

## POPCORN™

### Madea's Family Reunion: You go, uh, Girl?

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER  
2 popcorns

Playwright-actor-filmmaker Tyler Perry discovered a very profitable niche audience with Madea, the tough talking, take-care-of-business family matriarch first seen by movie audiences in his 2005 breakout hit, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*. And he's not done yet. She rides roughshod again in *Madea's Family Reunion*.

Be assured, there won't be any Oscars. But then there are other factors to consider, not the least of which is Mr. Perry's rather curious rhapsody in drag. In case you just tuned in to this financial phenomenon, Perry plays his title character.

It's doubtful anyone else could be Madea. Perry dwarfs his fellow performers the way the really big kid in little league outshines his smaller pals. Oh, those other guys are pretty necessary all right. But he's the show.

Fact is, the over-the-top ebullience with which Mr. Perry imbues his curiously likeable, down home, overweight answer to Yoda almost makes up for the simplistic problem solving and wholesome wish fulfillment that otherwise define his work.

Indeed, Mr. Perry's latest seriocomic tale is predictable. But you don't create such a successful cottage industry without supplying something the audience wants. For all its soap opera acrobatics, there's no discounting the film's well-intentioned hopefulness, embodied heart and soul by Mable "Madea" Simmons.

In effect, Madea is the matriarch as superhero, a countrified Jean d'Arc who always keeps a potentially scalding cauldron of grits at the ready, just in case. That she is played by a he is again something else.

For one, it's funny. Milton Berle in a dress, funny. Why? Who knows? Call Dr. Freud if you must. We've been laughing at boys playing girls

for centuries. And in this instance, as has often been the case before, the ploy also works to the caricature's dramatic effectiveness.

Take note: This is no *Some Like it Hot* (1959) or *Tootsie* (1982). Far from it. Still, it does have that yin 'n' yang thing going on. Something about not judging someone until you've walked a mile in his or her pumps.

Complex as the appeal of Perry's film may be, its plot is conversely simple. It doesn't get much more melodramatic than this. Expect no twists. There is merely action and reaction. Like Madea herself, what you see is what you get.

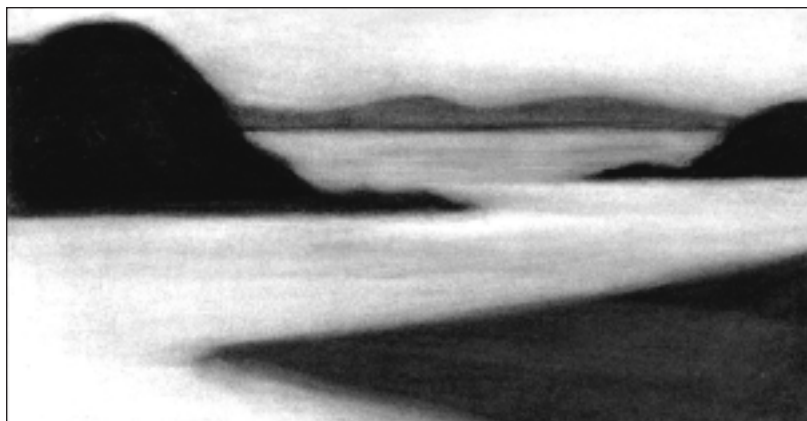
The comedy relief, oftentimes piggybacked into the same paragraph as the troubles, takes two forms. In the forefront is outspoken Madea's steady patter...a counter-attacking spew of jargon-filled bon mots. Less entertaining, Perry also plays Joe, Madea's lascivious, dirty old man brother. Eddie Murphy he is not.

But where before have we seen this instant gratification, all gift wrapped in moral vindication? It certainly makes for a strangely familiar concoction of elements.

And then it dawns on us. With little or no artifice to dampen the devastations and precious few buffers to ease the transitions from heavy drama to outright burlesque, Tyler Perry has manufactured the cinematic equivalent of professional wrestling. Filling the coffers with over \$30 million as of this writing, *Madea's Family Reunion* is his latest contender for heavy weight champ.

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*Madea's Family Reunion*, rated PG-13, is a Lions Gate Films release directed by Tyler Perry and stars Tyler Perry, Lynn Whitfield and Rochelle Aytes. Running time: 123 minutes



Laura Lou Levy- "Deer Island"

## Landscape Imagery Unites LandScope Artwork

By MARYLOU MORANO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

RAHWAY – A love of the land is the theme that unites the work of five artists in an exhibit entitled "LandScope: Recent Landscape Imagery" currently on display at the Arts Guild of Rahway (AGOR).

The artists – Laura Lou Levy, Roger Tucker, Peter Giaccio, Doug Schiller and Patricia Brentano – present differing perspectives of natural scenery.

Ms. Levy of Maplewood began her artistic career as a figurative artist. She holds an M.F.A. degree from Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and has also studied at the Universidad Complutense and the Academia Artium, both in Madrid. Her interest in landscapes evolved from family trips to Maine, Canada and Mexico. All of her work exhibited in "LandScapes" consists of charcoal drawings, but she also works in oil pastels and oil paints. "I like to work with what I observe," she said of her landscapes.

A professional artist, Ms. Levy is also an illustrator for *The Wall Street Journal*. Soothing, soft and flowing are three words that best describe her charcoal landscape drawings.

Mr. Tucker, a photographer, is happy to see the artistic community recognize the contributions photography can make to landscape artwork. "Traditional landscapes are painted or drawn," he commented. "To me, landscapes say a lot about the places in which we live. I am very proud that landscape photography has joined this multiple media exhibit."

A native of Newark who now lives in North Caldwell, Mr. Tucker attended Arts High School in Newark, the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York City and the Pratt Institute.

Pastel artist Peter Giaccio took up painting after retiring from an advertising career in New York City. According to Mr. Giaccio, he began utilizing his newfound free time by creating sketches of natural scenes in his hometown of Jersey City's Lincoln Park, and "everything fell into place." In addition to nature, Mr. Giaccio also creates renditions of Jersey City's brownstones. The most colorful offerings of the exhibit, his oil pastels bring a lifelike quality to his work, so much so that the viewer feels a part of the painting.

## Keith Hertell to Chair Westfield Symphony Gala

WESTFIELD – Longstanding Westfield resident and Westfield Symphony Orchestra (WSO) supporter Keith Hertell will chair the Westfield Symphony's major fundraising gala, to be held at the Shackamaxon Golf and Country Club in Scotch Plains on Saturday, April 1.

"I am glad to assist the symphony with such a crucial event," Mr. Hertell said. "There are very few suburban towns across America with an orchestra of this caliber. I have been constantly dazzled over the years by its performances and I am delighted to help ensure that Westfield and the surrounding community will have access to this fine music for many years to come."

Mr. Hertell is a past member of both the Westfield board of education and the board of directors of the Westfield Area Y, former chairman of the Westfield Recreation Commission, past president of the Westfield Boosters and Westfield Jaycees and founder and first president of the Westfield Soccer Association.

Traditionally, as part of the fundraising evening, the WSO honors and recognizes an individual or a team of people that has made a significant contribution to the symphony. This year, understanding that Westfield is made up of multiple vol-

## New Writer's Group To Meet at Library

SCOTCH PLAINS – The Scotch Plains Public Library will host a writer's group meeting on Thursday, March 23 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. in the Community Room. This group is for people from the area who share an interest in writing, getting and giving constructive feedback and sharing experiences and insights on the writing process. Those who have difficulty getting past writer's block will find this group an impetus to become a better writer.

No registration is required. Join the library for the initial opportunity to discuss possible directions for the group and to share writing experiences.

The Scotch Plains Library is located at 1927 Bartle Avenue, one block from Park Avenue in the center of town. For further information or directions, call (908) 322-5007.

Ms. Brentano, a recent recipient of a New Jersey Council of the Arts Fellowship, has contributed charcoal drawings to "LandScope." The Indiana native, who now resides in Westfield, holds an MFA degree from Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. She has exhibited in several states, as well as locally.

Ms. Brentano sees her art in "LandScapes" more as natural still lives than landscapes. "I like to draw attention to nature and the environment," she said. "We get so involved in our lives that we forget what we have in nature."

In a sense, two of Ms. Brentano's contributions to the exhibit can be thought of as "art within art," as renditions of natural sculpture built by the artist are part of larger drawings.

Many of Mr. Schiller's offerings to "LandScope" focus on Seelye's Pond in the Watchung Reservation. An oiler, he also teaches drawing and painting at Arts Center of New Jersey in Summit.

"This exhibit brings together a fine group of artists who have found the land, sky, the earth and the many components of the natural world around us as a fit starting point for their unique and diverse work," said Executive Director of AGOR Lawrence Cappiello.

"LandScope: Recent Landscape Imagery" will be at AGOR, 1670 Irving Street, Rahway, until March 17. Admission is free. Gallery hours are Wednesday, Friday and Saturday, from 1-4 p.m. Thursday hours are 1-3 and 5-7 p.m. or by appointment. For more information, contact AGOR at (732) 381-7511 or log onto [www.rahwayartsguild.org](http://www.rahwayartsguild.org).

## 42nd Street

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really means well, but it often doesn't come out that way. I can relate to that."

Performances of *42nd Street* are scheduled for the evenings of March 17, 18, 23, 24 and 25. There will be an afternoon performance on Sunday, March 19. Tickets are currently available for purchase at the high school on Monday and Wednesday evenings from 7:30-8:30 p.m.



Keith Hertell and Linda Frame

untary bodies, the symphony plans to move beyond its own boundaries and recognize one of the many other organizations that consistently adds value to the Westfield community.

"I applaud the WSO Board of Directors for their vision in recognizing that Westfield is indeed a close-knit community and for their response naming Mark Elsass, executive director of the YMCA, as this year's honorary chairman."

This year's Gala, *An Evening in Venice*, will include a cocktail reception, gourmet dinner and dancing to a 10-piece band. A highlight of the evening will be the live auction conducted by charity auctioneer and New Jersey State Assemblyman Jon Bramnick of Westfield. The live auction will offer a wide variety of items including getaways to exotic locations, New York dining, a hot-air balloon ride and the opportunity to take Maestro David Wroe's baton and conduct the Westfield Symphony.

Silent Auction Chairwoman Linda Frame and WSO board members Gaile Boothe and Jim Dettre have put together a silent auction of items donated by more than 70 local retailers, restaurants and businesses.

The silent auction will run throughout the evening, which will culminate in the drawing of three winners for the cash raffle. Raffle tickets may be purchased at the symphony office. Invitations have been mailed to WSO subscribers and supporters, but attendance, which is capped at 250 due to space constraints, is open to the public and invitations may be obtained on a first-come first-served basis by calling the WSO office at (908) 232-9400.

## 'Stitch In Time' Links Ancestors Through Quilts

By MARYLOU MORANO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD – Westfield recently took a trip back in time to the days of the Underground Railroad when the renowned Williams sisters of South Jersey brought their historical presentation, "A Stitch in Time" to Edison Intermediate School on February 18.

The production was in celebration of the 70th anniversary of The Westfield Community Center Association (WCCA).

Known by the stage name "Seven Quilts for Seven Sisters," the Williams sisters - Elnora Lucile (Miss Elly), Phyllis Amanda Walker (Miss Mandy), Bertha Kellum (Miss Bert), Kathleen Lindsey (Miss Kat) and Anna Stevens (Miss Annie) - have been performing for approximately 13 years. Two additional sisters - Loretta Mae Carter (Miss Retta) and Ida Rowe (Miss Idie), who are now deceased, were at one time also part of the performance.

In a heartfelt collage of stories, skits, songs, dance and, of course, quilts, "Seven Quilts for Seven Sisters" brought the audience into Miss Bertie's home and allowed us to eavesdrop on the sisters as they reminisced about the misery of life as a slave and the solace and joy found in quilting.

Period costumes and props gave the performance authenticity, and the combination of notable historical events that they discuss, along with the craft of quilting, allows the sisters to educate, while at the same time entertain.

"If we know where we came from, it will be easier to get to where we need to be. And this is true of every race because every race has either been enslaved or affected some way by this evil thing...even in today's world," Miss Mandy told *The Westfield Leader and The Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.



By VICTORIA McCABE  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

The piano man is back – prior to embarking on his current tour (which includes 14 sold-out shows at Madison Square Garden), Billy Joel released "My Lives," an incredible four-CD-plus-DVD box set that is absolutely essential for true Billy fans.

The career-spanning collection covers everything from the hits of the Lost Souls and the Hassles, the bands Billy fronted as a teenager, to his cover of "Don't Worry Baby" at the star-studded tribute concert for Brian Wilson in 2001. In between, there are enough unreleased demos and early versions of songs to drive fans wild – it's amazing to hear an early recording of "Only the Good Die Young" with a much more relaxed, almost-reggae accompaniment or hear him sing early "Piano Man" verses and hum the melodies for yet-to-be-written lyrics.

Billy includes a very diverse group

"As we share the story of our ancestors through our quilts and songs, we often develop a bond with people of all races, and from all walks of life," added Miss Bert.

The common theme of quilts that runs through the presentation highlights their use as coded messages that assisted slave escapes. Innocently hung out on a clothesline, a quilt could take on a second life signaling danger, safety or directions.

In the present day, quilts continue to be an important part of the Walker sisters' lives. All are avid quilters and two own quilting stores. At the conclusion of "A Stitch in Time," many of the quilts the sisters have made for each other or other family members became part of the presentation and were warmly appreciated with applause from the audience.

In addition to bringing history to life, the Walker sisters view "A Stitch in Time" as being a ministry. "The presentation" gives us the opportunity to glorify God as we grow closer and closer to each other and ultimately to Him," explained Miss Elly.

"A Stitch in Time" served as a major fund-raising event for WCCA. "The Westfield Community Center's Board of Directors was extremely excited to present 'A Stitch in Time' to the community during African-American History Month. The practical craft of quilt-making and how it flourished in early African-American slave life is a story seldom told," said WCCA Executive Director Thelma May Smith.

Originally started as a Toy Lending Library in 1935, WCCA is presently a multi-service center that serves the recreational and educational needs of members of the community of all ages. It is located at 558 West Broad Street in Westfield.

More information about "A Stitch in Time" can be found at [www.sevenquilts.com](http://www.sevenquilts.com).

of cover songs here, running the gamut from a charged live rendition of "Shout" at Yankee Stadium to a jazzy interpretation of Disney's "When You Wish Upon a Star" to an inspired pair of Elvis classics.

Added bonus – the 64-page booklet provides a wealth of fun reading material, and an extra CD wedged in the set offers computer-savvy fans the opportunity to create their own mixes of two Billy songs on the computer.

A few years ago, Billy announced that his touring days were over, so Billy's reemergence from retirement is thrill enough for his fans. That this new compilation stretches beyond his greatest hits and provides an unprecedented look into his evolution as a musician and a performer is icing on the cake. This is the box set that will make the music world fall in love with Billy all over again and pray that this current tour won't be his farewell to good.

## Workshop Brochure Celebrates 35 Seasons

WESTFIELD – The Westfield Summer Workshop (WSW), a five-week program of fine and performing arts, has recently published its greatly anticipated 20-page brochure of course selections for the 2006 season.

The program, for students in preschool to grade 12, will be held at Edison Intermediate School, Rahway Avenue, Westfield, from Tuesday, June 27 to Friday, July 28. Classes are held from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. daily, and an afternoon program can be attended in conjunction with the Westfield YMCA.

The Arts and Crafts Department, chaired by Ian Dorian and Janet Hrindo, offers 29 individual courses such as Architecture, Basketry, Cartooning, Needlework, Pottery, Scrapbooking, Sculpture, Toy Design and Wood Crafts.

Chaired by Wendy Hahn, the Communications Department has 12 individual classes, such as Movie Makers, Myths and Legends, Tomorrow's Authors and TV Production. This year the Westfield Summer Workshop welcomes Gecko Kids Creative Computer Studio. In separate courses, Gecko Kids will offer "The Art of Bookmaking on Computers" for children in grades one through six.

Nine courses in the Dance and Movement Department, chaired by Denise Bellog, include such skills as Dance/Pom, Fencing, Gymnastics and Irish Dance.

Among the offerings in the Drama and Theater Department, also chaired by Ms. Bellog, are Children's Theater, Junior Acting Workshop and Magic.

Two separate musicals will be presented this summer. The Workshop Theater, for students in grades six to nine, will present *Seussical*, the musical based on the works of Dr. Seuss. No audition is required for this production. The Showcase Theater, for outstanding young performers in

grades nine through 12, is currently holding auditions for Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*. Those who participate in this production will also have an opportunity on July 28 to perform in a Cabaret Night, a revue of Broadway musical theater.

There are 13 courses in the Kaleidoscope Department, chaired by Patricia Simo. Some of these include Chess, Cooking, Magic, CSI-Westfield, Fun with Math and Scientific Encounters.

The Music Department, chaired by Janet Lyman, has 11 classes. Among them are Beginning Guitar, Fiddlin' Fun, Garage Band, Keyboards and Vocal Performance.

There are separate self-contained workshops for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten children. Both are a hands-on learning experience in music, creative movement, arts and crafts, drama, Spanish and violin. Jeanne Bucholz chairs this department.

The workshop also offers an early morning drop-off from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m.

To help celebrate its 35th season, the WSW is sponsoring an art contest for all registered students. Each child may submit a drawing illustrating his or her reason for enjoying the workshop. A panel of art teachers will judge all entries and 35 winners will be chosen to receive a free ticket to the Workshop Theater production of *Seussical*.

A special anniversary celebration tuition drawing will also be held. One student will receive a free tuition for the 2006 summer.

Completion of the registration form will automatically enter the student's name in the drawing. For a brochure, or more information, call the special WSW number at (908) 518-1551. Information on all NJWA programs is available at 150-152 East Broad Street in Westfield or log on to [www.njworkshopforthearts.com](http://www.njworkshopforthearts.com).

## On The Surface

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than granite and requires treatment with oil periodically to maintain its appearance, especially if a dark tone is desired.

If natural materials aren't your preference, there are plenty of easy-care manufactured surfaces available to suit your taste and budget.

Corian by Dupont is a manufactured solid surface that has been around for more than 30 years. It resists stains and is easy to clean. It is also more economical than natural stone.

"Right now, we mostly sell Corian for baths, not kitchens," says Betha Amato of D-A-D Kitchens and Baths in Garwood. "People like it as an integrated sink and counter that is all one piece."

Silestone, Zodiaq, CaesarStone and Cambria are types of surface materials that combine the radiance of quartz crystal with the strength and durability of manmade materials. They are stain and scratch resistant, as well as maintenance-free.

"Silestone is also treated with Microban, an antibacterial that's become very popular," Ms. Comar added.

This marriage of nature and technology can prove to be a happy compromise. However, Silestone prices can sometimes be even more expensive than natural stone.

According to Michael Mondello of Functional Design in Scotch Plains, there isn't a huge cost difference between natural stones and the manufactured quartz ones above.

"They're really comparably priced, and it depends which color you choose," Mr. Mondello said. "Granite continues to be the most popular, but the trend is definitely going toward the quartz."

More porous stones like limestone and travertine, as well as butcher block and even stainless steel, are also being used as countertops. But again, there is a bit of maintenance required.

"Stainless steel can give you that restaurant look," Mr. Mondello explained. "It holds up just as well as granite, but it does show wear."

Mr. Mondello added that butcher

block is very economical, costing about half of the price of granite and quartz, but does not have the same longevity.

Ceramic tile gives an old-fashioned look, although keeping the grout lines clean can prove challenging.

"Right now we mostly use that for backsplashes and flooring, not counters," Ms. Comar said.

While less popular, laminates like Formica are probably the most economical way to go, their thin surfaces can chip and split.

Some surfaces might be a better choice for a bath than for withstanding the everyday wear-and-tear in a kitchen.

You could also opt to select two different surfaces for the same room. For example, in a kitchen, you could choose one for a center island top and something entirely different for the counters.

Choosing the right countertop really comes down to a matter of personal preference. Take the time to explore the wide range of materials available, and you'll be well on your way to creating your dream kitchen or bath.

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Do you have a home or garden question you'd like to see answered in this column? Send your inquiries to [estorms@goleader.com](mailto:estorms@goleader.com).

## WF Artist Awarded VCCA Fellowship

WESTFIELD – Michael Metzger of Westfield has been awarded a fellowship to the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts (VCCA). The Geraldine Dodge Foundation supports the fellowship. The VCCA is located in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in rural Virginia. Mr. Metzger will be in residence with approximately 20 other artists focusing on their own creative projects at this working retreat for visual artists, writers and composers.

Mr. Metzger taught for 38 years at Kean University and recently retired in 2003. He has exhibited statewide and nationally and his work is in private and corporate collection.

## BH'S Hilltop Players Perform Anything Goes

BERKELEY HEIGHTS – The Governor Livingston Hilltop Players will perform Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*.

After 70 years, *Anything Goes* is still unmistakable. Written in the age of midnight sailings, transatlantic crossings and shipboard romances, *Anything Goes* preserves the jazzy tempos of the 1930s in such Cole Porter standards as "All Through the Night" and "I Get A Kick Out of You."

In addition, such rousing songs as "Anything Goes," "Let's Step Out," "Heaven Hop" and "Blow, Gabriel Blow" still have the power to get feet tapping.

The book takes a gangster-ridden transatlantic voyage, mixes in a love story and peppers it all with an abundance of comic situations.

This year sees the return of the entire production staff from last year's production of Stephen Schwartz's

*Pippin*. Choreographer Melissa Kaban has taken a dance contingent and brought some tap work to life on stage. Musical Director James Campodónico has woven the cast into a tapestry of musical sound that does the Cole Porter score proud. And, as with *Pippin* last year, Stacia William's costumes round out the experience with a period extravaganza.

*Anything Goes* will be performed on Thursday, March 23 at 7:30 p.m. and Friday and Saturday, March 24 and 25 at 8 p.m. in the Governor Livingston High School Auditorium, 175 Watchung Blvd., Berkeley Heights. The Friday and Saturday performances will be interpreted for the hearing impaired. Tickets are \$10 and \$6 for seniors. Advanced tickets are available by calling the box office at (908) 665-0783 or by emailing requests to [boxoffice@bhpsnj.org](mailto:boxoffice@bhpsnj.org). Tune into Comcast channel 34 for more information.