singing. There are two other performers, but Neu is in the middle, the focus of the photo. Not much is recorded in the way of passenger reaction, just two blurry faces, both ambiguous. Are they enjoying it? Or preparing to flee at the next stop? Hard to tell. But if you know Georgia Neu, you know she'd keep performing either way.

"I intend to be the artistic director of a major regional theatre." Georgia Neu, the brisk majordomo of Actors Repertory Theatre, wrote that on her application for the recent Women in Achievement Awards (she has been nominated twice, losing out to Eileen Hayes and Fern Adair, respectively). It's as quick and accurate a definition of Georgia Neu as you're likely to find. Even on paper it throbs with her big self-confidence, her drive, her ambition, qualities which are immediately apparent on meeting her.

You might guess from the firm deliberation of that statement that she works hard at her goal, though you probably wouldn't guess that she works 60 to 90 hours a week for Actors Rep – 75 is the average, she says – a job that paid her about \$12,000 last year. Some quick math yields a figure of around \$3.50 an hour. If Actors Rep ever makes it really big, she might some day earn minimum wage.

The work and drive have paid dividends. Since she started it four years ago, Actors Rep has climbed into the front row of the Las Vegas community theatre by presenting a mix of popular summer musicals, classics, new works and challenging theatre (notably works by David Mamet). Last year Actors Rep played to 16,000 people; this year they expect that to go up, which makes the company, according to the same application, "one of the most extensively attended Arts Organizations in the state."

The qualities have earned her some critics, as well. She incurred some anger last year when she made her company an Equity Theatre, which some critics felt Las Vegas wasn't ready for (Equity Guild actors are generally restricted from participating in unpaid community theatre tying up valuable talent). But Equity status was an important step in Neu's plans to make Actors Rep a big time professional theatre.

She's earned a reputation for aggressiveness, which is the kind of reputation that cuts both ways. Many respect her drive; but not all. A current anecdote has it that a musical director working concurrently with Actors Rep and another cultural organization decided – on his own, without talking to Neu – to stop working with the second organization. The head of that group reportedly responded: "That damn Georgia Neu!"

This story could very well be apocryphal, untrue – the rumor mill spits out this kind of stuff all the time, about Neu and others – but even so, the fact that it made the rounds in that form says something about Neu and her position. She is one of a few figures in the theatre community here – Bob Dunkerly, her occasional nemesis (their conflicts have been covered extensively in these pages) is another – around whom strong emotions coagulate, high praise and bitter rumor. People talk, criticize.

They say things that eventually turn up later, second- and third-hand, well travelled. *That damn Georgia Neu!*

Neu doesn't care, or says she doesn't. She tells the story with a hearty chuckle. But she is, after all, a trained actress, talented at conveying emotional nuance, if the critics whose laudatory reviews Neu hands out are to be trusted. In this case, though, her nonchalance seems genuine, unscripted.

"I'm having a wonderful time," she says of her life and work. She lifts an axiom from a self-esteem book: Choose something you love to do and you'll never have to work a day in your life. "And that's true!" she says in her big voice. "I can't take a day off. I don't want to. It doesn't mean anything to me. This is not me complaining. I've never been happier; I don't have to work for a living."



Upbeat stuff, that, but while we've got the charge sheet out, let's talk without dissembling about the main negative you hear regarding Actors Rep, that it's just a vanity theatre, a way for Georgia to snag some juicy roles.

Again, she says she doesn't care what people say, and she probably doesn't, but she's come bearing an answer anyway. It begins with an anecdote: "I once had a director get pissed off at me and say, 'You just started this company so you could star in all your own shows!' And the interesting thing was, this person had been hanging on to this piece of ammunition like it was *the ultimate bomb to drop*, and I was like, Yeah...so?"

Then she offers statistics: "We offered work opportunities to 165 people last year, designers, actors, directors, whatever. I had three of them." And philosophy: "When I think of what it is that I am, what I do, I am an actor. First, last, always. If I stopped acting, well, I might as well stop breathing." History: "Before the turn of the century, and even into this century, most theatres were operated by actor-managers; that's the way it was. They did exactly what it is that I do, and it was probably even more of a vanity theatre." And, finally, indignation: "I do some of my own projects, and I will continue to do that. I can't stop and I have no intention of that. It's what I was put here to do. So to stop acting *because* I have a theatre company is ridiculous. Ludicrous. It's like owning a restaurant, and therefore you stop eating. It's a silly concept."

She also points out that even if – *if* – Actors Rep is a vanity theatre, a lot of other people have benefitted from it. Just ask her repertory players.

"I've been in five shows," says Hillary Dekker-Williams, "and Georgia hasn't been in any of them. She hasn't had a hand in any of them. She's been there in case she was needed, but she didn't interfere."

"They've been able to keep me busy enough that I don't have time to keep auditioning in front of a lot of other directors," says Nerissa Tedesco. "One thing that's very important to me is that Georgia has cast me against type several times. I have a certain look, and she's been willing to go against what I look like. I'm a decent actress, and when you see someone up there who doesn't look like the part, and pulling it off, it's better for the audience, it's better for everyone. So I haven't been

.....

To stop acting  
because I have  
a theatre  
company  
is ridiculous,  
a silly concept.

.....



pigeonholed."



"The specific and primary purpose of Actors Repertory Theatre is to maintain an ensemble acting company dedicated to training for and productions of the classics and the best in modern and musical theatre..." So goes a statement of purpose accompanying literature for *Shakespeare's Women*.

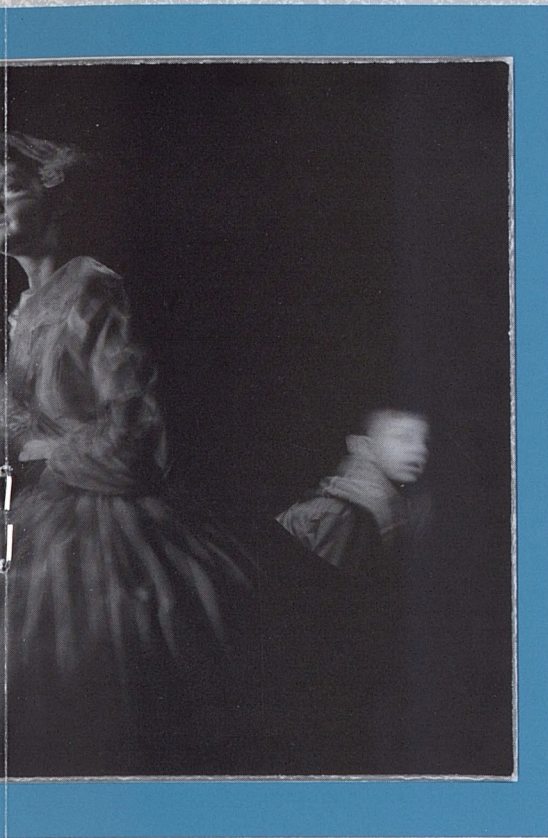
Neu says the notion of a repertory company as opposed to the more common open casting arrangement took root when she was working a midnight to 6 a.m. job watching security screens five years ago. "Your mind gets a little strange at those hours," she says, laughing again. Then she turns serious.

"I believe very strongly that if you want to put on a good production of Shaw, of Shakespeare, of Ibsen, any of the classics, in a town that does not normally produce these things, you do not hold an audition, cast the show, rehearse for six weeks, and put on anything but crap. If, on the other hand, you're working with a tight ensemble group of players who are used to each other, who have a body of experience in common, who are committed to their own growth..." she trails off, then continues.

"There's a sense of emotional support that occurs in repertory, a bonding that occurs, that doesn't have to be repeated every time you cast a show. Trust gets established by supporting each other; that allows you to go deeper, faster."

Again she cites history. "This thing we have in America of holding open auditions and casting each show in a totally open way is really very new. Very new. Until the turn of the century, it was unheard of. It was always repertory ensembles until this century."





One of the benefits of repertory, she says, is that most productions require only two and a half weeks of rehearsal, less than half of what most companies require. "People just flip into the alpha state. They no longer work pondering along. They say, okay, we're doing it, we're doing it in two and a half weeks, and boom-bah! they're outta there. The energy is incredible. It just pops sometimes."

■ ■ ■  
"Lately, when I've been under stress, I've been having this dream, about my father, who's dead. And he asks, 'Well, kid, are you doing the best you can?' 'Yes.' 'Then that's fine.' And it's not sentimental; it's tranquilizing. My father never much understood what I was doing, but he was very supportive, very supportive."

When Neu was five, she happened to see the Mary Martin version of *Peter Pan*. Her mother explained that Martin was an actress, and what an actress did. "I knew right then that was what I wanted to do."

Unlike most, she never lost her grip on the dream. She grew up to perform not only on buses, but in a variety of amateur and professional contexts, along the way earning a BFA in music-theatre University of Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. Her resume before Actors Rep lists dozens of roles.

Her work attracted a fair amount of praise. "One of the best surprises is using Georgia Neu as the missionary Sarah," the Cincinnati Post theatre critic wrote of a 1979 production of *Guys and Dolls*. "Neu convinces us Sarah is really serious about getting the gamblers' souls in the mission for salvation. In fact, she's so serious that Neu tints Sarah with a touch of the neurotic."

Another critic gushed, "The Alma of

*Eccentricities of a Nightingale* is a wonderful acting role, and Georgia Neu renders her with brilliance and thorough craftsmanship."

One more: Cincinnati critic Tom McElfresh said of Neu: "She is simply splendid."

Of course, she doesn't come across with any bad reviews, but it's worth noting that even today, she says, she gets offers every year to work in the east. "I turn them down," she says. "If I wanted to, I could go do that. But that's not what I'm doing right now."

She arrived in Las Vegas in the mid-eighties, and began working in community theatre and in professional roles at the Union Plaza.

Two factors pushed her to start Actors Rep. After dipping her toes into the existing community theatre scene, she wasn't satisfied with the casting procedures she encountered, or the general guiding philosophies. "I thought some of the choices were sort of off-the-wall," she says, "I felt like Alice in Wonderland sometimes. I questioned if what I knew about theatre was right or not. But the only way I knew how to work was not what I would see being done."

Also, she simply couldn't handle a job in the real world. "I tried to be a civilian, but I couldn't take it," she says. She had a cozy job with an insurance company, but she could always hear the stage calling. "I just missed professional theatre."

And after four years of presenting critically hailed performances of such challenging theatre as Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* and *Speed-the-Plow*, and a well-attended series of musicals, it's been a long time since Neu performed on a bus.

■ ■ ■  
"I intend to be the artistic director of a major regional theatre."

Those words echo through the most recent chapters of the Georgia Neu story. They serve as both goal for the future and self-definition.

She hesitates before saying this, but eventually does, obviously aware of how it might sound: "You know, community theatre is okaaaay, but if you look at theatre on a historical basis, and how it developed, and where the real contributions have come from, it's been regional theatre. Regional theatre is the American National Theatre. It's where the new plays have developed - you know, David Mamet in Chicago, and so on - and new tendencies. I want to be around that, be part of it. I want to play with the big guys."

Right now, of course, she has to work small, but that doesn't stop her from thinking big, very big. "My goal is to build a theatre complex in Las Vegas by the turn of the century, and to establish a LORT (League of Regional Theatres) regional theatre here by 1995."

"A LORT theatre has a commitment to develop new works and to influence an area beyond the city in which it works. And we are pursuing that more and more. This year we established a five-year plan for rural and regional touring. A lot more touring. It's going to be very difficult. A constant financial struggle. So it won't be easy. But easy doesn't have anything to do with it."

In the meantime, she is taking the necessary baby steps:

■ The Classics in Context series. "Yeah, I guess it's how we pay the rent," she said; Actors Rep's deal with the library calls for them to mount a season of free performances in return for using the stage to mount their main season. "But it's much more important than that."

In fact, it's become a forum not only for presenting the classics, but for presenting new works or variations. Examples: Nerissa Tedesco wrote and directed *Runyonland*, an original script based on characters from the writing of Damon Runyon. Hillary Decker-Williams wrote and directed an original update of *Antigone*. *Shakespeare's Women* was first presented in the Classics in Context series, as were original shows based on J.D. Salinger and Edgar Allen Poe. In the cases of both Tedesco and Williams, each was her first directing opportunity here. Both report that Neu approached them, and basically took a leap of faith in their ability to pull a project together from scratch. Both were successful.

■ The summer musicals. Although she points out that any company scheduling *The Heidi Chronicles*, *Other People's Money* and *Don Juan in Hell* in one season had better do *Carousel* and *My Fair Lady* as well, Neu insists she isn't making the standard theatrical trade-off of staging popular stuff to bankroll the real art. "For instance, I'm very proud of our production of *South Pacific*. I think it was a knockout. Artistically it was as good as anything I've seen done."

"What I'm trying to do," she says, "is take all the theories we have, all the principles, and take the first step. So all of these are operating, even if it's on a tiny level. That doesn't matter; at least they're started. If we keep feeding them, they'll grow. Eventually we'll get to the point where we're a regional theatre. We're doing all the right things. Now it's just a question of patience. Of course, the worst fault I've got is that I'm very impatient. Very impatient."

■ ■ ■  
Her philosophy is informed not only by an ambition for the big time, but also a sure knowledge that it doesn't really matter if she makes it.

"Let me tell you a story," she says, her voice shifting into a more somber gear. "When I was 39, I was very depressed, because I was about to turn 40. Two weeks before my 40th birthday, Jerry Cleary died. Jerry Cleary was 39. When that happened, 40 didn't look so bad. And what came home to me with a resounding thud was that none of us know how long we've got. Maybe I've got 80 years, maybe I've got eight months. But all any of us have on this world is a certain amount of time. That's it."

"I'm not under any illusion that it makes any difference what I'm doing. In 1,000 years, no one will give a shit. In the big picture, it doesn't matter what you do. So it's hard to take myself seriously, although I take the work seriously. Really, it's a freeing thing to know that it won't make a bit of difference. But you have to carry on as if it mattered."

Why?

"Because I made a deal that this is what I'll do, no matter what. I made a deal with God."

And you don't want to welsch on a deal like that. aa

# ACTORS+LAS VEGAS=WORK

By John Powers

(Editor's note: In this multi-part commentary, the author will explore the world of the actor in Las Vegas and the struggle for opportunities to perform. Actors and others connected to the theatre, film, and video business are encouraged to submit letters of feedback and other points of view for input into subsequent articles.)

Prepare for the possibility of gale force winds momentarily swirling through the Vegas Valley caused by the powerful of Las Vegas' theatre groups slamming down this magazine, swearing, "This jerk will never work in this town again!" I say "possibility" because the points below are relatively palatable and perhaps, just perhaps, one or two of said folk will examine current methods and realize the benefits to the theatre community, its casts, and its patrons, of some adjustments. It is not necessary to agree with all the views expressed here to agree that local theatre would benefit from an examination of procedures and practices. An infusion of new ideas could bring Las Vegas theatre to fruition as first class entertainment and garner it a national reputation as a breeding ground for professional talent.

Actors are part of the huge influx of people into our area. We need to attract them and keep them as members of our community theatre environment. If we do so, Las Vegas can turn its back on the inferiority complex of being Los Angeles' stepchild when it comes to acting. A strengthened and vibrant local theatre will help justify a reputation for producing homegrown actors who hold their own in any comparison. Actors in Las Vegas deserve this recognition, and likewise deserve a powerful reputation so that film and video productions which come here to shoot stop importing actors to fill even small speaking parts. It is vital to convince incoming productions to hire local talent whenever possible. The amount of such work is increasing, but still small. The importance to local talent cannot be overemphasized.

Local theatre in Las Vegas has many things going for it. The theatres themselves provided by various governmental and private entities are excellent – many libraries have attached stages and auditoriums which have no counterpart in Los Angeles: I am unaware of any L.A. County libraries built with a theatre. L.A. does not provide local theatre many outlets on a scale commensurate with Clark County. The Community College of Southern Nevada is planning what has the potential of being the best theatre for stage plays in Southern Nevada. The recent passage of the library bond issue means more theatres – there are plans for structures at the Flamingo branch and downtown.

No system is perfect, but the best systems are adaptable and flexible enough to change shape to fit a changing environment. Las Vegas, of all places, is rapidly changing, and just as other businesses grow to meet the challenge, so must our theatre community. As a small town, Las Vegas had to acknowledge its secondary position in regard to Los Angeles, New York, Chicago and other cities in the world of theatre. But now, with Las Vegas the fastest-growing area in the U.S., our theatre community likewise has more resources, the most important of which is the rapidly expanding pool of actors. Always renowned for attracting quality touring talent, Las Vegas now has local talent of ever higher calibre. If, and only if, when, and only when, local theatre groups make the best use of this resource, then we will deserve, and must demand, a reputation as a Big City Theatre Arts Community of which Las Vegas can be proud.

These changes cost nothing, and the quality of theatre productions could improve noticeably by improving the acting pool.

Increasing the number of quality actors willing to play local theatre will happen when we raise the benefits and satisfactions associated with participation. An increase in competition for parts means better talent filters through. The resulting benefits for patrons of this art in Southern Nevada are obvious.

The pool of actors concerned herein are those who want to work hard at their craft. They must want work so much that they are willing to sacrifice a great deal for the opportunity to perform for free. Their dedication is *prima facie*, because most local theatre in Vegas does not pay (1). Just because some make this choice does not mean society at large or theatre lovers in particular owe them anything. Yet, like anyone else seeking meaningful utilization of his or her talents, they appreciate a level playing field. Many times they do not find it.

Let's say a well-schooled and relatively experienced actress – "Nancy" – wants to perform in community theatre during the upcoming season. Let us also assume she is a recent immigrant. First of all, she must contact all the theatre groups she can find through word of mouth or in the phone book, etc. Once she is on the mailing lists, she will receive notice of auditions. Until then, there is no one place she can check to discover all the theatre producers in Clark County (2).

Nancy prepares a monologue and goes to the audition. Once there, if the casting director (who is virtually always the play's director) is in an up-front mood, she may be told right off (3) that one or more parts have been pre-cast, i.e., no auditions have been or will be held for that part – it has been given to a friend of the director. (The word "friend," is used in the very broadest sense. It may be a friend, or a friend of a friend. In any event, it is a

person that the director is relying on to carry the part to the exclusion of other potential contenders.)

First problem: pre-cast parts. It could very well be the part for which Nancy was auditioning. This means her time and efforts were to no avail, or that she must audition for another part. But, if she happens to be a better actor *and* more physically compatible for the role, then suddenly she is not the only person burned – now the patrons of the theatre suffer, albeit in ignorance, for no one will ever know that the best actor for the part did not get it – indeed, did not even get a chance to audition. After all, even the prejudice of directors has been known to crumble in light of a dazzling audition.

To be fair, it may be that these groups have what seems to be valid reasons for pre-casting. I have directed community theatre in Los Angeles and have called upon friends and acting-school mates to play certain parts. But the decision was made after open auditions where no hopeful auditioned was capable (in my artistic opinion, of course – the director's foremost tool) of carrying the role. I do not equate this with pre-casting.

More than talent is often necessary to be chosen for good parts, but what? Whatever it may be, it should be articulated and made known to every actor who is willing to compete. Has anyone actually been cast in a local production simply because their name on the marquee would guarantee box office success?

I am fully aware from personal experience of the totally subjective nature of casting. The director *must* be free to dictate his or her own taste, judgement, prejudice and/or whim during the casting process. The point is that objective criteria exist and are accepted by actors. When actors are rejected for a role, all things being equal, they know they were judged on merit along with everyone else. When that is the case, actors remain comfortable and confident within the community, and satisfaction – the "payment" for participating – and trust in the integrity of the system exists.

Parts being pre-cast discourage actors from auditioning. Practices which discourage actors from participating in theatre should be foresworn unless directors can show compelling artistic reasons for them.

1. With few exceptions, such as some Equity productions by Actors Repertory Theatre, which are governed by the complex rules of the Equity Guild, which mandates compensation.

2. I have learned that the Allied Arts Council is about to issue a comprehensive cultural directory listing most theatre companies.

3. Example: Robert Dunkerly – directing "You Can't Take It With You" – made actors aware of two pre-cast parts in the audition announcement.

See page 24.

# AN INTERVIEW WITH WOLE SOYINKA

By Jeffrey A. Portnoy

In 1986, Wole Soyinka became the first African writer to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. The award honored a distinguished literary career that includes the writing of essays, poetry, fiction, and plays. In March he became the first Nobel laureate to visit UNLV. His trip to Las Vegas was sponsored by UNLV and the Department of English and funded in part by a grant from the Nevada Humanities Committee. His itinerary featured several discussion sessions with students, an evening with the Rainbow Company, and a public lecture.

During several of these sessions, he acknowledged that he considers himself primarily a man of the theatre. He has written several volumes of poetry including *Idanre and Other Poems* (1967) and *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972), and his novel, *The Interpreters* (1965), received critical acclaim for its insight into the perspectives of young Africans. His non-fiction includes critical as well as political essays, and he has written an autobiography of his childhood, *(Ake: The Years of Childhood)*, (1981), and a memoir of his years in jail as a political prisoner (*The Man Died: Prison Notes of Wole Soyinka*, 1972). His plays range from the comic and satiric to the tragic. They often contain moments of dance, song, drumming, and lyrical intensity. His works raise important questions about the individual's relationship to community, to self, and to the spiritual world. *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) is his most critically acclaimed play, but other important titles are *The Lion and the Jewel* (1959), *Kongi's Harvest* (1965), and *Requiem for a Futurologist* (1985).

Soyinka was born in Abeokuta, Nigeria in 1934, and is a member of the Yoruba tribe. He studied at University College, Ibadan, Nigeria and in England at the University of Leeds, where he earned a B.A. with honors in 1957 and was presented with an honorary doctorate in 1973. Soyinka has taught literature and drama in a number of academic institutions including Cambridge University, Cornell University, Yale University, and the University of Ife in Nigeria.

(With Mr. Soyinka's permission, I have taken slight liberties in editing this interview for purposes of clarification.)

*JP: Religion and mythology seem to be important elements in your work. Could you relate a traditional story, myth, or legend that would help me understand the pantheon of your gods?*

WS: Mythology, I think, more than religion as such because, even though both are related, in terms of being a creative person, it's mythology which really preoccupies my imagination, or, let us say, the religious instinct. Instead of talking about any specific deity or story, it's probably more useful to try to encapsulate the world view of the Yoruba, the people to whom I belong. The Yoruba have a

very vivid sense of the continuum of existence. The Yoruba recognize three principal worlds: the world of the ancestor, the world of the present – the living, and the world of the unborn. These worlds are interrelated in very vivid and affective ways, not some kind of conceptualization which exists in the exterior.

It's really an internalized apprehension of reality, and of course all around these and weaving through these areas of existence is what I call, in my own phrase, the area of transition through which all the energies pass in the motion between one world and the other. The gods also are so synchronized in that way with the abode of ancestors. In other words, while the ancestors are not necessarily gods, the gods are also conceived as occupying that kind of terrain, that is where they would be normally. Most myths have to do with the passion plays of the gods, have to do with this process of bridging the abyss of transition, which is where my own favorite, shall we say, companion deity [Ogun – the god of artistry and metallic lore] comes in, because he was the pioneer deity – he was the one who actually plunged first into this abyss of transition, to hack through primordial chaos and forge a path to man, that is, to the world of the living.

I think that more or less sums up the relationship between the various worlds and the interest which I have in the demiurge, who is the explorer god, both the god of war and of lyric.

*JP: So the god of war and lyric is one and the same?*

WS: Yes.

*JP: That's an interesting combination.*

WS: It is, isn't it?

*JP: Is this preoccupation with transition and the transitory nature of things part of the reason why death seems to be an important motif in your work?*

WS: No, I wouldn't say that death is an important motif, though it's true I've written this play, *Death and the King's Horseman*, which is well-known in this country. If you look at that play very carefully, I think you'll find that it really turns out to be an affirmation of life, of the principle of sacrifice, the principle of the scapegoat. The significance is, in fact, the assurance of continuity. So it's not so much about death. I think it's more the preoccupation with the mysteries of transition, really trying to explore this normally intangible space through which we pass coming into this world and through which we presumably must pass to join the ancestors.

*JP: The play seems to have a celebratory attitude towards death.*

WS: Yes, indeed, the attitude of many African societies towards death is not a negative one, especially the death of an old person. The expression is, "She has gone to join the ancestors." Actually, there's always a sense of loss. Absence is loss in all human beings. But then there's a therapeutic approach which is

that of recognizing the fact that there's been a transfer: she has gone to join other energies in preserving the health of the community.

*JP: And death is easier to accept, of course, when it's the elder who dies first as opposed to the son; there's that terrible inversion in *Death and the King's Horseman*.*

*Where do you get ideas for your works?*

WS: From everywhere and everything. Sometimes I get my ideas from actuality. A play I just completed, for instance, is a result



of a very deep bewilderment, an obsession I've had with with an event which took place in my own country, where three young men were executed under a retroactive law. In other words, when they committed the offense, it was not a capital offense. While the trial was going on, this offense was escalated to a capital forfeit. It started protests all over the country. A very brutal military regime executed the three men.

*JP: Was the law changed to punish these men?*

WS: Yes, it was a very strange rule; up to the last minute nobody believed such a hideous injustice could be carried out. There were protests from all sections of the community. It was a mercifully short-lived fascistic regime that really wanted to terrorize the country into submission.

So you have ideas like that, and you have those that spring just from observation of the foibles of society and so on and so forth.

*JP: What was the genesis of *The Lion and the Jewel*?*

WS: *The Lion and the Jewel* is an event, a yoking up of experiences. It's a little-known fact that this play actually commenced gestation when I was a student in England, and, in

fact, the first version of it was written when I was in England. The immediate cause, the triggering event, was the marriage of Charlie Chaplin to Oona, the daughter of Eugene O'Neill, who was about 50 years younger than he was at the time.

Naturally the press made a big deal out of it, but I just transferred it to my own society where it's not uncommon to find a virile old man taking his sixth, eighth, tenth wife, who might be a girl young enough to be his granddaughter. I always considered Charlie Chaplin to have a bit of the satyr in him.

As I was thinking about it, I considered the whole question of the comedy of the sexes, shall we put it this way, not the battle of the sexes but the comedy of the sexes, the whole issue of seduction, of compatibility. I transferred the whole thing to my terrain where a school teacher who is sort of a half-baked modernist, a very half-baked modernist, finds himself contesting for the hand of the village belle with a very wily, really cunning and virile satyr who is the chief of the village. That's really how that came about.

*JP: What are your writing habits? What is your creative process like?*

WS: The strongest feature is that any work, whether it's a poem, or a play, or even prose, gestates for quite a while in my mind before I really start to get it down on paper. As for the habit of writing, all I can tell you is that I use a typewriter. I have used a typewriter for ages. When I've typed, I do a lot of longhand scribbling over key sections. I cannot express any particular method beyond writing, correcting and redrafting, and sometimes rejecting, literally starting sections all over again. In the case of plays, sometimes changing the original theatrical idiom which I use simply because, as I write, another idiom seems far more suitable, and so now I have to recast the whole play in the new idiom. Once in a while, a play which has been gestating in my mind comes out like *that*, in white heat. All at once.

An example I can think of, a very painful one, was *The Strong Breed*, which I remember I wrote in literally what is called white heat. And then I went to a rehearsal one day, not my rehearsal; I went to watch another group, known as Players of the Dawn. I just finished the play and so I just wanted to sit down and watch some other people suffer. I had the play with me at that time. I had only one copy with me.

I can only work on one copy at a time. I cannot put a carbon between two sheets of paper, no. When I have just finished a work, I tend to hang onto it until I can copy it on a photocopy machine.

I had this play with me, went to rehearsal, left the rehearsal, stood outside talking to some of the actors while leaning on a car, perhaps with the script in my hand. When I finished talking to one of the actors, he got into his car, and I went to my buggy. I left the play on top of his car and that was the last I saw of that play. There was nothing I could do about it except wince and drink a beer or two.

*JP: Or three or four.*

WS: Or three or four, and then go about other things. Then one day, maybe about a year later, it came back exactly the same way as I originally set it down. In other words,

I just sat down and didn't get up till it was all down on paper. That's the one exception. The others required a lot of scribbling over and a wastepaper basketful.

*JP: How important to you is having access to a theatre company as you prepare a play?*

WS: Very important. Very important. It's always useful to have in your mind the kind of actor you might want to play a role. Even that very factor can shape, can fine-tune the character in a number of ways. It doesn't matter whether that actor plays it eventually or not. I find it personally useful too to have an entire company to work with at the time that I write because I do not see the play merely on paper. As I write a play, I literally have to stop the action on stage and figure movements or hear new sounds or go over it several times.

*JP: Do you have an audience in mind when you put together a play?*

Writing in English  
is not a decision,  
it's an imposition.

WS: The only time I have an audience in mind is with my guerilla theatre, which is social commentary, improvising satirical sketches around certain social anomalies, political anomalies, petty acts of oppression, society, responsibilities. That guerilla theatre definitely has an audience in mind. It is a shotgun kind of theatre: you rehearse it very quickly; you go to the market square; go outside the civil service offices; play to civil servants during their break; you go to the house of assembly where they've just done some stupid thing or stolen – appropriated – resources; dramatize the event; and you disappear before the police can arrive to arrest the actors. So with that I have an audience in mind.

I cannot think of any other kind of work in which I consciously sit down to write to an audience, primarily because my material comes from my society, and the end product returns to that society. I take that for granted.

*JP: My understanding is that you write everything but poetry in English, but poetry you write in the language of the Yoruba.*

WS: No, I write poetry also in English. I do write some poetry first in Yoruba, especially the lyrics for some of my plays. I write quite a bit of it in Yoruba.

*JP: Is the decision to write in English a literary, cultural, or political decision?*

WS: It is not a decision: it is an imposition. English is the national language of Nigeria. As much as I may resent it politically, it is a reality, and it's also a convenient reality because we have so many languages within the national boundaries, and each language, especially the three or four main languages, is very important. They are spoken by large,

politically conscious sections of people, and the language can become a divisive factor in the politics of a volatile country like Nigeria. This is why much that is culturally or politically, shall we say, presented on a certain level is presented in English. Most Nigerians would recognize the fact that, in addition to the indigenous languages, English may possibly be a unifying factor. If you attempted to impose one of the others, there would be serious political turmoil.

*JP: So English gives you access to a larger audience in your own society. How do you feel about winning the Nobel Prize?*

WS: It's affected the attitude of a number of African governments. I know that some of them who never had a cultural policy before, some of them for whom the arts, the humanities, have always been a kind of poor relation of other concerns, of societal development, have succumbed to the significance of a prize like this, and actually have become more deliberately involved in fashioning some cultural policies. This is true. Whether you like it or not, the arts always carry a stigma of self-indulgence in a number of developing societies.

*JP: Here in America, too.*

WS: Here, too, okay. You know the priorities: food, health, and shelter. All that is acknowledged. What the planners never seem to acknowledge is that the arts, in fact, contribute towards the consciousness of the mobilization of forces that generate these fundamental necessities. And in any case, the arts are part of social development. So this recognition – from in effect an alien planet, because that is what it is – the alien planet says, "Wait a minute, Something is going on here which is of significance to the rest of the world." That's what the prize really means.

That has affected the thinking of quite a number of governments.

*JP: Has it had an effect on individuals as well as governments? Do you feel that you are an inspiration to the next generation of writers?*

WS: Yes, very definitely, and at the same time it has been, shall we say, a rather sore bone in the throat of some kinds of individuals also. Would-be-critics, for instance, who say very curiously – not curiously, because one knows what their motivations are – they say, why should an outside body come in and decide what is good literature in Africa. That kind of very petulant thing. It's silly and really small-minded, but very much in the minority. So it's affected individuals, too, I think.

*JP: Do you find yourself getting along with literary critics in general?*

WS: Oh, the first thing I would say about literary critics is that I tend not to read criticisms of my own work, whether good or bad. In fact, when for one reason or another I am compelled to look at a particular critical work, I never read it thoroughly. I always feel embarrassed, even if I'm alone in the room. I just find a kind of embarrassment in reading about myself. This is the truth; I've never become used to it.

But you see I'm a teacher, which means that I'm a literary critic, and I have certain literary values. I find myself compelled from time to time, when I see a piece of this teaching misleading, even if it relates to my own work, to respond to such criticism, especially what I call dishonest criticism. One such was the

case of Monsieur [Frank] Rich. This tyrant sits on the pages of *The New York Times* [as drama critic].

*JP: Yes, 60 Minutes did a story on him last Sunday. Did you see it?*

WS: No, I didn't. Oh, I would have liked to see that because I hope some truths were told about what I consider a case of sheer megalomania, sheer megalomania. I say this not just in relation to my own work, which took a savaging from him, but what's become an attitude which I have always had about the entire American critical scene. One or two people can make or break a production. It's a very strange thing, absolutely not duplicated anywhere else in the world. So my attitude to critics is generally informed by two principles: one, the critic is not infallible; and two, the critic should not exercise more power than the creative person.

*JP: What contemporary authors do you like to read? Do you have favorites?*

WS: Yes, Toni Morrison is one of my all-time favorite authors, and Umberto Eco and Derek Walcott, I like a lot. There are some lesser known younger generation writers whose work I find very stimulating: Ben Okri, a Nigerian writer, for example. My tastes are rather eclectic.

*JP: You have never hesitated to take a political stand. How do you see the relationship between art and politics?*

WS: A point which I always like to stress is that every artist, every writer, is different from the next. I never accept the idea of a blanket mission or engagement for artists. I believe it's an unhealthy, unnecessary burden placed on the artist by certain schools of thought and very often by a certain will to fascism. It can develop into an opportunistic kind of fascistic control over the mission of the writer. I accept the fact that temperamentally I am the kind of writer or artist who is politically engaged and who feels very uncomfortable writing about a sunset when there's mayhem in society, especially by a state power.

Writing generally I consider a social phenomenon; in other words, when we talk about literature, or art in general, we must think of the totality of artistic productivity. It's the collective response of the imaginative mind which ultimately affects society, and one part is not more important than the other.

Let's talk about the consumer for a change, not just the producer. We know very well that people do not restrict themselves only to politically engaged literature. On the contrary, very often what the consumer needs is a work which speaks in certain universal terms, which enlarges the vision of that particular consumer, enlarges the horizons, and opens up totally new vistas of perception: in other words, enlarges the humanity of the individual.

This is a very important function of the writer, every bit as important as the other combative kind of writing geared to ameliorating the condition of the individual or the collective in society. So I look at the entire pabulum of literature. I think that it is this totality which actually serves society.

I don't believe that if I can pick up a book that has nothing to do with political engagement and read it with satisfaction, then I'm committing a crime of non-engagement as if I had written that book myself, or that I should pick it up and say, "Ah, this is not

politically engaged; I have no business to be reading it." You and I know that is not true. Very often when you have just had your head bashed in by the forces of law and order, maybe what you want to do is, in fact, pick up a book and totally escape before plunging in again. So literature operated solely by a movement, I like to stress again and again, is a kind of critical tyranny which takes a very narrow definition of the function of literature for humanity. That kind of narrowness is what I particularly deplore.

*JP: Do you still feel the shadow of having been in prison for over two years? Is it still hovering over your life in some palpable way?*

WS: No. No. Because I have been very nearly back in again since then. There have been two regimes since I was in prison, to whose ministrations and attention I came again and again. Going back in prison, I didn't court it once; I assure you I am not a masochist. But

I am uncomfortable  
writing about  
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society.

it was something to which I reconciled myself very easily. If that was the penalty for being able to live with oneself, it's unfortunate. Very reluctantly I prepared to undergo it. So from that point of view, I would say that no, I don't have a shadow hanging over me.

The main thing that it's probably done is that it's made me more conscious of the fate of those who are inside prison, and I don't mean only in our country, but in the outside. It's really a boon to my kind of activism on their behalf, especially in the African continent.

*JP: You seem to stress the pragmatic in politics rather than ideology and rhetoric. How do you see the future of democracy, racial justice, and economic vitality in Africa?*

WS: I don't oppose pragmatism to idealism; I oppose pragmatism to rhetoric. Ideology has been practiced more in the breach of rhetoric than in the act. Many regimes have taken refuge to entrench themselves as purely totalitarian states and nothing else. Ideology becomes merely the stepladder to climb to power and the platform upon which they oppress their own society. If that is ideology, I would rather have the pragmatic approach to ruling.

I believe very much in certain ideological principles. I even believe an ideology can and should be codified. But it has got to be spelled out in all the various areas of social activity and must be related to the reality which exists in our culture. I consider myself totally a socialist. I cannot give up the fundamental socialism in which I believe, and I know that African societies require socialism as a principle on which to develop their society.

It's not socialism which failed in Eastern

Europe; no, it's the opposite – it's tyranny which became exposed, and it's a pity the baby gets thrown out with the bathwater. The African nations should understand why this is happening. We are talking about countries which have undergone half a century of the most vicious kind of totalitarian control: control over thought, the arts, even economic enterprise.

Economic enterprise does not necessarily have to fall under the system of capitalism. You can socialize industry if the producers are made to feel a part of that productive process, of the resources, of the end result. I believe that is what socialism can do for a society, genuine socialism, where the worker actually feels he is the owner of the work. That is socialization of labor. This is not practiced in the so-called socialist nations.

*JP: Do you foresee the African nations engaging in that sort of conscious examination of their society? What sort of mechanism would have to operate for this to happen?*

WS: It can happen, and it should happen. The wind of change is blowing fiercely over the African continent. One tyranny after another has fallen, and the beginning of a good, sound, correct, and relevant ideological choice is first of all the deposition of tyrannies.

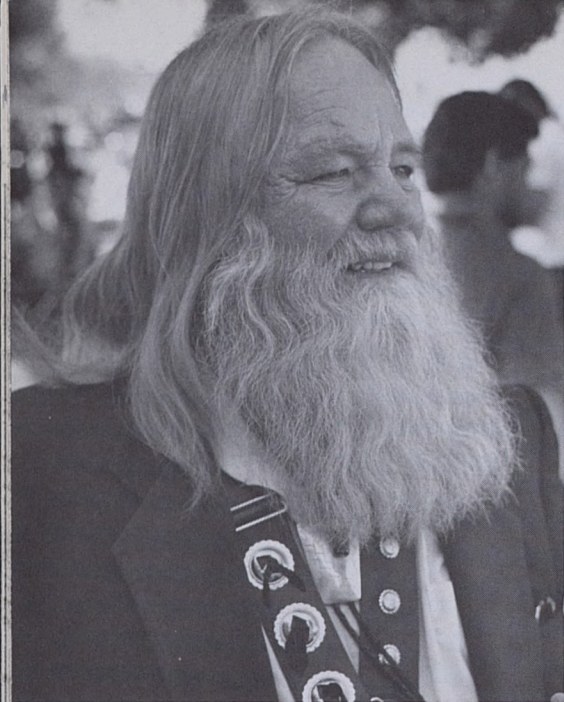
A year after the Nobel we had a literary conference in Nigeria, 1987 or 88, where I challenged African writers and artists to bend their crafts towards eliminating all dictatorships, either of the right or left, military regimes, civilian, or whatever, on the African continent before the end of the century. That's the target. It's happening much faster than I even predicted.

At the time I made that declaration, we had not yet seen the true face of Russia, of *perestroika*. The moment things began to happen in Eastern Europe, I knew the process would be accelerated even on the African continent. The moment tyrannies, dictatorships, are eliminated, which means that the people now have a right of political education in all its variety, political choices in very concrete, not mere theoretical, terms. When they have that choice, it's possible for those who believe sincerely in socialism, in a real, productive socialism, to then mobilize and disseminate their faith, their principles, to the public, and through that try and seize power.

This could never happen as long as you have dictatorships, whether a dictatorship of the left or the right. In fact a dictatorship of the left is more dangerous. It's always been more intolerant of genuine socialists because they know that genuine socialists will expose their own declarations for the rhetorical scarecrows which they really are. When you have a process of political choice, then you have the process of political education, sensitization, and it's easy for those with a socialist agenda to go to the people through the process I described. So I can see it happening once we control the dictatorships on the continent.

*JP: Do you think it's possible for the U.S. to play a positive role in Africa's move towards freedom?*

WS: No. Capital NO. The United States should just stick to the United States and leave other people alone. The United States should not be allowed to attempt to step into the vacuum being created by the eclipse of the Russian Soviet influences and its ideological battles. **aa**



Bobby Mercereau, Blues Man. John L. Smith photo.

**Y**ou need not search for the blues. It finds you.

It taps you on the shoulder one night late, gently like the ghost of a lover long gone, or rough like a barfly looking for a fight.

The blues is a painful memory. It starts two heartbeats after you realize you left more than a crippled-up dog, crock pot and your best Jimmy Reed albums behind when you quit that last relationship.

"Blues ain't nothing but a good love gone bad," the man said, and that's as good a definition as any.

Although getting the blues is as easy as breathing, locating the music that paints its mood is no mean feat. If far from impossible, finding blues music in Las Vegas is a fulltime search for addicts of the kind of sweet nepenthe pushed by Muddy Waters, Little Milton, Stevie Ray Vaughan and B.B. King.

The dedicated can get their share of the stuff. The rest don't matter.

Most of the blues available locally is mined in

dark bars featuring keg beer, poor ventilation, and barely enough room for a stage. With little room left over, dancing is a contact sport in these joints. It gets done, though.

On a recent Friday night at the Sand Dollar Lounge on Spring Mountain Road, John Earl Williams and his Boogiemans Band stood shoulder-to-shoulder and filled the room with the good stuff.

The band's sounds were incongruous with the Sand Dollar's dock-of-the-bay decor. After all, they don't play the *Gilligan's Island* theme. But that's the way it is at most blues venues. For addicts, the funky scenery adds to the emotional surrealism of the music.

Although the locations and the bands change, the faces of the local players remain constant. On some nights, it is almost as if the Las Vegas blues movement is composed of a single cadre of relentless players.

John Earl Williams is one of those. Williams, 44, grew up in Dallas and has played the blues from Las Vegas to Amsterdam and most places between. He sings, plays lead guitar,

# THE FACE OF THE BLUES IN LAS VEGAS

BY JOHN L. SMITH



Scott Rhiner Band, Austin (Rhiner at right). John L. Smith photo.

piano, harp, and almost any other instrument capable of moaning and lamenting. Williams works construction when he needs to, plays the blues because he has to.

Bassist Avian Kee is another. Kee tried to go straight a couple of years ago, but he slipped back into the blues. He works in the daylight for an auto glass-tinting business. At night, he wears tinted glasses, a felt fedora and thumps the bass beat to the standards of the genre for the Boogieman Band. He plays a little of his own stuff between installments of Albert Collins, Junior Walker and Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Bill Johnston is a 37-year-old harp player. (A harp is a harmonica, not the instrument angels pluck.) After three years playing with the Blues Kings and other bands, Johnston chased the blues to Austin and found the climate great for listening but not conducive to earning a living. Record executives have decided Austin is a breeding ground for talent, and the competition has grown so great that many bands play for tips or less.

So it was back to Las Vegas with his briefcase full of harps and a hunger to ride out the bad times.

"This takes time," he said between sets. "I don't think people can just walk in and say, 'Oh, let's play some blues.' This takes a lifetime. It's my way of blowing off steam without violence or anything. It's my way of being creative."

He surveyed the smoky, half-filled room and added, "If we stay here for awhile people will hear about it."

A good local blues band might make from \$300 - \$500 a weekend, plus tips and drinks. It's not enough to put junior through medical school, but the players acknowledge the reality of working a straight job in order to afford their music. Bands that attract a following can stay in one place long enough to get their names on the marquee and maybe even a radio advertisement and mention in the local paper.

"That ain't a lot of money, but you want to get paid," Johnston said.

More often, by the time most blues heads sniff out the latest venue, the band has already packed its instruments and shuffled off to another club.

"It's better than going and watching somebody copy Madonna," Johnston said before returning to the stage. "This town's grown enough. It could be awesome."

It is something less than that.

"It's a tough blues crowd in a sense," Williams said. "People are pretty spoiled here. They get the best acts in the world here."

Bar owners are also spoiled. Until recent years, the omnipresence of video poker machines all but guaranteed a bar owner could make a profit from his business. Just keep the beer cold and the doors open and the customers took care of the rest. With the proliferation of bars, the competition has increased and available income has decreased.

It all has had an impact on the blues. Few owners are willing to pay more than a shot and a beer over minimum wage. If a band doesn't immediately draw a crowd, it can expect to be looking for work by daylight.

"It's hard to keep a band together when they don't pay very much," Williams said.

Blues also suffers from another malady locally: little radio airplay. With the exception of a couple of university public radio programs and a Sunday evening show on KKLZ 96.3 FM, blues music is limited to a distinctly southern sound. That is, the greatest hits of Stevie Ray Vaughan and the Allman brothers.

If the music has an organized front, it is the Las Vegas Blues Society. In less than four years, the club has grown to more than 700 members. Although it sponsors picnics and brings prominent players the like of Albert Collins and Charles Musselwhite to Las Vegas for one-night stands, the society functions best as a blues communications base. Its *Blues News* paper lists everything from the latest spot to hear the music to the newest release from national artists.

Bill Cherry, a transplanted Chicago boy who grew up watching and listening to that city's greats, is the president of the society.

"I got addicted to the blues in Chicago in the late sixties," Cherry said. "When I came out here in '71, there wasn't much going on other than B.B. King playing at the Hilton once in a while."

That has changed.

With increased organization and constant mailings to fans, the music has managed to grow steadily in popularity. The fourth annual Blues Society picnic at Sunset Park in April, at which an estimated 10,000 people gathered, illustrates the upside. Seven bands, most of them local, played at the picnic.

If the blues has a face in Las Vegas, it belongs to tenor man Bobby Mercereau. His black suit, long gray hair and longer gray beard make him look a cross between an old country preacher and an older biker. He is the oldest of the regular players: "I've passed the speed limit," he said of his age as he stood before going on stage at the picnic.

He has the face of a cynic, the words of an optimist.

"The blues is kind of coming back all over the country," he said. "It surprises me. Blues music is almost a cult music."

But cult music rarely pays the bills. Mercereau plays in any band that will pay him. He earns his living as a musician and blows everything from combo jazz to country and western. But it's blues, always blues, that hits him where it hurts.

"As long as I can exist, I'd rather do that," Mercereau said, then added that, while many things have changed in the past 20 years, the rate of pay for a local bar musician has remained the same. He is not sentimental about it: "You might make \$55 a night now.



John Earl's Boogieman Band

I was making \$55 a night back in 1970."

Blues Kings leader Nick Farkas puts it bluntly: "I think the expression in Washington is 'diminished expectations.' You can leave town, but you'll be lucky if you make expenses."

Guitar player Scott Rhiner made the move to Austin more than a year ago and has managed to survive. He hasn't sold his first million records, but his job at an Austin guitar store frequented by Jimmy Vaughan and other top players has put him a little closer to his dream. Rhiner, a talented 27-year-old, brought his band back to Las Vegas for the blues picnic and was impressed by the turnout.

"This feels great," he said. "In Austin, we're just another band."

Las Vegas may someday drop its neon and polyester image and evolve into a blues Mecca, but don't bet your harp on it. Despite the success of the picnic and other Blues Society functions, the city has been slow to embrace the indigenous American music. It has managed to gain a precarious foothold in the land where disco and Elvis never died, but it will probably always be a cultural expression that exists in smoky bars and roadhouses.

Then again, that suits the music just fine.

The society's Bill Cherry hopes for more.

"I think a lot of reason the blues is coming on so strong worldwide right now is a reaction to synthesizers and the Milli Vanillis," he said. "People want to go back to real music. The blues is very basic, real music."

As real as the ghost of a good love gone bad. aa



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## ACTORS+LAS VEGAS from page 18.

A practice related to pre-casting is the "tendency" of companies to cast the same people over and over again, giving them precedence over people from other theatre groups and newcomers<sup>(4)</sup>. It is easy enough to say "their" actors are better or more suited for a role. At times, of course, that is so. But, when seasoned and talented actors with no history in Company Y never get call-backs for Y's productions, it creates the impression that it is because they are outsiders.

I considered this issue a great deal before expressing it, because it is, of course, an excellent excuse actors can use as to why (s)he was not cast. But it has been discussed too many times among actors – and observation seems to lend it credence – to brush it off as sour grapes. I have never personally felt victimized by de-facto trouping, but I've spoken to several actors who have.

The point is this: pre-casting and formation de-facto troupes lessen the artistic value of Las Vegas' community theatre and chip away at the value of our shows. They lessen ticket values by putting artificial obstacles in the way of assembling the best possible talent available to do the job. And actors who contribute so much to local theatre without financial compensation should be treated as fairly as possible for all our sakes.

Many things attract patrons to theatre – historical perspective, cultural achievement, simple entertainment. Our community has an obligation to provide the best talent available. Since most theatres do not pay actors, all those actors with talent and desire must be welcomed, allowed to compete, and fully utilized for the benefit of Las Vegas community theatre. aa

**Next issue: Sharing audiences and resources – are local companies too competitive? Also: Why not pay actors from the box office?**

4. Obviously I do not refer to groups like Actors Repertory Theatre formed expressly as a repertory ensemble.

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## A PLAY IS BORN from page 14.

a glamorized and appealing, if somewhat ambiguous, Billy the Kid; "Rooster and Ponytail" (also by Shuttleworth) is a modern day parallel to "Land Pirate," but here the Billy character is unambiguously ruthless, brutal, and destructive. "Among the Heathen," by John Newsom, gives us an exploited, worn out saloon girl (played by Kerry Loomis), parallel to our modern day worn out show girl. Leaving out "Show Girl" also left the whole play lopsided. Not only was symmetry lost, but theme suffered as well. "Rooster and Ponytail" left us hanging around in the era of Bonnie and Clyde. "Show Girl" would have propelled us into the contemporary west and also sustained the elegiac note of Bob Mayberry's ghostly Indian fishing in the desert (in the current version of *West!*, this is the final figure we see). "Show Girl" would have ended the play with a powerful image of the contemporary west – Las Vegas, city of hard desert glitter, final tomb of the American dream.

All of which just goes to show what I've

suspected all along – creation is a tenuous and sloppy process. No matter how you fine-tune the innards, the whole structure can tip over if you remove a cinder block.

Tipping over aside, *West!* is still an interesting attempt at playwrights collaborating, and, considering that it has eight authors, it hangs together remarkably well. I just wish they hadn't left out "Show Girl"!

While all of this blocking is going on, assistant director Devere is busy noting all of these gestures and movements on her script. So are assistant stage managers Anastasia Gavigan and Steve Mauro. Gavigan and Mauro coordinate actors, props, scenery, and everything else you can think of. They do a lot of the paperwork of the production. It's like recording a baseball game, play by play, but they record scenes, movement by movement and gesture by gesture.

Also during blocking, actors and actresses are learning their lines through constant repetition. Espeland and Gantt worked through their scenes with script and pencil in hand, constantly pausing to note movements, gestures, and emotions on their pages. In fact, at this stage everybody's busy writing everything down.

I left amazed at the amount of time it takes to simulate reality on the stage. And fascinated by the way in which drama is a relationship between words, space, gestures, and emotions.

At the second rehearsal I attended, I watched "working" and "running." working is similar to blocking, only smoother. Fewer starts and stops, but a continuation of the fine tuning, of the pulling together of words, emotions, and movements on the stage. Running is, as its name implies, just that – you run through the piece, without pause, to watch it flow. And then you work it some more.

At this stage, the actors and actresses are without their scripts, so they occasionally ask to be prompted by someone who, apparently, volunteers to sit around with a script in his (her) lap.

The six weeks of rehearsals are intense. The company rehearses six or seven days a week, four hours a day, and sometimes as much as six on weekends. So, why do they do it? Bob Mayberry, author of several parts of *West!* and player of many Indians in it, said, "It's the element of danger. Some people jump off the sides of bridges on bungee cords for thrills. I get up on the stage."

*West!* opened on a Thursday evening, and the Friday before, the director, stage manager, and various members of the technical crew got together for what's called "paper tech," the noting of all sound and light cues on the script. Saturday the same people ran through all the cues, without the cast, in what's called "dry tech." Sunday was "wet tech," the same as the day before, only this time with the cast. After wet tech, the cast and crew ran through a full performance. It's a long day, 12 or 13 hours.

Monday and Tuesday are full dress rehearsals, and Wednesday is a dress rehearsal in front of an impromptu audience.

Then....

Opening night. Words as resonant as "backstage" and "behind-the-scenes." I looked

for a "break a leg" and, sure enough, there it was, on a bulletin board outside the men's dressing room. (During rehearsals I'd listened for "cut" and "take five" and they'd been there, too – along with one I'd never heard before, "press on.")

Opening night, the director and assistant director go backstage and make all the actors and actresses nervous. Then they sit out front, in the audience, agonizing because now the play's on its own – they can't fiddle with it anymore.

What happens during the hour before curtain time? A lot. The tech crew makes light and sound checks. Prop people sweep and mop the stage area and also set up props for the actors.

During this time, the stage manager, LouAnn Viado, makes a series of calls to the cast through a page/cue system. An hour before the house opens, she says, "Good evening, cast. This is your hour to house call. We will notify you as soon as props are set for your inspection. Thank you." (This information and the quoted material comes from a memo from technical director Joe Aldrich.)

After the props are set, Viado announces, "Cast, may I have your attention, please. Props are set and ready for your inspection. You have \_\_\_\_\_ minutes in which to check your props before the house is opened."

Then, five minutes before the house opens, she sends out a five minutes till call and a final check your props call. When the house does open, she announces, "Cast, the house is now open. Please do not enter or cross the stage area. This is your half hour call to places."

Thereafter follows a number of calls to places at spaced intervals until the two minute warning. Here she repeats "call to places" several times and tops it off with a "have a good show."

As stylized and efficient as an airplane take-off.

During that half hour before the house opens, the actors and actresses are making mental and physical preparations for the show. They walk the stage, exercising, limbering up, letting out bellows, screeches, trills, and shouts – all to loosen up the vocal cords and release tensions. (Theatre is an unusual blend of spontaneity and tension, of contraction and release.)

Waiting like banshees and flopping like flounders, they seem oblivious to the tech crew all around, running final checks.

The curtain rises and I can't stay backstage because I'll be in the way, so I spend time till intermission up in the lighting booth, where I have clearance. There Viado is hooked up, via headphones, with light operator Justy Hutchins and soundman Kevin Stevens. The system at Judy Bayley is computer assisted, which means that some of the light and sound operations have to be done manually. Viado calls cues to Stevens and Hutchins, 103 of them for the show.

Viado's also hooked up to Gavigan and Mauro in the wings. Throughout the show, Gavigan and Mauro coordinate actors and props. While they're doing their coordinating, Viado's coordinating her cues with them.

Opening night also means food. A reception followed the show, and everyone munched on crackers and cheese, celery and carrot sticks,



and strawberries and pineapple. Performance drains you of calories. Since stomachs are in knots before the performance, many of the actors and actresses came out and grazed mightily upon the buffet, especially Mark Henness, who played a buffalo in Rand Higbee's piece, "Dream Grass." It was backbreaking work because Henness and fellow buffalo Shawn Martin had to stay bent over in four-footed position the whole time. Henness said he'd been having a rough time of it. I couldn't resist pointing out that that's the way pregnant women feel for nine months.

Everywhere there's a palpable feeling of release after the performance exaltation and buoyancy.

Closing night means "striking" the set. Somewhere between 30 and 40 cast and crew get together and tear everything apart and put what's left over, intact, away. It's a tradition, says Devere, that helps to soften the psychological letdown of the show being over, postpartum depression.

Enormous doors at the back of the set are open to the Scene Shop, a vast room that Norse gods and goddesses could easily fly winged horses through. This room is the Sargasso Sea of the theatre: props and scenery from all the shows reside in jumbled array here. On one wall is a stained-glass lion left over from *Merchant of Venice*; on the opposite wall is a space shuttle with an astronaut floating outside.

The Scene Shop opens, through big doors, out onto the night, the wind, the stars, Maryland Parkway. Some things are thrown

out, but a lot is saved and recycled. Flats are painted over endlessly. Parts of *Candide* and *The Man Who Came to Dinner* were patched into the set of *West!*

Performance should evaporate. It is, by its nature, ephemeral. So how right that the set too should disappear. Nevertheless, it's nice to think that the souls of previous shows are passed along to succeeding ones, piece by piece, flat by flat, fragment by fragment.

The backdrop for *West!* is a desert mountain scene that looks like a silvered-over photograph. Depending on how it was lit, it shapeshifted throughout the show, sometimes looking like a rolling sea with mountain islands rising from it, sometimes like a plain of clouds seen from airplane height. But now, with no transforming light upon it, it looked dowdy and neglected. On this sad note I left, with a lot glimpses into the stage world, but with something I've always wondered about left unanswered. How does an actor or actress who has to play something very still onstage, like a corpse or a rock, stay motionless all that time? At the beginning of "Rooster and Ponytail," actor Charlie Paddock is shot during the first second. Thereafter he lies motionless on his stomach while the rest of the piece plays out around him. I asked Paddock, but he had to dash off before he could tell me.

After the stage is stripped blank, the stage manager leaves one light (called a "ghost light") on above it, in the middle. (This is in case burglars break in, so they don't fall and hurt themselves and sue someone.)

A fitting end note: one ghost light shining above a blank stage. **aa**

## TRANSFORMING VISION from page 6.

Dramatic Arts, served as associate director of the Sierra Nevada Museum of Art, was a father of two, been the Northern Nevada coordinator of the arts council's Artists-in-Residence program, and was publisher of the tiny West Coast Poetry Review Press.

Oh, he had also worked as a guide in the Nepalese Himalayas. And he had trimmed down from a sedentary college weight of more than 200 pounds to a trim 155 on his 5 foot 10 frame, thanks to rock climbing begun in New Zealand.

*Transforming.*

A photo from 1980 shows a smiling Fox in wireframed glasses, shaggy hair and beard, polyester suit and striped tie.

An arts professional with an office.

Which is what he is today.

*when we return  
two weeks from now  
the waterfall  
across the valley  
will still hang frozen*

*two new shops  
will sell tinned fruit*

- Fox's poem, "Namche Bazaar."

Fox, NSCA executive director since 1984, now delegates that talk to high schoolers to other poets. He rues having only about eight hours a week to write.

"Absolutely the most valuable commodity an artist can have is time."

Time to transform. **aa**



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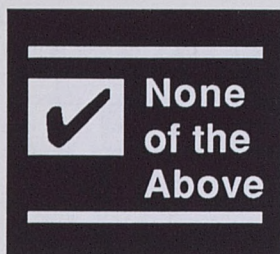
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# "If I only had an agent"

by Patricia McConnel

I had just finished a reading in the Jambalaya, one of the last of the old-style funky literary bars, in Arcata, California. I had read a story called "The Opal Earring," which has a lot to do with iridescent colors and what they mean to me, although the main story line is about a lost opal earring and the bizarre sequence of events that lead to its recovery. One of the lines in the story goes like this: "If you ever see a woman staring into the gutter after the rain, you'll know it's me, mesmerized by the swirling rainbow colors on the oil slicks."

As I hoisted myself onto a bar stool, where I intended to decompress with a glass of milk (what's good enough for the Lone Ranger is good enough for me), a woman approached me and said, "I stare into gutters after the rain, too. I love those colors. I could have written that story." There was a smugness in her tone that told me she not only meant she understood and related to my story, she meant the remark literally as well. She really believed she could have written that story herself. Although I was extremely irritated, I responded with something polite and noncommittal.

But in the ten years since then similar things have happened so often that my sufferance-of-fools threshold is now far lower. If she said that to me today I would no longer be polite. I would say, "No, you couldn't, or you would have."

Ms. Smug was afflicted with the Anybody-Can-Be-A-Writer Syndrome. Any published writer will verify that at least one smiling but earnest person at every reading and book signing will tell the author, "I have a great idea for a best seller, if only I had the time to write it." Not only will they presume to make this outrageous claim, but they will stand there smiling expectantly, waiting for you to

be impressed. If you have the patience to ask if they have previously published anything, the answer will certainly be "No." Nor will the point of your question be understood. The person will blissfully babble on about his/her idea. Not only that, s/he will end up asking you for your agent's name and a recommendation from you, unless you can find a way to escape. (Spilling a drink on the nearly-famous almost-author works well.)

I am extremely annoyed by this phenomenon. Only the art of writing inspires this kind of presumptuousness. No one says, "I have a great idea for a ballet, if only I had time to dance." Or, "I have a great concerto in my head, if only I had time to learn to play the piano."

Why writing, and not the other arts? Because we are all adept at the tools of writing. Nearly everyone can use a pencil and a pen, many of us use typewriters and computers, but most of all, every one of us uses it language every day of our lives. We even think it, dream it. How many of us dance, play the piano, sculpt, or spread paint on canvas as ordinary everyday activities? But we do *speak* every day, and most of us do some writing as well. At the very least we write notes to the repairman, or letters home asking for money. We have something we want to express and we believe we do so satisfactorily. What's the big deal?

Some years ago I had to write a letter about a delicate matter that was of extreme importance to me. It was a difficult letter to write because I was at risk of losing something I cared a lot about, and I was very angry. I didn't want my anger to show through, since displays of anger are merely attempts to frighten our adversaries into compliance with our wills, like cats hissing and standing sideways with their

hair all standing on end so they'll look bigger. It seems to be an instinctive thing, perhaps left over from our Neanderthal days, but like many vestigial instincts, it no longer works. It just makes the other person defensive and stubborn. The last thing I wanted my letter to do was make the recipient more defensive and stubborn than he already was.

So the situation required tactful handling. When I had written the best letter I knew how to write, I called my friend Bernie and read it to him, knowing he would catch any weak points in my argument and any nuances which might reveal my anger. Bernie told me the letter was fine. He said it flowed very well and sounded cordial but firm, exactly the tone I wanted. In fact, he said, it sounded quite spontaneous and natural, and this surprised him because he knew how mad I was. Did I just write this off the top of my head?

"No," I said, "this is the seventh revision. I've been working on it all morning."

There was a long silence at the other end of the line. Then he said, "You mean you wrote and wrote and wrote and wrote until you got it spontaneous?"

So the big deal is that although generic writing is easy, *good* writing is not. Even people who are not writers have experienced how hard it is to write that letter on which so much rides – an extension of the mortgage, a proposal of marriage, the job you must have because it's what you always dreamed of. How many times have you rewritten such letters, struggling to get everything just right, searching for the language that will most precisely say what you mean, give the tone that will persuade and impress instead of alienate?

For professional writers, everything we write is such a letter.

Good writing is the result of years of dedicated discipline to learn the techniques, and then more years of practice. It takes no less discipline and practice to become a good writer than it does to become a ballerina or a concert pianist. But the popular perception is that the writer is born, not made – a unique, gifted individual, starving in a garret, writing by divine inspiration, a Muse standing behind her, dictating through a little microphone in the back of the writer's head. And of course, everyone considers herself a unique and gifted individual (and to a certain extent I agree, but I think very often the gift is not for writing).

The trouble is that although good writing is difficult, it *looks* easy – that's what makes it good. There is ease of comprehension, vividness of image, and musicality of language, all of it flowing so naturally it creates the illusion that whatever is being said could not have been said any other way. The best writing makes people think, "I could have written that." aa

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# CROSS CULTURAL Misadventures

by Tim Cahill

***Festival for Three Thousand Maidens*, by Richard Wiley, published by E.P. Dutton 1991. \$18.95**

It is 1969 and Peace Corps volunteer, Bobby Comstock, a fat boy with a good heart, arrives in a small Korean town where he will teach English for two years. Bobby is the only foreigner in town, the only American, and his size immediately sets him apart from the physically smaller and more innately graceful Koreans. Initially, his command of Korean is inadequate: he can't deal with dialects, or complex conversations. Bobby feels like a waddling tub of particularly inarticulate goo. People stare at him, and they smile, mysteriously. Bobby wonders if he is being welcomed warmly. It could very well be that he is the punch line of some sly inbred joke.

In *Festival for Three Thousand Maidens*, Richard Wiley chronicles Bobby's 16 months of teaching in a funny, sad, illuminating book about cross cultural misadventures. Wiley, who has lived and taught in Korea – as well as Japan, Nigeria, and Kenya – knows what it means to travel and work in a foreign country. He bombards hapless Bobby with introductions and sensations, with details of the daily lives of the town's people. Bobby is sensitive and intelligent but the initial barrage of information leaves him numb. Indeed, reading the early chapters of Wiley's book is a good deal like actual travel. Everything happens at once, and significance is often buried in minutiae. Epiphanies seldom occur on arrival. There is, instead, a sense of trudging horror and inadequacy.

Wiley – the author of *Soldiers in Hiding*, which won the 1986 PEN/ Faulkner Award – is not a flashy stylist. His writing is descriptive, exclamatory, understated, and deadpan. The technique serves him well in a comic hangover scene that rivals Kingsley Amis' masterful invocation of foggy humiliation in *Lucky Jim*.

In another scene, Bobby finds himself teaching English to his fellow teachers. The culture is inflexible and Bobby is required to use an old English text full of such common English phrases as "beat me, daddy, eight to the bar," and "please may I have intercourse with you."

Bobby tries to explain that the word intercourse is not entirely proper in this context – he doesn't elucidate – and that "Please may I speak to you" is more socially acceptable. A Korean teacher asks if "intercourse" isn't

more formal. "What about when addressing the president of the United States?" Mr. Kwak wanted to know. His enigmatic smile was still there, but Bobby couldn't read his intentions.

"When addressing the president of the United States one should never say, 'Please may I have intercourse with you,' Bobby answered, Then he added, 'Of this I am sure.'"

Wiley sets Bobby adrift in cultural cross currents that challenge his loyalties and sense of himself. His school, for instance, engages in a yearly exercise called "spy-catching day." Some stranger is secretly engaged by the school's headmaster to act the part of a North Korean spy. The spy is to dress oddly, act confused, and ask the price of such common items as cigarettes. The children roam throughout town, questioning strangers. They must catch the spy before the end of the day.

At least three of Bobby's fellow teachers plan to boycott spy-catching day. They feel, in the words of one, that "this little yearly drama contributes to our students' already narrow view of the world, taking from them any hope of a democratic spirit...where people are free to choose and to go about as they will."

Bobby agrees with the dissidents. His problem is that this year's designated spy is indisposed and the headmaster, who could lose his job if he can't find another spy on short notice, has literally begged Bobby to perform the service.

So here's Bobby Comstock, unsure of himself, wearing ill-fitting clothes, walking around town asking the price of cigarettes when everyone knows he doesn't smoke. The students act like little tyrants, interrogating farmers on the street. When they catch up with Bobby, the students wrestle him to the floor, tie him up, and march him back to the school. He is forced to wear a sandwich board sign reading, "Imbecilic North Korean spy dog."

Everyone agrees that Bobby was a wonderful spy, the headmaster's job is saved, and Bobby's friends, the three dissident teachers, are dismissed from their jobs.

It is just this sort of ethical and cultural ambiguity that informs *Festival for Three Thousand Maidens*. Wiley respects his readers; he doesn't moralize, he elucidates. The larger lessons, the epiphanies, are all right there, just as they are anywhere one travels. aa

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## TRUSTEES, OFFICERS ELECTED IN JUNE 27 MEETING

In a meeting scheduled for June 27, the general membership of the Allied Arts Council was expected to install Southwest Gas vice president Fred Cover as the Council's new president. The rest of the new officers will be: Maureen Barrett (first vice president); Janet Line (second vice president); Cliff Beadle (treasurer); and Eva Flores (secretary).

Ten board seats were filled with new and returning Trustees: attorney Marty Ashcraft (two-year term); returning member Andras Babero; returning member Mary Ruth Carleton; the Stardust Hotel's Bruce Fraser; returning board member (and outgoing president) Judy Kropid; returning member Lavonne Lewis; gallery owner and artist Mark Masuoka; returning member Tom Schoeman; arts patron Beatrice Welles-Smith (one-year term); Summa Corp.'s Mark Zachman (two-year term).

Richard Romito was appointed by the board to fill a special seat representing the Action Committee for Arts Marketing, a coalition of arts groups seeking publicity.

The membership was also expected to approve an amendment to the bylaws that would streamline the process of amending

the bylaws. That process currently takes a minimum of three months; the proposed amendment will allow the board to continually update the bylaws so that it will reflect the direction and activities of the Council. aa

## CULTURAL DIRECTORY COMING YOUR WAY

If you haven't already received it, the 1991 Southern Nevada Cultural Directory is coming soon to a mailbox near you. At press time, the 135-page volume was in the hands of Centel's printing department, which is donating its services.

"I think people are really going to be stunned when they see this directory and the way it illustrates the incredible amount of cultural activity going on here," said Patrick Gaffey, executive director of Allied Arts. "The directory covers the full spectrum of the arts, listing artists in every discipline, culturally oriented businesses, facilities, arts organizations, everything."

Allied Arts is already updating and compiling information for the 1992 edition. Artists, organizations, businesses, or facilities wanting to change their listing - adding new phone numbers or changing information - should contact the Council immediately at 731-5419.

Any artist, business, cultural organization, or facility not currently listed can get into the 1992 book by following a simple two-step

process: a) become a member of Allied Arts, and b) fill out the appropriate form. It's that easy.

"We're going to mail copies to all our members," Gaffey said, "then Allied Arts is going to get the remaining copies into the hands of people best able to make use of it, in terms of buying art, hiring bands, and so forth." aa

## GALLERY EXHIBITS:

Diane J. Butner's exhibit of assemblage boxes will be shown in the Barrett Allied Arts Gallery from June 2 through August 2, opening with a 5 to 7 p.m. reception on June 2.

Titled *Baby's First Visit to the Psychiatrist*, the work is reminiscent of Butner's last Allied Arts show, with the pieces addressing social concerns in a generally non-polemic way. "Miss Congeniality," for instance, deals with "our tendency to 'reward' beauty and the fact that we are often judged on our appearance alone." Other pieces are more personal, such as "Curse of the Yugoslavian Sisters," a piece for "my sister and me. We are a hearty yet hairy breed."

The August show will be a Women's Invitational exhibit, which was still being prepared at press time. It will run in the Gallery from August 6 to 30. The September exhibit was still undecided at press time.

For more information, call 731-5419. aa

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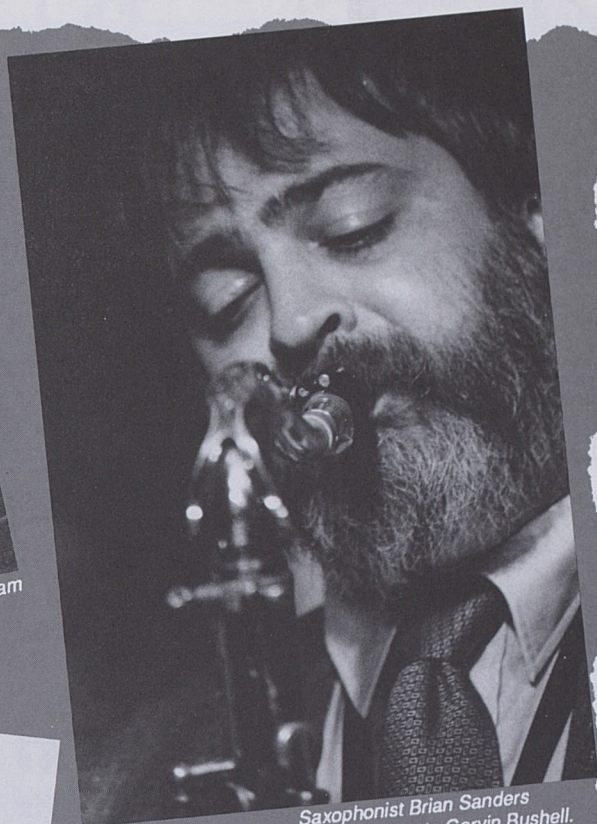
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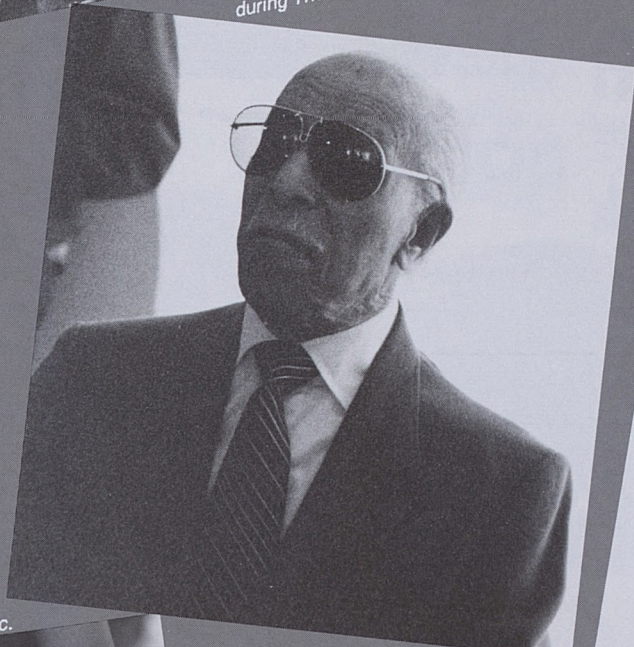
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Dan Skea, Kenny Siefert and John Abraham during The Tribute to Garvin Bushell.



Saxophonist Brian Sanders in The Tribute to Garvin Bushell.



An unusual view of trombonist Hiroshi Suzuki at the Jazz Picnic.

Garvin Bushell.



Saxophonist Phil Wigfall at Composers Night.



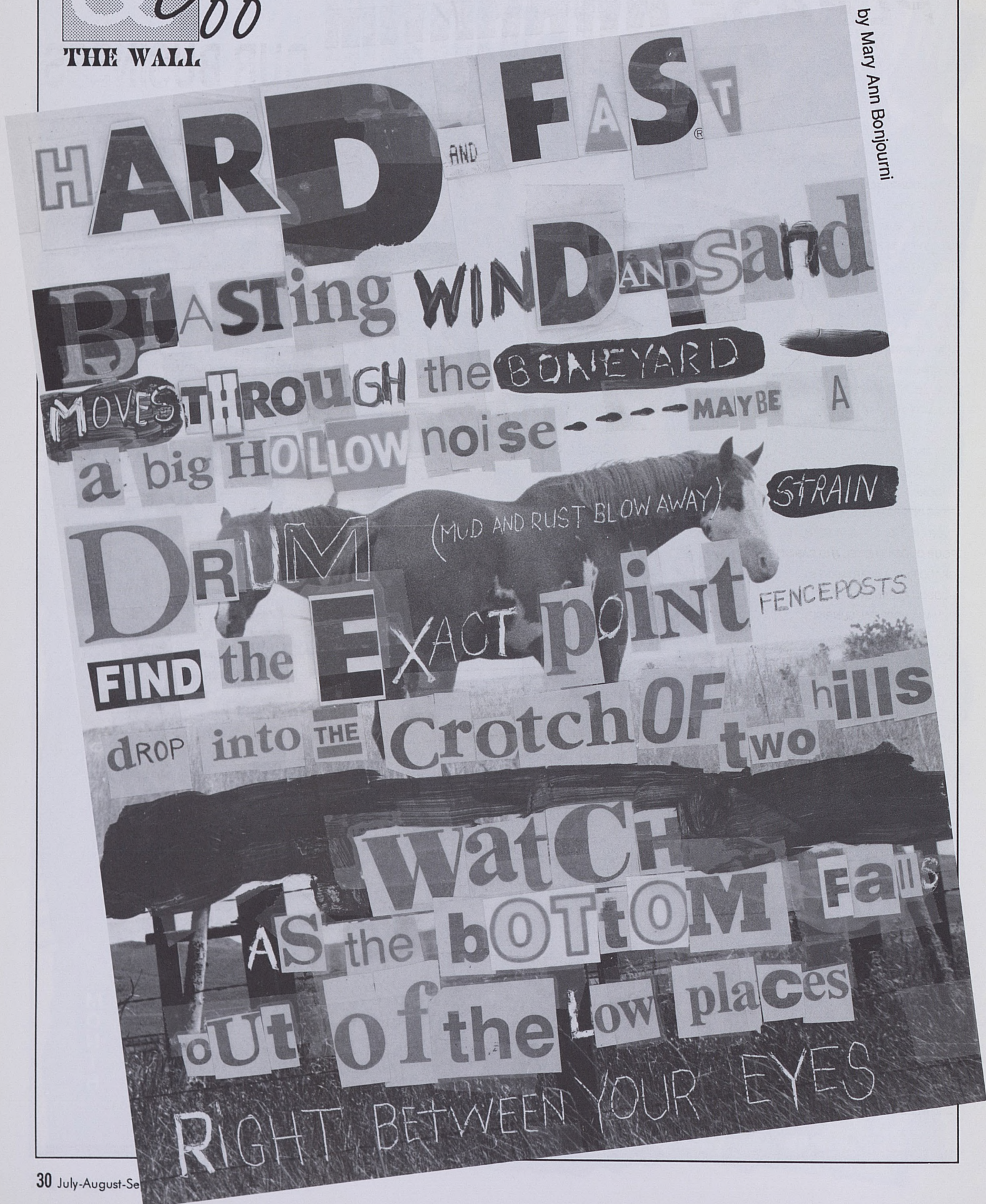
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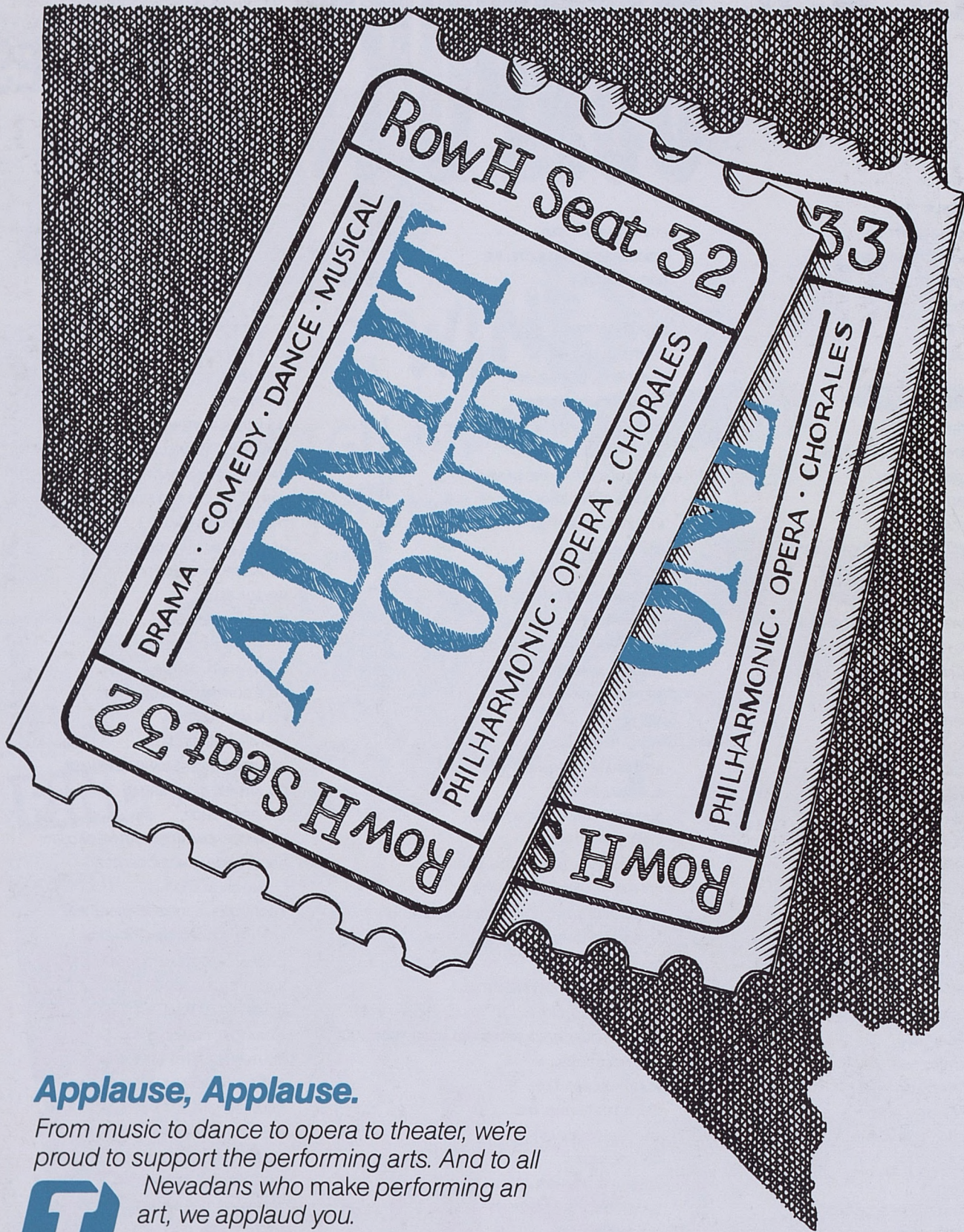
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