

Les Malamut Gallery Hosts Contemporary Art Exhibit

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

AREA - The work of 14 celebrated artists, including many from the immediate area, are currently on display at The Les Malamut Art Gallery located in the Union Public Library in Union.

All of the artists are members of a relatively new artistic community called the Contemporary Art Group (CAG). The exhibit is entitled "CAG Contemporary Art Group: Original Artwork Created by Central Jersey Artists."

The work of pastel painter Diana Taliaferro, sculptor Gladys Reimers and printmaker, Shari Seltzer - all from Westfield - are part of the exhibit.



Shari Seltzer- "Yellow Glad" (photo mono print)

In addition, the art of painter and printmaker Cynthia Weiss and sculptor Brooke Gardiner, both from Mountainside, are also included.

Other artists taking part in the exhibit are photographers Sheila Lenga, and Barbara Bohmer from Union, Barbara Wirkus from Kenilworth and Jane Rapp from Newton; painters Rosalia Verdun from Roselle Park and Monica Schraiber Otero from Watchung; watercolorists, Althea Howlett Scheller from Watchung and Maxine King from Woodbridge; and Kathie Ann Taylor, a photographer and stained glass artist, from Newton.

The exhibit as a whole represents an artistic mix that ranges from traditional to ultra contemporary.

For example, the viewer can almost feel as though he or she is sedately strolling alongside the figures in Ms. Taylor's "One Last Walk;" a beautiful watercolor and collage scene that unfolds through frost-kissed branches.

On the other end of the spectrum, Ms. Otero's "Global Warming" is a

veritable whirlwind of bright color.

Ms. Taliaferro's muted pastels, "Mothers & Daughters" and "Finding Fairies" are quietly elegant, yet playful at the same time.

Ms. Seltzer's "Yellow Glad" is a photo monoprint of a gladiola that she purchased at the Westfield Train Station Farmers' Market, with an abstract painting in the background.

"I seek to capture a fleeting moment," Ms. Seltzer told *The Westfield Leader and Scotch Plains-Fanwood Times*.

The mission of the CAG is to provide a forum for the discussion and exchange of ideas and information related to the contemporary art world; open up avenues for members to show their work; promote and gain recognition above and beyond the traditional channels; and offer constructive criticism and encour-

agement to each other in the pursuit of individual and joint art endeavors.

"The CAG is comprised of award winning artists, who have banded together to encourage and support each other in the practice of fine art. The group provides motivation for its members to create new art work that can then be exhibited in galleries and other venues," said Sheila Lenga, president of CAG, and one of the exhibiting artists.

The Union Public Library is located at 1980 Morris Avenue. CAG's exhibit will be in the library at Les Malamut Gallery until January 3. Gallery hours are Monday to Thursday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Friday and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Anyone interested in joining CAG can e-mail Ms. Lenga at slenga@comcast.net

County Tells Guidelines For Winter Activities

COUNTY - The County of Union has announced guidelines for winter-time activities at county parks.

Winter sports such as cross-country skiing, sledding and ice skating are permitted in several locations - weather, snow and ice conditions permitting.

Cross-country skiing is allowed at Ash Brook Golf Course in Scotch Plains, Oak Ridge Golf Course in Clark and the Watchung Reservation. There is no location in the park system suitable for downhill skiing.

The flag pole area in Echo Lake Park in Mountainside is the only sanctioned site in the Union County park system for sledding. Toboggans, bobsleds and other non-steerable devices are strongly discouraged at any time, for safety reasons. The park supervisor may suspend sledding activities if there is not enough snow on the hill or if there are severe ice conditions. Children should be supervised at all times.

Snowmobiles are strictly prohibited in the Union County Park System.

The Union County park system is heavily wooded. The parks sit in proximity to roadways and bodies of water that can be hazardous to sledders and snowboarders.

Galloping Hill Golf Course is not available for winter sports activities. Terrain of the course is considered too hazardous for this use.

Snowboarding and sledding are also prohibited at the Ash Brook and Oak Ridge golf courses.

Many options are available for ice skating in natural areas. Lighted lake areas include Warinanco Park Lake in Roselle; Meisel Avenue Lake in Springfield; Rahway River Park Lake in Rahway; and Briant Park Lake in Summit. All areas are unattended and used at the patrons' own risk. Please observe all signs regarding ice conditions.

Non-lighted skating areas are: Warinanco Park Lagoon in Roselle; Black Brook Park Lake in Kenilworth; Nomahegan Park Lake in Cranford; Milton Lake Park in Rahway; and the extension lake and lagoon in Green Brook Park in Plainfield. Signs announcing the suitability of any natural area for skating will be posted. The public is urged to observe any restrictions since these decisions are based upon the lake's ice thickness and other safety concerns.

Ice hockey is permitted at designated skating areas at the discretion of the Union County Police. This decision is based upon the ratio of ice hockey skaters and non-hockey skaters proportionate to the size of the skating area.

The Union County Department of Parks, Recreation and Facilities reserves the right to cancel winter sports at any park at any time if the conditions of the park are such that the safety of the public is in jeopardy.

For additional information regarding winter sports, call the department at (908) 527-4900 between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday. Information can also be obtained by visiting our website at www.ucnj.org, or calling the recorded message at the Warinanco Skating Center (908) 298-7850, and the Union County Parks hotline (908) 352-8410.

SPFHs Hosts Holiday Concert on Dec 20

SCOTCH PLAINS - The public can celebrate the music of the season at the annual holiday concert featuring the choral ensembles from Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School on Wednesday, December 20, at 7:30 p.m. in the high school's Many Ungar Auditorium.

Admission is a suggested donation that benefits the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Music Boosters Association (SPFMBA).

The SPFMBA provides support to all of the Scotch Plains-Fanwood district music programs, including the five elementary and two middle schools. Additionally, the SPFMBA will collect used cell phones and used ink cartridges at the door.



Erica Russo and Amie Diamond of Westfield as Clara in the Nutcracker Suite

Westfield Talents Perform In Clark's Nutcracker Suite

WESTFIELD - Talented local dancers and professional performers set the stage for Center for Dance Education's (CDE) fourth annual Nutcracker Suite to be held at Arthur L. Johnson High School in Clark this Sunday, December 17. The show, which will be performed at 1 and 5 p.m., is a way for children and adults to welcome the holiday season.

Now in its fourth year, the Nutcracker Suite has become a holiday tradition for the students of CDE. This year the performance will include professionals in the cast with the addition of Mark Stolzenberg as Drosselmeyer, a professional actor, clown and mime from New York City, Erica Russo and Amie Diamond

will share the role of Clara. Caitlin Murphy will appear as the Sugar Plum Fairy. Chrissy Cobuzzi will celebrate her senior year as the Snow Queen. All four live in Westfield.

Also, Westfield's Andrea Ellis has been accepted to the Gifted and Talented Performing Arts program at Somerset County Vocational Technical Institute. The program offers students professional preparation for a career in dance, acting and musical theatre. These students also have lead parts in CDE's Nutcracker Suite.

Tickets for the Nutcracker Suite are \$20, and group rates are available. For more information, contact CDE at (732) 388-6088 or visit CenterforDanceEducation.com.

Auditions will be Held for WYACT Summer Program

WESTFIELD - More than 700 applicants are expected for the seventh Annual New Jersey Performing Arts Center's "Young Artist Talent Search" (YATS), a weekend for young tri-state performers to audition for spots in New Jersey Performing Arts Center's (NJ PAC) arts training and scholarship programs.

Audition applications may be obtained at njpac.org or by calling the Talent Search Hotline at (973) 353-8009. NJ PAC's Arts Education Department will offer workshops in February 2007 to help applicants prepare for their auditions.

The weekend event, provides artistically talented young performers opportunities to audition for approximately 300 openings in any of its five arts training programs.

Auditions will take place Saturday, March 24, and Sunday, March 25, 2007 at the Lucent Technologies Center for Arts Education, located on 24 Rector Street, on the NJ PAC site. Last year, more than 500 young artists auditioned during YATS weekend.

Preliminary auditions will also be held for the NJ PAC/Westfield Young Artists' Cooperative Theatre (WYACT) Summer Musical Program.

NJ PAC's Arts Education Department will offer free audition workshops to all YATS applicants. Workshop instructors will offer advice on technique, presentation, material selection and other key audition elements at sessions scheduled Thursday, February 15, and Monday, February 26.

Students will receive more information about these workshops after their applications have been received for the Young Artist Talent Search.

Applications will be mailed to all New Jersey middle schools and high schools. A \$15 application fee must accompany forms postmarked by January 15, 2007. Final applications must be postmarked no later than February 23, 2007, and must include a \$20 fee.

NJ PAC/WYACT Summer Musical Program is a collaborative effort to offer young people a first-hand opportunity to learn about musical theater by participating in a full-scale, professional-level musical production.

The preliminary audition of cast and orchestra applicants is in preparation for open auditions, to be held in the 2007 spring season for the upcoming NJ PAC/WYACT Summer Musical Program. Students who attend the Talent Search may be called back in the final round of auditions in the spring.

Pro Arte Chorale Lauds WF's Schwab

WESTFIELD - Pro Arte Chorale awarded a scholarship in the amount of \$500 to Laura Schwab of Westfield High School, the daughter of Mary Sue Veerkamp-Schwab and William Schwab, of Westfield.

She auditioned with a classical aria, presented strong letters of recommendation for her musical activities at school and in the community, sang vocalists, underwent sight-singing tests, showed capabilities in the pronunciation of foreign languages and was evaluated in ear-training exercises to compete for this award.

Laura will perform with the Chorale for the duration of the 2006 - 2007 season and will receive their monetary award upon graduation.



Laura Schwab (far right)

The Twelve CDs of Christmas

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

'Tis the season for tradition. The Christmas trees, the lights, the garlands and, ah, the music.

Christmas music can be a touchy subject. Some people cringe when radio stations start slipping in holiday tunes. Others, this writer included, have to physically force themselves to wait until Thanksgiving Day before breaking out Mariah Carey's "Merry Christmas" and will later curse the day they have to send it back into yearlong hibernation.

(Note to Lite FM: next year, please wait until Thanksgiving weekend to start with the Christmas music...the two-month-long buildup only fuels the haters' fire.)

But even those whose hearts are not swayed when Alvin and the Chipmunks start asking for hula-hoops should be able to find some musical effort to get them into the holiday spirit.

Keeping with a personal tradition, here's a sampling from the many different Christmas albums out there (ratings out of five Christmas trees), one for each day from now until Christmas morning:

"Christmas With The Rat Pack" (2004)

Classic voices do classic Christmas songs. Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis, Jr. deliver characteristically fine performances, and the album's producers throw in some candid unreleased cuts to round out the 21-track set.

Martin's "Baby It's Cold Outside" and Ol' Blue Eyes' "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" lead the Pack, and Sammy's "Jingle Bells" adds more fun to the cheery, nostalgic release.

John Denver and the Muppets - "A Christmas Together" (1979)

This joint effort between Denver and Kermit and Co. kicks off with a great version of "The Twelve Days of Christmas," in which a different character takes each verse. Aside from commentary and interaction between the performers, highlights include "Silent Night," the harmonies of "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" and the ability of the set to take you back to your childhood without any sign of Raffi.

98 Degrees - "This Christmas" (1999)

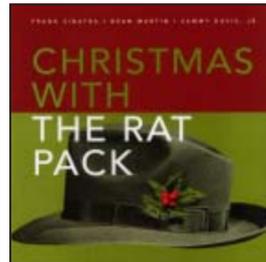
Stop laughing. Seriously. Yes, 98 Degrees is pretty low even for a boy band. But this album is shockingly good; with only a few exceptions (see the double-dose of original "This Gift"), the singers step outside the cheesiest of pop arenas for the sake of some thoughtfully arranged Christmas songs. Full vocal harmonies drive this album, especially on a cappella tracks like "I'll Be Home for Christmas" and a lovely setting of "Ave Maria."

Mariah Carey - "Merry Christmas" (1994)

As far as pop Christmas albums go, this one's pretty unouchable. This is the pre-R&B-makeover Mariah, the owner of arguably the best voice ever to grace the pop stage. And she uses it here; she exercises the full extent of her renowned vocal range on a powerful rendition of "O Holy Night," and she uses a gospel choir to wonderful effect on songs like "Silent Night." And at the moment you read this, on any college campus you can think of, at least 20 groups of girls are belting out "All I Want for Christmas Is You," a modern Christmas anthem. And it will never get old. A must-have.

Destiny's Child - "8 Days of Christmas" (2001)

The Beyonce-led trio puts an R&B spin on classic tunes like "Little Drummer Boy" and "Do You Hear



What I Hear?" and offers some originals to flesh out the release. Unfortunately, these are not the dynamic interpretations these singers are certainly capable of creating. They fail to capitalize on the potential of songs like "O Holy Night," which could have been stunningly arranged (Michelle Williams surprisingly forgoes any gospel twinge on a very uninspired, flat version with a bouncy rhythm that further detracts from the power of the soaring melodic line). The originals are nothing special either - lyrics like "On the seventh day of Christmas my baby gave to me a nice back rub and he massaged my feet" don't really bring the holiday spirit with them.

Diana Krall - "Christmas Songs" (2005)

Diana Krall is one of the best talents in modern jazz, featuring the Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra, is a wonderful, varied collection from start to finish. Big-band sounds make "Jingle Bells" and "Let It Snow" really swing, while a pensive take on "Christmas Time Is Here"

(think a *Charlie Brown Christmas*) and soothing versions of "What Are You Doing New Year's Eve?" and "The Christmas Song" use sparse instrumental arrangements to let Krall's gorgeous vocals drive them. A wonderful album to play during dinner or relax around the tree with, "Christmas Songs" is a modern classic.

Kenny Chesney - "All I Want for Christmas is a Real Good Tan" (2003)

This is exactly the kind of Christmas album you'd expect from the country tropical-island lover. He waxes poetic about St. Bart's and white sand over the north and white snow - "Jingle Bells" goes calypso, and "I'll Be Home for Christmas" moves at an island cantor. Great vocal harmonies on "Silent Night" and a Willie Nelson cameo on "Pretty Paper" are definitely worth a listen. There's some good stuff here, but those dreaming of a white Christmas won't really find what they're looking for.

Canadian Brass - "Sweet Sounds of Christmas" (2004)

Perhaps the best thing to ever come out of Canada, this brass quintet has captivated audiences worldwide for the last 36 years. One of multiple Christmas albums the group has released, "Sweet Sounds of Christmas" features wonderful

"A Rosie Christmas" (Series)

This series, a fundraiser for Special Olympics International, boasts amazing artist lineups and a good mix of conventional and popular songs. Volume 1 is a great starter, with U2's "Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)," Madonna's "Santa Baby" and Run DMC's "Christmas in Hollis" leading the way. Five successive releases, including a live album and an acoustic one, feature artists as diverse as Aretha Franklin, Smashing Pumpkins, Dave Matthews, Jonny Lang, SR-71 and even a Frank Sinatra/Cyndi Lauper duet. Any album in the series has something for everyone.

"Now...Music" (Series)

The minds behind the yucky "Now...Music" pop-compilation series get something right. This two-disc set features some of the most popular names in music over the past century singing both pop Christmas classics and traditional carols. The first disc is brilliant, spanning artists from Bing Crosby (with the quintessential version of "White Christmas") to Elvis to Ella Fitzgerald. The second half of the set goes more modern, John Lennon and Yoko leading the way with "Happy Xmas - War is Over." The second disc has some highlights from Bruce Springsteen and the all-star Band Aid, but contributions from Britney Spears and Joe will quickly have you spinning back to disc one. With only a few missteps, "Now...Christmas" is definitely worth more consideration than the generic pop mixes the series' creators regularly spit out.

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