

Arts & Entertainment

Fresh Spirit: Wojcik Releases Album of Original Compositions

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

WESTFIELD – Deep in the depths of the Westfield High School (WHS) basement, chaos is erupting. Someone is banging on the drums, someone else is diligently practicing a run in Mozart's 40th, everyone else is chatting animatedly.

In a few seconds, the bell will ring over the loudspeaker, and a baton tap will soon hush the talkers and prompt them to ready their instruments. But right now, it's mayhem.

At the center of it all is Raymond Wojcik, the baton wielder and WHS's

ishes and resolution. Wojcik composed *Jubilee*, an overture, when commissioned by the New Jersey Youth Symphony (NJYS) to write a piece to celebrate the orchestra family's 25th anniversary in 2004. Few deserve the commission more; in his years at WHS, Wojcik has worked with scores of high-school musicians who have gone through the ranks of NJYS's respected student orchestras.

Wojcik says he drew on his observations of young musicians for inspiration for *Jubilee*'s musical material. "It's a noisy piece," he says. "There

Up next for the composer/conductor is the world premiere of "In the Valley of the Shadow," a 12-minute work commissioned for the guitar-violin duo "Duo Fresco." The premiere will be a part of "Ars Vitalis: The New Jersey New Music Forum" at the Wilkins Theatre for the Performing Arts at Kean University next Wednesday, April 11. Wojcik, along with the handful of other composers whose works the program will feature, will participate in a pre-concert discussion at 7:15 p.m., prior to the 8 p.m. performance.

A graduate of the Manhattan School of Music and the Lamont School of Music at the University of Denver, Wojcik draws on a wide range of musical idioms – from Beethoven melodies to popular rhythms – for his own musical textures. In this modern age, that's not so unusual. "To be an American is to be an eclectic," he says.

What distinguishes his work is its emotional breadth. His music draws on modern styles but also reaches back for more elemental themes and ideas. "I've always loved a gorgeous melody," he says. "So I've always been attracted to melody, and in my music, even though there are things that are rather abstract, I can still write a tune."

"A piece has to ring true for me," he says. "There's something that has to really grab me and take hold in me emotionally on some level, as complex as it may be, that I figure will reach another person."

In the case of "Akin to Fire," it will.

"Akin to Fire" is available at albanyrecords.com and amazon.com. Look for Albany Records to release a second album of Wojcik's compositions later this year or early next year.

For an exclusive *Leader/Times* video interview, see goleader.com/video.



'FIRE' PLACE... Westfield Leader/Times Arts and Entertainment columnist Victoria McCabe speaks to Raymond Wojcik, WHS's director of instrumental music, who has released his debut album, "Akin to Fire." See video on goleader.com/video.

director of instrumental music for more than a decade. For 12 seasons, he has channeled youthful excitement and musical passion into the high school's instrumental program, mentoring beginning musicians and encouraging experienced student instrumentalists to perform challenging solos and study ambitious chamber music.

The WHS basement is his domain by day, but away from the long hours of patient coaching and rehearsing, Wojcik's own compositions take shape.

He released his debut album, "Akin to Fire," this year on Albany Records. Recorded with the Moravian Philharmonic (Czech Republic) and the Rzeszow Philharmonic Orchestra (Poland), the album contains original compositions premiered between 2001 and 2005.

The title "Akin to Fire" comes from last line of Jeanne Fitzgerald's poem "Elemental" – to Wojcik, it represents "that part of us that is the most elemental, the closest to our true nature."

The single-movement piece that bears its name has both unintentional and deliberate ties to late Beethoven works, he writes in the album's liner notes. "Akin to Fire" captures and builds upon the essences of multiple Beethovenian ideas; the piece takes its introductory melodic material through myriad conflicts that ultimately lead into triumphant flour-

are things that imply [cell phones and video games] in the play of the piece."

Indeed, the chaos in the WHS basement gives Wojcik a unique perspective on the high-school student's experience of art music. His overture reflects the technical maturity and deep love of music he knows the young musicians possess, and it also captures the unbridled (and at times unfocused) energy they have.

"The Art Spirit (Eight Miniatures after the Paintings of Young People)" is a fascinating suite of movements inspired by abstract student paintings. The Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts in Cape May commissioned Wojcik, then composer-in-residence for the Cape May Music Festival, to write two works based off of student artwork in 2004 and 2005 for its "Sights and Sounds" educational program. In "The Art Spirit," Wojcik blends movements from both years.

Each movement of the suite is its own musical sketch, and the composer creates markedly unique reflections of the individual paintings. In his liner notes, he describes how he translated the artwork's spirit into music – in some cases, using music to literally depict visual elements, in others, creating a back story out of a painting.

In "Bad Day at the Boardwalk," he brilliantly orchestrates a vivid scene. Percussion instruments create the sounds of jingling coins and arcade game bells; winds add flare. As that boardwalk texture fades in and out, a solo violin waltzes sadly over it, eventually allowing brass instruments to join in.

A high viola solo drives the wistful "Old Woman at the Window." The string instrument's high register, Wojcik says, "reminds me of the kind of voice you hear an old person speaking in or trying to sing in – there's a kind of poignancy to it."

"House Party" is "a meeting of two worlds" – Wojcik merges hip-hop and jazz elements with a fugue built from an 11-note tone row. The musical vignette is a perfect microcosm for the musical worlds he straddles here. He peppers his contemporary aesthetics with sounds that reflect the culture of the students whose art inspires the pieces.

Trailside Announces Photography Contest

MOUNTAINSIDE – Trailside Nature and Science Center has announced the 2007 Wildlife Photography Contest. Amateur photographers, ages 6 through adult, are invited to enter their original photographs of wild animals in their natural habitat. The deadline for entries is Friday, April 13.

Contest entries should be unmounted, unframed, five-by-seven inches black and white or color prints. Participants may enter a maximum of three photographs.

Prizes will be given in each of three age groups: 6 to 10, 11 to 15, and 16 to adult. An awards ceremony will be held at Trailside's 17th annual Wildlife Sunday on Sunday, April 22. Professional photographers will judge photographs on originality, composition, technical excellence and artistic merit. All photographs will be displayed at the Trailside Visitor Center through Sunday.

To obtain a copy of the contest rules and an entry form, call Trailside at (908) 789-3670. Trailside is located at 452 New Providence Road in Mountainide.

GONE IN A FLASH...All amateur photographers are invited to take part in Trailside's Wildlife Photography Contest. Wildlife, like the green frog pictured above, makes a challenging subject.



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Sue Zwick - Billboard Blues

Sue Zwick to Exhibit Images in Springfield

AREA – Sue Zwick, an architectural photographer from Summit, will exhibit her color images in an exhibition titled "Structures" at the Donald B. Palmer Museum in the Springfield Public Library from now through April 26.

Ms. Zwick said, "Architecture is everywhere. Everyone is a viewer. The abstract beauty of shapes, lines, curves and angles is all around us. Through my images, I try to capture a structure in a fresh way. I do not show the building in its entirety. In many of the images, I break down the elements to show my vision of the whole...abstracted."

The Donald B. Palmer Museum is located at 66 Mountain Avenue in Springfield. Hours of the exhibit are: Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, from 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., and Tuesday, Friday and Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Sunday hours are 1 to 3:30 p.m. For information, call (973) 376-4930.

SP Library to Host Book Launch for 'T'

SCOTCH PLAINS – The Scotch Plains public library will host the book launch of "T: An Auto-Biography" by Scotch Plains resident Feather Schwartz Foster on Saturday, April 21, from 1 to 2:30 p.m.

Ms. Schwartz is the author of several other books and also serves as secretary for the Scotch Plains Public Library Board of Trustees. "T" is a new venture into the genre of young adult fiction. The book tells the life story of a Model T Ford from 1920 to the present, and is suitable for ages 8 to 12.

She will sign copies and will discuss the research and writing of the book. Refreshments will be served, and all ages are welcome to attend this free event.

As celebration of National Library Week, the Scotch Plains Public Library has made April Author Month. Several other authors will also make presentations, as well as a poetry celebration on April 11.

The library is located at 1927 Bartle Avenue, one block from Park Avenue. For further information or directions, call (908) 322-5007.

Seton Hall Presents Dead Man Walking

AREA – Seton Hall University Arts Council presents Tim Robbins' *Dead Man Walking* beginning April 20 in the South Orange Performing Arts Center (SOPAC).

The play will conclude Seton Hall's semester-long Dead Man Walking Theatre Project and is directed by Deirdre Yates, professor of theatre in the department of communication.

Dead Man Walking is based on a book written by Sister Helen Prejean, one of the most renowned voices against the death penalty. The play is inspired by the real-life experiences of Sister Prejean and her encounter with a young man, Matthew Poncellet, on death row for the murder of two young teenagers.

Tickets may be purchased through the ticket office in the Seton Hall University Center or online at arts.shu.edu/artsCouncil/tickets.htm.

Prices are \$15 for regular admission, \$12 for alumni, children and senior citizens, and \$8 for students (with a valid ID), faculty and staff. Performances are at 8 p.m. April 20, 21 and 22, and April 22 at 2 p.m. For more information on this season's shows, visit the Theatre-in-the-Round's website at arts.shu.edu/theatre.

Ewald Focuses on Sculpture With 'Bathing in Color'

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

WESTFIELD – Photography and sculpture are two artistic media that are rarely, if ever, deliberately positioned in tandem.

However, at Grounds for Sculpture (GFS), a 35-acre sculpture park and museum located in Hamilton, juxtapositioning the two art forms is an annual occurrence.

Grounds for Sculpture's exhibit, "Focus on Sculpture," is a juried show of photographs sharing the common theme of sculpture as subject matter.

Twenty-four photographers, including Westfield resident Andrea Ewald, are represented in "Focus on Sculpture 2007."

A native of Germany, Mrs. Ewald, has only recently started to take her interest in photography seriously. She is mostly self-taught.

Her contribution to "Focus on Sculpture," "Bathing in Color," is a female nude sculpture reclining on the lawn, surrounded by Maple leaves in their autumnal glory.

The cast-in-iron sculpture is called "Mirage" and it is the work of Russian-born sculptress, Katrina Tatarovich. "Mirage" is located in the Japanese Maple Courtyard at GFS.

"I had seen that sculpture on a previous visit to GFS, but it had not appealed to me at all because of the drab colors. When I saw it again last fall with the colorful Maple leaves all around and on top of it, it had a totally different effect on me," explained Mrs. Ewald.

"There were several reasons why I chose to submit this photo to the juried show, but I think the main reason was because it was a personal favorite," she continued.

Mrs. Ewald has had previous exhibits of her photographs at the Watchung Arts Center, Children's Specialized Hospital in Mountainside, the New Providence Memorial Library, the Library of the Chatham,

the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey in Summit, the Arts Guild of Rahway and the Freeholders' Gallery in Elizabeth.

Nancy Ori, an award-winning photographer in her own right, who is on the faculty of several New Jersey art schools, including the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, curates "Focus on Sculpture 2007."

She is currently exhibiting her own photographs in a show entitled "Soul of a Tree" at Reeves-Reed Arboretum in Summit.

Ms. Ori had the daunting task of narrowing down the 200 photographs submitted to "Focus on Sculpture 2007" to 27.

"I selected a group of images that I felt were well seen, framed, focused, exposed and presented. The images that caught my eye had a good balance between the proper use of the technical tools and creative choices," she said.

Regarding "Bathing in Color," Ms. Ori said: "Andrea's piece was definitely connected to the environment of the colored leaves. There were other photos submitted of the same sculpture but I felt that hers was really about how nicely the sculpture fit into the environment. The point of view was also good and the lighting was nice and soft."

The mission of Grounds for Sculpture is to promote an understanding of and appreciation for contemporary sculpture by organizing exhibitions, publishing catalogues and offering a variety of educational programs and special community events.

"Focus on Sculpture 2007" will be on display on the mezzanine level of Grounds for Sculpture's Domestic Arts Building through April 29.

Grounds for Sculpture is located at 18 Fairgrounds Road. Hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. For more information, call (609) 586-0616 or visit Grounds for Sculpture online at groundsforsculpture.org.



Andrea Ewald - "Bathing in Color"

WF's Barbara Uhr Shares Enthusiasm For Pastels

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

WESTFIELD – Westfield artist Barbara Uhr was among four members of The Shared Enthusiasm Group recently exhibiting pastel works at Les Malamut Gallery in Union.

Ms. Uhr showed a dozen pieces of her art at the exhibit, which was formally called "Shared Enthusiasm: An Exhibit of Pastel Artwork."

A social worker by training, Ms. Uhr moved to Westfield from Manhattan 10 years ago. At that time, she returned to painting, which she had studied as an undergraduate at Allegheny College.

"The one medium I had never explored as an undergrad was pastels. I began working on my own with pastels and subsequently enrolled in classes at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey (VACNJ), Somerset Art Association (SAA) and the DuCret School of Art," she explained.

From an artistic point of view, Ms. Uhr believes that drawing and painting are the best ways to see and enjoy the wonders of nature.

Many of her works shown in "Shared Enthusiasm" demonstrate her appreciation of nature.

Her use of shades of blue in "Stormy Sky" allows the painting to exude energy and urgency, while the muted purple hues in "Evening Sky" impart a peaceful feeling.

In addition to pastel paintings of

nature, the artist also displayed portraits, including her own.

Ms. Uhr's portraiture technique adds a bit of mystery, and makes one want to know more about the subject.

The Shared Enthusiasm Group is a group of nine woman artists that met while studying under award-winning artist Danielle Mick of Parsippany.

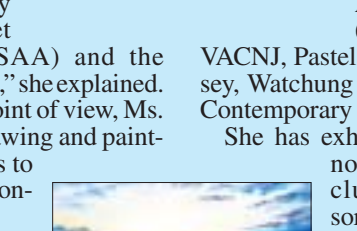
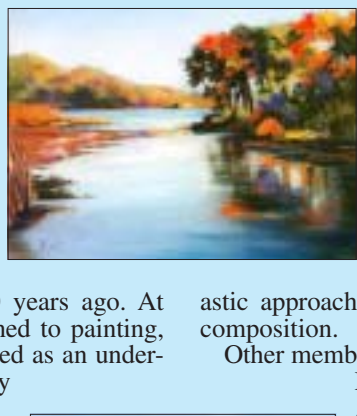
The group's name comes from Ms. Mick's vision of art, which includes an enthusiastic approach to color, light and composition.

Other members exhibiting at Les Malamut were Althea Howlett Scheller of Watchung, Anita McKenna-Murphy of New Vernon and Diane Gallo of Summit.

Ms. Uhr is a member of the Westfield Art Association (WAA), SAA, VACNJ, Pastel Society of New Jersey, Watchung Art Association and Contemporary Art Group (CAG).

She has exhibited in juried and non-juried shows including those sponsored by WAA, SAA, VACNJ, and the Watchung Art Center.

Ms. Uhr has also exhibited at the Atrium Gallery in Morristown, Cultural and Heritage Affairs in Somerset, Children's Specialized Hospital, Diversity Art Gallery in Clark, New Jersey Workshop for the Arts in Westfield and the Morristown Community Theatre.



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