

ARTS ENTERTAINMENT

Happy Valentine's Day

She Says She Wants An Evolution: Artist Eldridge Looks Back While Looking Forward

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

MOUNTAINSIDE — Alexandra Eldridge has made a living shattering the widely held belief that no one with a passion for art can make a living at it.

"Having grown up in a family with art around me all of the time gave me the permission to be an artist," Eldridge told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times* during a recent interview.

The daughter of painters, illustrators, poets, and authors Harry A. Devlin and Wende Devlin of Mountainside, Eldridge, like so many of her siblings, was endowed with an aptitude and brilliance in creative writing and artistic genius.

Timeless and trendy at the age of 53, Eldridge received her Bachelor of Arts Degree from Ohio University in 1970, was educated in Cambridge, England, Penland, N.C., Great Neck, N.Y., Florence, Italy, and Sante Fe, N.M. She married her art professor from Ohio University, with whom she shares two grown children.

Profoundly influenced by the genius of William Blake (1757-1827), British artist, poet, and printmaker, Eldridge flourished in the Blake-inspired farm community of Golgonooza. Described by Eldridge as "the visionary city of art," the surroundings enabled her to blossom as an artist, staging plays, pageants, and art exhibits.

Eldridge left Golgonooza and moved to New York City for one year before settling in a Sante Fe-based artistic community for 14 years. There, she relished acclaim in the motivational, cocoon-like atmosphere, where she said "people get to

A bird outside of a bottle is depicted in "Unseen Waiting to be Seen," while a ladder is encapsulated in the bottle, with tiny birds released



Michelle H. Le Poidevin for The Leader/The Times

Alexandra Eldridge.

from the top of the ladder. For Eldridge, the bird calls to mind the Buddhist concept of witnessing oneself or the artist examining her own evolution. The ladder represents "raising yourself to another level of consciousness and deeper understanding."

"Someone Is Arriving," pictured at right, shows a woman floating above the earth, signifying the woman's disconnection with the earth and the disorientation Eldridge experienced "after her children left of being suspended in reality." The nine trees in the piece convey a lack of completion, said Eldridge, for numerologists point to the number 10 as a metaphorical state of completion.

Among several other symbols,

ary niches in the countryside. The journey, said Eldridge, resulted in a unique body of work, repeating the image of feet touching the earth, "making a spiritual connection through the dark underworld, instead of the brilliant light."

"I am always searching out new situations that wake me up and make me look anew, destroying the made-up mind and forever being open," Eldridge told *The Leader/The Times*.

Invited to live in a 13th century monastery in Elba, Eldridge was enveloped by the ocean below, flood-

ing candlelight, and no trace of electricity. Within the castle walls, Eldridge crafted contemporary illuminated manuscripts, in which she used poems by Tarkovsky in the six large paintings.

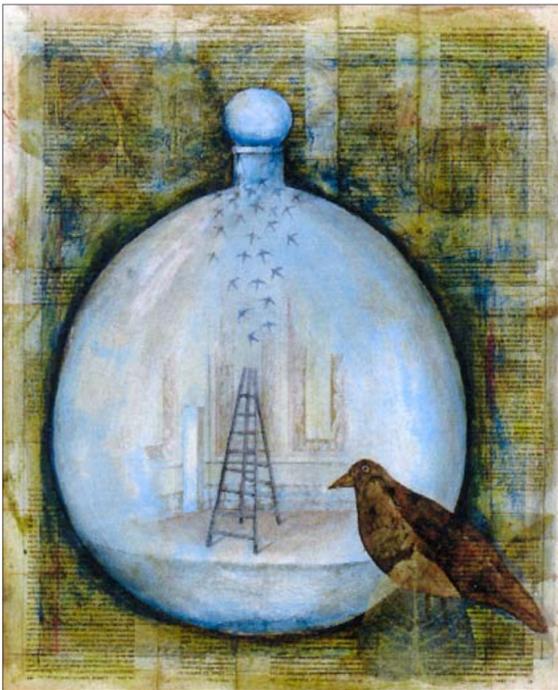
"With the shadows cast by the candles, it was like being in the presence of a mystery," said Eldridge, adding that the experience led to new bodies of work that were "all very autobiographical."

The evolving story of Eldridge's life took a sharp turn on November

Continued on Page 21



"Someone Is Arriving," gleece print by Alexandra Eldridge. Courtesy of Alexandra Eldridge.



"Unseen Waiting to be Seen," gleece print by Alexandra Eldridge. Courtesy of Alexandra Eldridge.

know your work immediately."

Eldridge was responsible for inspiring visitors to a New Mexican meditation room when she created an elaborate mural for the facility's ceiling. A prescribed assignment, she discovered that she flourishes as an artist with fewer limitations.

In Sante Fe, Eldridge also recognized that she, as an artist, held a certain responsibility to pose questions and present a mystery to the beholder of her pieces.

Recalling the work of her parents as "realistic and representational," Eldridge identifies her artistic style as one with a more archetypal flair, derived from all facets of the imagination.

The poetry of Rumi and Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky has also illuminated Eldridge's creativity, while blending philosophical and spiritual tenets that represent her personal credo — art is a conversing with eternity.

"Art is born and takes hold wherever there is a timeless and insatiable longing for the spiritual," Tarkovsky wrote during his short life (1932-1986). Most of the metaphors in her pieces point to Tarkovsky's statement.

In "Wanderlust," (see Page 21) Eldridge merges images of a butterfly and feet to convey a message of the psyche and soul (butterfly), as well as a spiritual connection with the earth (feet).

Eldridge also incorporates pieces of literature because she has "learned so much from books," nests because it represents a "container, your own soul and being at home inside of yourself," and high heels because it points to a need to slow down — "you can't run in high heels," she said.

After her children went off to college, Eldridge, then a single, divorced mother, traveled to Paris, where she lived for six months. For three weeks, she painted an exquisite mural, exhibited in the fashionable Marais district, next to Musée National Picasso, and became engrossed in the country's people, who she described as "very poetic by nature."

In France, Eldridge found muse in the watercolors by Victor Hugo and purchased pieces of circa 1800 texts at flea markets, which were used in several future pieces. At Galerie Selmersheim in Paris, Eldridge participated in a solo exhibition, "Go by the Way You Know Not," the flavor of which she calls "going deeply into the unfamiliar."

Eldridge, whose pieces are included in the private collections of notables such as actors William Hurt and Steve Buscemi, learned how to paint murals during a trip to Morocco. Spending one month in India, the artist was spiritually awakened during a pilgrimage to search for black madonnas, which took her to crypts, churches and other extraordi-

Pen & Ink

By Michelle H. Le Poidevin

The Myth of the Knight in Shining Armor: Bibbity, Bobbity, Boo-Hoo

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

"It's just unrealistic to think that a knight in shining armor is going to show up at your door. Things don't work like that." If I had a dozen roses for every time I heard that phrase, I probably wouldn't be complaining about Valentine's Day. But, the miracle of it all came a few weeks ago when Castle Bootery, which resides next to *The Westfield Leader* office, positioned a knight in shining armor near its storefront — pedestal, pomp and circumstance and all that great stuff we read in fairytales.

Who said he wouldn't come to my door? — even if "he" is hollowed out and brought in from the rain, to keep him from turning into The Tin Man.

I'm not cynical about love and finding one's soul-mate, but it has taken me almost 30 years to realize that there will be no glass slipper, coach to whisk me off to the ball, prince to awake me with a kiss, or white stallion to carry me off into the sunset. Sometimes, I think the Brothers Grimm did society a huge disservice by prolonging these fantasies through literature. You don't know how much deprogramming I have ahead of me.

The first Valentine's Day I can recall with any vivid detail was in grade school. I had a gigantic crush on a kid named "Mark." That day,

I was scheduled to get my braces put on and they didn't come off until my junior year in high school. That has a way of killing off prospective mates. They weren't the invisible kind that dentists can offer today.

Once the heavy metal was dismantled, I walked the halls on Valentine's Day amid a group of bubbly cheerleaders who measured "love" by how many carnations they sold for a fundraiser. If you were caught walking around with only one, you might as well park a big old "L" on your forehead for "loser." Years later, my sorority ran the same sale and I was part of what I thought was the "greener side" of the situation. I just made a lot of girls green because I got enough flowers to make up for high school. So, as you can tell, the success of



Amy Horowitz for The Leader/The Times

My Knight in Shining Armor



The Cinderella Principle: Is it worth shattering the myth?

CARTOON CORNER



COOH!!! It SAYS HERE EIGHT OF THE FOURTEEN NIGHTS OF OLYMPIC PROGRAMMING WILL BE FIGURE SKATING!!!

Nierle to Transform WHS Auditorium Into Paradise

By STEVEN KRAKAUER
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — The Westfield High School (WHS) Drama Department has never been one to dawdle in ordinariness.

Last year, their production of *God's Country* by Steven Dietz focused on neo-nazism through true scenarios. Earlier this school year, the department put on the first-ever high school performance of *The Laramie Project*, a documentary drama based around the town of Laramie, Wyo., in which Matthew

performing in her second WHS show, plays Aphra.

"Everything is coming together really well. Everyone is so talented, and the direction is so well organized. Also, the music is very beautiful," Greenberg said.

The music is being coordinated by Musical Director William Mathews, in his third show.

The cast is also very much ensemble-based. The ensemble, known as "Storytellers", combined with the speaking parts,



Steven Krakauer for The Westfield Leader and The Times

IN REHEARSAL...Westfield High School students rehearse for the first song, "Let There Be" of the new musical, *Children of Eden*. JD Hyman, who plays "Father", Ryan Leonard, who portrays "Adam," and Erica Cenci, who plays "Eve," are surrounded by the Storytellers.

Sheppard, the homosexual college student murdered in the late-1990s, lived and died.

The current show, which is in rehearsal stage, and is set to hit the stage at the end of this month, is the biblically based *Children of Eden*.

Children of Eden is rarely performed at the high school level, mainly because of its difficult abundance of songs. The play is almost entirely made up of singing, with scarce interludes of dialogue, which makes the performance and rehearsal process an arduous one.

The play will be directed by Joseph Nierle, currently in his 15th year of directing for WHS.

"Things are going really well. It's a difficult show to do, and it requires a lot of passion, and a sort of emotional commitment. The cast has been very committed," Nierle told *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood*.

That cast is highlighted by a slew of capable leads. Junior JD Hyman, who previously starred as a freshman in the WHS musical *Big*, will play "Father," the God figure in the drama.

The first act of the drama covers the first two major biblical stories, Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel. The second act traces the tale of Noah and his family.

Cast as Adam and Eve are sophomore Ryan Leonard and senior Erica Cenci, respectively. Cenci also serves as the dance captain for the second act.

Cain and Abel, the quarreling children of Adam and Eve, are played by Josh Lerner and Tyler Patla, both juniors.

In the second act, Noah is played by David Eisenberg (a junior), while Mama Noah is played by senior Dania Aguerro. Aguerro is the dance captain during the first act.

Emily Greenberg, a freshman

totals over 40 cast members.

Betsy Paynter, a junior, plays the part of Yonah, a character created for the show that was never mentioned in the bible. Yonah is a slave-girl of Noah who becomes a member of the family after being chosen by Noah's son for marriage.

"The play is really starting to pull together, and become more of a cast," Paynter said.

She will also be a member of the Snake, a six-person character who will represent the snake in the Garden of Eden. The Snake is made up of sophomores Jason Mesches and Elliot Johnson, Paynter and seniors Aguerro, Josh Lieberman and Marion Pomann.

In Act Two, three individuals will be featured soloists for two songs. Senior Andrew Pidkameny and junior Christine Perot will sing solos in "Generations" and Lindsay Rose Sinclair will solo for "Ain't It Good."

Junior Matt Toriello is the shows Assistant Director and Stage Manager. This will be the third time he serves as stage manager for WHS. The set, which features an ark (for the second act) and a jungle setting for the first act, was built by Toriello, junior Doug Chananie and senior Pedro Ruiz.

"It was the most difficult set we've ever built. I'm glad the show is coming along really well," said Toriello.

Nierle stated that, although the musical is based on biblical stories, it also focuses on other issues. "It's really about looking at families, and what we pass as parents to our children. It's also about forgiveness," he said.

"Children of Eden" will play at WHS on February 28, March 1 and 2 at 8 p.m. Tickets can be pre-ordered by calling (908) 789-4549 for \$8, or can be picked up at the door for \$10.

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Editor: mlepodevin@goleader.com	mgoldenberg@goleader.com
kcort@goleader.com	mmorano@goleader.com
mbrody@goleader.com	cdavis@goleader.com
dpalladino@goleader.com	imckinley@goleader.com
agoldenberg@goleader.com	ahorowitz@goleader.com