

From the Cradle to the Stage, The Wittels Of Westfield Have Theater in Their Blood

By KERRIANNE SPELLMAN CORT
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD—If you are at all familiar with local theater in our area, then surely by now you have heard the names Ed and Madge Wittel. This interesting mother and son team have collectively performed onstage, offstage and backstage at some of the community's finest theater companies.

Running the gamut from acting and directing to sewing costumes and designing lighting, Ed and Madge Wittel seem capable of doing it all.

Madge Wittel performs and recently appeared onstage at Cranford Dramatic Club's (CDC) highly successful production of *The Sound of Music*, but she is also a sought after director. Currently working with CDC's children's theater company, Madge will direct *The Fantastiks* at CDC this coming fall.

She is on the board of CDC and has served on several boards in our area in the past, including the Westfield Community Players (WCP).

Ed Wittel, a "Jack of all trades," also recently appeared onstage in *The Sound of Music*, but, addition-



LADIES MAN...Ed Wittel dominates stage at the Cranford Dramatic Club when he portrayed the Lord of the Ladies in Waiting during the organization's production of *Snow White*.



FAIRY GODMOTHER?...As the Blue Fairy in the Cranford Dramatic Club's Children's Production of Pinocchio, Madge Wittel of Westfield sprinkles some fairy dust on one of the characters.

the way, but that is part of life. Take it all in stride.

WL- Madge, what do you like most about living in Westfield?

MW- We have a nice community. In my neighborhood, we really watch out for one another. I don't understand why people retire and move to Florida! I love New Jersey.

WL- And Ed, (who is an avid Beatles fan), if you could have an absolute dream job, what would it be?

EW- Paul McCartney's guitar tuner. Or Emeril Lagasse's sous chef.

Be sure to catch Ed in Pleasant Valley Park this summer, perform-



MOTHER AND SON MAKE A PRODUCTION...Madge Wittel and Ed Wittel, both of Westfield, have amazed audiences for years in productions offered at community theaters throughout the area. Pictured, above, Ed and "Mom" Madge give an acclaimed performance during *Arsenic and Old Lace* at the Westfield Community Players.

ally, he is a self-taught musician, (piano/keyboards, guitar, drums, recorder, ukulele and harmonica), a lighting designer, sound operator, singer (in a successful Beatles cover band), and involved in many other creative endeavors too numerous to mention.

It seems that talent runs in the family. The Wittels are longtime Westfield residents and have always been involved with the arts in some way, shape or form.

Ed's brother, Keith, is also a musician and has his own band, and his wife is currently working with Madge, launching a new business that will design specialty bibs for babies.

Is there an end to the creativity? Seemingly not. The Wittel grandchildren are also currently getting their feet wet and starting to perform in church and school plays.

I recently had a chance to chat with Ed and Madge.

WL- Madge, do you prefer acting or directing?

MW- I love them both. (laughs) But usually when I'm onstage, I think, 'I wish I was directing' and when I'm the director I think, 'I really wish I was onstage.'

WL- Ed, do you prefer working

onstage or backstage in a crew?

EW- I like it all. You get a very different perspective when you are involved at all levels.

WL- Madge, in addition to your theater work, what else do you find the time to do?

MW- After working nine to five for many years, I am happy to say that I now have the pleasure of looking after my grandkids, and I'm also working with my daughter-in-law, starting our new business.

WL- Ed, does your full-time job allow you the opportunity to pursue your passion for theater?

EW- Oh, sure. I'm doing something all the time. I work in a school in Clark and I even get a chance to be theatrical there, dressing up on Halloween and stuff to make the kids laugh.

WL- Madge, what advice would you give to a young artist who is embarking on a theatrical career?

MW- Do as much as possible in community theater, it is a great stepping stone. Our local schools have great programs. Just get involved and do something.

WL- Ed, any final advice for struggling young performers?

EW- Keep up with it, attack it! There will be some letdowns along

ing in *Guys and Dolls*, and be on the lookout for Madge's rendition of *The Fantastiks* at CDC this coming fall.

Seeing Beyond Obstacles: Mighty Jazz Man Bob Young Inspires Communities

By CAROL F. DAVIS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — Bob Young is my friend. He is a special man. No, I mean a really special man. He has, in his 70-something years, overcome an unusual amount of obstacles. It's not just his senior citizen status in life, nor the fact that he is black. You see, Mr. Young is also blind. Born with retinitis pigmentosa and macular degeneration of the eyes, he has been legally blind since birth. More than 10 years ago, he became completely blind. But that's never stopped him from constantly striving to accomplish his dreams.

Besides being a musician for more than 50 years, he has held several jobs that have afforded him an opportunity to remain actively involved in the field of music — his number one love. He was a piano tuner in New York City for the Aeolian Piano Company, NBC Television Studios, and for classical and jazz performers. He has also provided this service in the Westfield school district for more than two decades, keeping pianos tuned and in tip-top shape.

As a talented trumpet player, vocalist, and jazz aficionado, today Mr. Young is the Musical Director of The Friends of Jazz, a four-man combo of talented locals who have a mission.



Bob Young

The group formed in 1998, and debuted at the Plainfield Public Library. It has been non-stop ever since, mostly due to the fact that they are dedicated to those often forgotten neighbors — the elderly, infirmed, and impoverished, or, as Mr. Young calls them, the underprivileged.

Born in the woods of slavery, jazz, according to Mr. Young, is the core

ingredient upon which all American music is built. Inaugurated in New Orleans by Louis Armstrong, it is the only musical form intrinsic to this country.

Jazz today survives because of groups like The Friends of Jazz, who dedicate themselves to the perpetuation of this American art form. It is their firm belief that "all Americans should have access to live musical performances."

The Friends of Jazz performs, free of charge, at senior citizen homes, hospitals, nursing homes, and in other public places. Their repertoire includes jazz, blues and pop standards by artists like Armstrong, Ray Charles, Billy Joel, Frank Sinatra, Miles Davis and Nat King Cole.

Mr. Young leads the combo on vocals and trumpet, with Dan Costelnick on keyboard, Lester McKee on drums, and Eddie Blackwell on guitar.

He is thrilled to be able to share his gift with these special citizens and their families. He once told *The*

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Pen & Ink

Here Comes the Bride, Open Your Wallet Wide: Why Guests Equal \$\$\$

By MICHELLE H. LePOIDEVIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

My aunt has been invited to a big Italian wedding on Staten Island this month and the whole thing makes her uncomfortable. In asking her parents to shell out an astronomical amount of money for everything from swans to caviar to fireworks, the bride (we'll call her Carol*) has openly asserted that each guest should give her at least \$500 for a wedding gift. A hairdresser by trade, my aunt has "worked out a deal" where she can pay half of that and style the bride and bridesmaids' hair to work off the rest of what is owed.



If you don't fill the purse with bundles of money, were you a good guest?

Carol's attitude toward her guests reflects a trend in wedding planning. Not only are the guests expected to pay for their meals, but they should also fork over some funds to help with the down payment on the couple's house. Let's ignore the fact that the cost of living has risen over the years and nothing comes cheaply — keeping in mind, of course, that if you want a wedding to remember, it shouldn't require your parents taking out a second mortgage on their homes.

According to USABRIDE.COM, "The average wedding in the United States now exceeds \$20,000 in total costs." My grandmother and mother have an interesting spin on this statistic: what ever happened to the modest wedding reception? June after June, they have watched their cousins try to top one another's receptions. Still, Joey and Marie's cocktail hour didn't have enough variety; Sam and Gina's deejay almost deafened the senior citizens; the prime rib at Paul and Maryann's was like eating the sole of a shoe. So, everybody who got married after pulled

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Father's Day in Philly With New Dad Clapton

By MELISSA BETKOWSKI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

PHILADELPHIA — There are a few things in life that I've decided are just too good to pass up.

One of those things is the offer of tickets to see a rock and roll legend live in concert.

Especially when the aforementioned icon is none other than Eric Patrick Clapp, better known as Eric Clapton.

So, when my father did just that a

music, and split from the Yardbirds due to the band's pop tendencies.

He later joined forces with bassist Jack Bruce and drummer Ginger Baker to form Cream, according to Launch.com "perhaps the first rock 'supergroup' of the era."

Cream scored hits with "Sunshine of Your Love," "Badge" and an arrangement of Robert Johnson's "Crossroads," which continues to be one of my favorite songs.

With the Dominos, Clapton earned his stripes as both a guitarist and a songwriter, penning the legendary



few weeks ago, I had no other choice but to think about it for a split second before I said "yes!"

Clapton has always been one of my favorite performers, which is quite surprising for someone of my generation.

Having been born in 1978, one would think that I might not realize that the acoustic version of Derek & the Dominos' "Layla" which Clapton released in 1992 is not the original, but I do. In fact, I much prefer the heavily electrified Dominos' version to that of the "Unplugged" album.

The truth of the matter is that I grew up listening to much of dad's music, and that included the likes of Clapton, The Eagles, Jackson Browne, Bruce Springsteen and many other 70s icons.

But, there was always something about Clapton. The man, who many in his native England once revered as "God," (courtesy of a mid-1960s graffiti) certainly attained similar stature in my eyes.

However, Clapton has certainly had a human existence, from his battles with drugs and alcohol, to the tragic 1991 death of his 4-year-old son Connor in a 53-story fall from a window.

Connor's death inspired the song "Tears in Heaven" which Clapton co-wrote with Will Jennings. The song was included on the soundtrack for the 1991 motion picture *Rush* starring Jason Patric and Jennifer Jason Leigh.

Though he is now known as a rock and roll guitarist, Clapton began his career studying American Blues

"Layla."

Both "Layla" and another Clapton classic, "Wonderful Tonight," were inspired by Clapton's love for Pattie Harrison, the sometime wife of former Beatle George Harrison.

So what can be said for the legendary rocker who is 30 years removed from his days as a member of Derek & the Dominos?

He is every bit as impressive a guitarist as he was when he earned the nickname "Slowhand" or when a zealous fan deified him.

Clapton may be grayer around the temples than he was in the 1970s, but the 56-year-old legend can still pack an arena (in this case the First Union Center in Philadelphia), and he can still wow audiences with his incredible guitar skills.

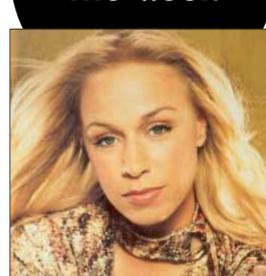
Recently, a fury erupted when a *Rolling Stone* article reported that Clapton was pondering retirement. His publicist Ronnie Lippin responded by saying the reports were greatly exaggerated.

"He will be recording in the future," Lippin said. "The only thing he won't commit to doing again is 12 months on the road."

Who could blame Clapton for wanting to take some time off to get acquainted with daughter Julie Rose, who was born on Wednesday, June 13, to girlfriend Melia McEnery?

With Clapton becoming a father again, Father's Day was the perfect time to experience the magic of one of the founding fathers of rock and roll.

Artist of the Week



Tammy Cochran

By MELISSA BETKOWSKI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

Her name and face might be unfamiliar, but the heart and raw talent conveyed in country singer Tammy Cochran's music proves that she's more than just another pretty face.

The 30-year-old Cochran sings with all the spirit of another Tammy — Wynette, the so-called "First Lady of Country Music."

Cochran's current single, "Angels in Waiting" is a bittersweet tribute to her two older brothers, Shawn and Alan who both suffered from cystic fibrosis, a genetic lung disease.

Shawn succumbed to the disease in 1980 at age 14 and Alan died in 1991 at age 23.

Cochran has been quoted as saying "I was actually a mistake."

The singer continues, "Once Mom and Dad found out the boys had it, they said, 'Okay, we can't do this anymore. We can't put another person through this.'"

Through it all, the family grew closer together, so close that when, in 1991, Cochran decided to try her luck in Nashville, her mother and father picked up and moved to Music City with her.

After a few years of hard work and a failed marriage, she signed on as a songwriter with Warner-Chappell Music in 1998.

Cochran says she always knew that she wanted to write a song for her brothers, but that she would begin to write and then the emotion would catch up with her and she wouldn't be able to finish.

That all changed when Cochran met Jim McBride and Stewart Harris, with whom she co-wrote "Angels in Waiting."

"We didn't just write," she said. "We talked about our lives, who we'd lost that affected us, and we just wrote what we felt. And I think it turned out really good."

So good, in fact, that her record label, Epic, asked to release the song as a single, to which she agreed after discussing it with her parents.

"One of my fears was that I didn't want people to think I was taking my personal loss to gain from it." However, when she discovered what effect the song had on others, she realized that the selfish thing would be to keep the song hidden away.

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