



Artist of the Week

Lisa Nicole Lopes (1971-2002)

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

Out of the three members of the 90s rap/hip-hop group, "TLC," Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes was the indomitable one to be reckoned with. In 1994, when she became incensed over a melee with her boyfriend, Atlanta Falcons receiver Andre Rison, she set his house on fire. When she got in the habit of substituting one of her eyeglass lenses with a condom in order to promote safe sex, she also made a fashion statement. But, when she decided to vacation in Honduras, a place where she found serenity, she lost her life at the age of 30 in a car crash.

Tragic deaths at young ages is nothing new in the entertainment industry; still it never seems to stop piercing us with sighs of grief and words of what might have been for the singer, actor, or personality.

Surviving the group's bankruptcy and rifts between its members, Lopes had attempted to release a solo album with Arista records entitled, "Supernova," which was shelved because radio stations weren't receptive to her work. Plugging away, Lopes signed with Death Row Records and threw her support behind emerging artists.

The Philadelphia native was born with music in her blood—father Ronald played a wide range of instruments, from piano to saxophone. While her father's career in the U.S. Army brought her all over the world, Lopes came to appreciate various cultures and races, most especially Spanish traditions.

In 1990, Lopes made Atlanta, Ga. her home and hooked up with Tionne "T-Boz" Watkins and Rozonda "Chilli" Thomas. The trio hit it big in 1992 when they gave birth to a triplet of hits, "Ain't 2 Proud 2 Beg," "Baby-Baby-Baby," and "What About Your Friends" (my personal favorite).

Still, no one stood out with crazy-quick rapping skill like Lopes, telling it like it is, unafraid of censorship and wise beyond her years.

Friday morning, when news of her death came across my television screen, I couldn't help but to peel down the sunroof and blast "Waterfalls," the award-winning single that etched razor-sharp images in our heads and lessons to hold true and dear.

Continued on Page 19

ARTS ENTERTAINMENT

Three Superheroes Inspire 'A New Day': A Painter, Firemen and The Red Cross

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

MOUNTAINSIDE—During three short weeks, on evenings and weekends, Mountainside painter Bronna Butler inspected photographs of the firehouse in Westfield, taken at dawn, to capture the glorious, amber morning light, the grandness of the building, and the valor of the firefighters to formulate her latest piece, "A New Day."

According to Butler, Dennis Kinsella, Director of the American Red Cross Chapter in Westfield/Mountainside, recommended the firehouse as the painter's focal point. Butler, who began "A New Day" in March, was working under a strict deadline in order to produce the painting for a Red Cross raffle slated for Sunday, September 22.

Normally a portrait artist, who works under longer deadlines, Butler found the time limit challenging, but was more intrigued by the hospitality and cooperation of the members of the Westfield Fire Department.

"They were so fabulous," she told *The Westfield Leader and The Times of Scotch Plains-Fanwood*, pointing out that on the morning of shooting the photos which would be used for the painting, firefighters, who "suited up" for the event, were sure to have the doors to the firehouse garage wide open, fire trucks repositioned.

Butler was especially pleased that the painting would include American flags waving in the wind, a red, white and blue "God Bless America"



Jennifer Pinto for The Westfield Leader and The Times
FOUR-ALARM PAINTING...Bronna Butler of Mountainside has worked with the American Red Cross chapter in Westfield/Mountainside and firemen at the Westfield Fire Department to craft her latest oil painting, "A New Day," which will be raffled off by the Red Cross.



Jennifer Pinto for The Westfield Leader and The Times

sign on the building's façade, and an adjacent mailbox painted with a flag motif.

She believes that these symbols will serve as reminders indicative of the post-9/11 period, "so that five years from now, people could look back and know that this was painted a few months after September 11th."

In "A New Day," Butler precisely captures the way the ochre light plays upon the normally-white firehouse, turning it a tawny hue. From the blaring red lights on the center red fire engine, the fluidity of a light blue sky and the blurs behind the

engine's windshield, signifying the presence of two of Westfield's bravest, Butler depicts the true symbolism of the structure.

"A New Day," which will be displayed in the window of Juxtapose Gallery on Elm Street during the SpringFest on Sunday, will be raffled off by members of the Red Cross chapter and given to one lucky winner on September 22.

Mr. Kinsella remarked that Butler, who is also a Red Cross volunteer, has not only contributed profoundly to post 9/11 efforts through her personal selflessness, but also through her creative expression. He was honored to have the piece displayed recently at the Red Cross Chapter House, located at 321 Elm Street.

The admiration is mutual for Butler, who told *The Leader and The Times* that she was struck by the "commitment and selflessness" demonstrated by both the firemen and rescue workers, as well as members

of the Red Cross, who she calls "the quiet heroes" of volunteerism.

Directly after 9/11, Butler crafted the 24" x 36" oil painting, "The Rescue," which was donated by the American Red Cross in October 2001 and later displayed at the New York City Pier 94 Family Assistance Center from October to December of 2001. The Red Cross donated the piece to the Archdiocese of Newark, where it hangs in the Archdiocesan Center. To read an interview with Butler on "The Rescue," please visit <http://www.goleader.com/02jan17/>.

Butler received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Art in 1972 from the University of Missouri. The artist has also studied at Idaho State University, the New Jersey Center for Visual Arts in Summit, DuCret School of Art in Plainfield, and the New York Academy of Art in New York City.

Primarily, most of Butler's portraits may be found at Juxtapose. She has also exhibited in art shows throughout the state and New York City at the Salmagundi Art Club. Butler is also a member of the American Society of Portrait Artists, the Portrait Society of America and the New York City Salmagundi Artists' Club.

"A New Day," which is professionally framed, is one of three prizes up for grabs at September's raffle. The second prize is a vacation package to Amelia Island Plantation Resort in Florida and the third prize is a sports tickets package, featuring the Mets, Yankees, Devils and Nets games.

Tickets for the raffle are currently available at the Red Cross Chapter House, The Town Bank of Westfield, The Windmill, Bonsall Chiropractic & Sports Center, all of Westfield, and the Mountainside Deli. Proceeds will benefit the Red Cross Chapter of Westfield/Mountainside. For more information, please call (908) 232-7090.



Photo Courtesy of Juan Pineda
MAGIC STORYTELLER...During a spring production of Donizetti's *L'elisir D'amore*, the story of a magic potion is told to villagers.

Big Strides Being Made By Little Opera Co.

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

SCOTCH PLAINS—Don't let the name fool you. There is nothing "little" about The Little Opera Company of New Jersey except for some of the performers. The youngsters in the company range from 6 to 18 years old, and although many are from the Westfield area, some travel up to two hours away to be a part of this dynamic and talented ensemble.

Once the youngsters are accepted into the group, they may receive, free of charge, training in Italian, vocal and stage techniques, and exercises in opera improvisation.

According to Valerie Pineda, who founded the two-year-old non-profit group with her husband, Juan Pineda, the Little Opera Company was founded quite "by accident."

The two were planning a concert version of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, when suddenly they were joined by an orchestra with a conductor, costumes, kids, and narrator Celeste Holme.

Valerie and Juan devote their lives to opera. Both performers in the company, they also teach voice at the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts in Westfield.

The most recent concert offered by The Little Opera Company included Westfield residents Elizabeth Cullin, Rachel Hawkins, Valerie Hoffman, Emily Sheehan, Anna Lena-Schmidt, Hillary Nicole, Rebecca DiFazio and Sarah Szollar, as well as Scotch Plains students

William Shore, Jennifer Cua, Francine Nieva, and Melissa Pantojan.

A double bill concert held at Westfield High School (WHS), the program included challenging pieces such as Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*.

Celine Mogielnicki, 15, a WHS student and the winner of the 2002 Young Vocal Artists Awards Competition, performed as the daughter in *I Pagliacci*. Darren Levy, 16, of Westfield, played the narrator during the performance.

The purchase of tickets to one of their performances will not only provide the ticket holder with a wonderful opera experience, but proceeds benefit The Scholarship Fund, which provides financial assistance to their performers, in order to enable them to continue their studies.

Catherine Spadora of Union became involved with the group last year, and will be attending the New England Conservatory of Music with the help of this financial aid. None of the company's efforts would come together without the dedication of the volunteers behind the scenes.

Christine Sheehan, President of the Board of Trustees, is just one example of someone who believes in this company.

People of all ages are welcome to audition, and may arrange to do so by calling (800) 831-6215.

Pen & Ink

By Michelle H. Le Poidevin

America's Favorite Muppet Puts His Fur on the Line To Save Music Education

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



It's a sad commentary on society when Elmo, a squeaky-voiced puppet with red hair, is the only thing that can get through to members of the United States Congress about preserving music education among our young people. Maybe it means appealing to the hardheaded with something to soften their hearts on a vital topic, but the Sesame Street critter seemed to make perfect sense to the 17-member House of Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education on April 24.

Whether or not Elmo will achieve his goal of appropriating \$2 million for the International Foundation for Music Research is still unclear. Yet, Elmo and his co-star Joe Lamond, President and CEO of the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM), asked members of Congress to consider allowing the monies to "make sure every child has access to quality music instruction." A worthy cause, but this is not usually top on the totem pole for the majority of our schools.

Though he tells us from an elementary point of view, Elmo redefines

the need for music education in our schools and homes—a necessity often overshadowed by sports-only extracurricular activities or math/science/English-only syllabi. He tells us how music has helped him learn his ABCs, facilitating memory skills and allowing him to express his creativity. "My friend Joe Lamond says some kids don't have music in school. That makes Elmo sad," pled the puppet.

According to an NAMM press statement, both the muppet and Mr. Lamond believe that "music education is a vital core subject, not an optional elective." Still, most creative subjects in our school systems are either extracurricular options, electives and/or mildly encouraged as career possibilities. I'm wondering why, especially when the National Association for Music Education cites success in society, life, developing intelligence and education as resulting from a strong education in music.

In fact, every March, a public outreach program, entitled MIOSM, is crafted to support school music programs and raise awareness of the importance of music education. Did you hear about it in your school district or does it take a puppet to bring the importance of music education to our consciences?

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