

Arts & Entertainment

All That Glitters is Not Gold, Says WHS Graduate Rob Palmer

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

AREA - Former Westfield resident Rob Palmer has recently released his second book, a novel entitled "Queen of Diamonds."

Like Mr. Palmer's first book, "Patriot James," his second novel concerns a woman protagonist, and is told from a woman's point of view.

Set in Philadelphia and the fictional college town of Brandenburg, Pa., "Queen of Diamonds" is the story of Ngoc Soan, a Vietnamese businesswoman and gambler who owns a prosperous diamond business.

Ngoc wants to lower the price of diamonds so that all can afford them. To do this, she must confront De Beers, the South African conglomerate of companies that controls the world's diamond business.

Part thriller, part romance, in "Queen of Diamonds," Mr. Palmer takes his reader into the diamond "underworld," and brings together a cast of unlikely characters to help Ngoc achieve her goal.

CONTINUED NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA - BEETHOVEN 7

nies were haunting and alive.

Seasoned cellist Steven Isserlis delivered an intoxicating performance of Elgar's Concerto in E minor for Cello and Orchestra, Opus 85. In the concerto, Elgar uses the cello's entire range, from foreboding low notes up through the instrument's soaring high register. The composer takes advantage of the cello's unique tone colorings, well suited to his romantic compositional style, and Isserlis knew how to bring that passion to life.

Sunday's performance was full of brilliant moments - Isserlis dialogued with violins, with oboes, with cellos (there was a particularly striking *ritardando* interplay between cello soloist and cello section). Mournful orchestral harmonies created an underpinning for languid solo melodies. Isserlis floated on top of the orchestra, though the full NJSO at times masked his low notes.

The romantic aesthetic Elgar creates is the stuff of which classic movie scores are made - emotional and stirring, the NJSO's performance gave its cello soloist a lovely foundation for his interpretation of the work.

The audience so appreciated Isserlis's talent that its applause did not stop until the cellist returned for a thrill of an all-pizzicato encore.

The NJSO devoted the second half of the concert program to Beethoven's magnificent Seventh in a performance that victoriously overcame a rather tepid beginning.

The tempo Maestro Oundjian chose to begin the Seventh was a bit too slow to stay crisp. The orchestra seemed to linger a bit too long in anticipating the grand downbeat chords that open the symphony. But both orchestra and conductor really came alive for the full outburst of the movement's major theme, and from there, momentum only grew. Interplay between the wind instrumentalists was stellar, especially during a wonderful passage in which a subdued orchestra frames a flute-oboe dialogue developing through several different keys.

Beethoven's Seventh Symphony is

Mr. Palmer spent three years writing "Queen of Diamonds," part of which was spent researching the diamond industry, especially diamond mining.

"...I was helped by a cousin in Colorado, David Emslie, who has mining experience," the author said.

Mr. Palmer likens his writing process to that of Stephen King, whose books show characters who take on lives of their own.

"I tend to create a character, put (him or her) in a premise, then see where the people I have created take things," he explained.

"I have a general idea where things are going, but sometimes the characters fool me, and I find I'm writing their story, not mine," he continued.

Mr. Palmer was doubly inspired to write "Queen of Diamonds." First, he wanted to write about the diamond industry because he is curious about the hold diamonds have over people.

His second inspiration came in the form of a Vietnamese-American friend who impressed him by overcoming cultural, language and gender barriers.

"Ngoc Soan [is] much more flam-

more heroic than many give it credit for. The opening of the second movement's dirge is all about dark string tones; the lower strings lay down minor melodies with a melancholy that betrays the movement's "allegretto" tempo marking and has in it the heart of the Beethoven works that have inspired the "heroic" compositional label. Oundjian led the NJSO through the full gamut of emotions that the Seventh's most poignant movement covers. Explosive *fortes* and soft laments, all of the myriad emotional expressions Beethoven wrote found voices here.

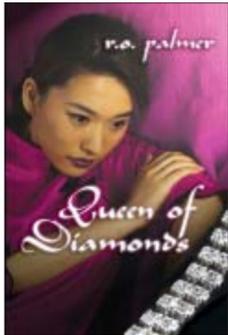
For the third movement, Oundjian confidently chose an exceptionally brisk tempo that really worked; the NJSO musicians stepped up to create a delightful, robust scherzo, with reflective moments punctuated by jubilant *sforzandos*. The violinists effortlessly threw out trills, the winds smoothly transitioned between themes.

Beethoven writes a whirlwind of a fourth movement; brass punctuate seas of strings, awesome timpani pounding propelled the musical action. The NJSO delivered a performance both aurally and visually stimulating; at one point, every string bow moved together in accented rhythm.

The triumphant performance drove home again to this music critic the inherent heroic undertones of this symphony. Though throughout its lifetime scholars and audiences have felt its dance-like qualities, the powerful sadness of its second movement and the formal drama that stirs beneath its euphoric rhythms give the work another important dimension.

Interestingly, the NJSO this weekend performs Beethoven's Third Symphony, dubbed *Eroica* - "Heroic" - by its composer. Those lucky enough to have experienced last weekend's performance of the Seventh may find more parallels between the two symphonies than many others see.

The NJSO's "Beethoven the Hero" runs this weekend; the orchestra presents the concert tomorrow night at NJPAC. For details, see njsso.org.



"Queen of Diamonds"

boyant, but the concept of an Asian-American making good in the U.S. came from my hard-working friend," he said.

Mr. Palmer dedicated "Queen of Diamonds" to his father, E. Marshall Palmer, a longtime Westfield resident who recently passed away.

Mr. Palmer graduated Westfield High School (WHS), after which he attended Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pa.

Currently at work on a sequel to "Patriot James," the author has two additional novels and two outlines in various drafting stages.

He enjoys meeting his readers, and welcomes invitations to speak at book club and library group meetings.

On April 16, Mr. Palmer will conduct a class for the Westfield Adult School entitled "How to Publish Your Book Using Print on Demand Technology." The class will be held at WHS.

Both "Queen of Diamonds" and "Patriot James" can be purchased at Town Book Store in Westfield.

For more information about Mr. Palmer, visit ropalmer.com.

SP-F Art Assoc Hosts 'Still Life in Pastel'

SCOTCH PLAINS - The Scotch Plains and Fanwood Arts Association Meeting will be held on Thursday, March 8, at 7 p.m. in the Scotch Plains Library, located at 1927 Bartle Avenue.

A program on "Still Life in Pastel" by Dolores Brink will follow a brief business meeting.

A graduate of the duCret School of Art in Plainfield, Ms. Brink has taught classes in stained glass and pastel for more than 10 years, and is frequently asked to judge local art shows.

She has studied with renowned artists such as impressionist Joseph Dingley, portrait artist Furman Finck and master pastelist Daniel Greene. This award-winning artist exhibits frequently in the tri-state area, and her works are in many private collections.

The demonstration is free and open to the public. For more information, contact Tom Yeager at (908) 322-5438.

Younger Crowd Gathers At Y Annex for Music, Fun

By MEREDITH MANNINO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD - Vans sneakers, cell phones, loud music and waves of vibrant, youthful energy filled the Westfield Y Annex on East Broad Street this weekend.

The facility hosted a special sort of teen night, where 20-something and younger musicians performed for exuberant fans in a safe drug-free environment.

For those teens didn't feel like rocking out, a cardiovascular fun house in the Y's upstairs entertained them. Comprised of a Dance Dance Revolution machine and game bikes, a good time was had by all.

"We're giving teens a viable place to go and do stuff they like in a safe, constructive environment," Marty Collett, Westfield Y Camp/Teen Director, said.

A youthful Mr. Collett still skateboards and likes punk music, making teens trust and relate to him.

One such teen, Michelle DeLuca, 17, of Cranford, said the milieu at the Westfield YMCA was much more low-key and fun than some other teen programs she had frequented.

"This is a great idea," she enthused. "It seems more relaxed than other rec

Former WF Resident Benny Reid Is 'Finding' Peace With CD Debut

By CHRISTIE STORMS
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD - The saxophone may seem synonymous with the blues, but the recent release of "Findings," Benny Reid's first contemporary jazz CD, seems rather uplifting. The 26-year-old former Westfield resident has worked toward this goal for more than a decade, determined to have his departed sister live on through his music.

"She has been the guiding and driving force in my life," Reid says of his sister, Alina Siegel, who died suddenly after brief illness at age 14. "I didn't know how much talent I'd have or how good I'd be, but I always knew I'd do something for her, make it happen...and this is the dream coming true."

Reid began playing saxophone in second grade and believes he expresses himself best through music.

He had been a 13-year-old student at Edison Intermediate School when he lost his sister and says picking up his saxophone helped him deal with the tragedy.

Edison's music director at the time, Robert Rietzke, invited him to perform a saxophone solo in Alina's memory and reportedly told Reid it was the first time he'd ever seen a student receive a standing ovation.

"Kids very rarely just know what they want to do, but I committed to it," Reid says. "I distinctly remember being in eighth grade at rehearsal and saying 'this is what I want to do forever.'"

Reid cites Rietzke as one of his early mentors and "the founder of the only 'Jazz Band Boy Scout Troop' in the world," which provided him countless opportunities to play with "phenomenal musicians" at a young age.

At Westfield High School (WHS), Reid says he further honed his talents thanks to teacher and band director Raymond Wojcik.

"He is a genius musician and composer and taught a lot of theory," Reid says. "And that was really great because you have to know that kind of thing, especially to compose."

While Reid plays saxophone, he does most of his composing on the piano, reporting this is common practice among musicians.

"The thing with the piano is you can see every note in front of you," Reid says. "But you have to have knowl-

edge of every instrument you're composing for. So you score it on the piano and then expand it to the individual strings, percussion and what have you."

He explains it is also common for professional saxophonists to "double up" by additionally playing instruments like the flute and clarinet during performances.

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Benny Reid - "Findings" Courtesy of Concord Records, Raj Nalk

five horns," he says. "That's basically because those are instruments played with a reed so they group them together. But it's difficult because they're really not that similar."

Reid spent a couple of semesters studying these instruments while attending Indiana University, where he majored in Jazz Studies.

He also learned to play the three other types of saxophones: soprano, tenor and baritone.

"I just did a show with Frankie Valli where I had to play tenor for most of the show and then got to do two alto features with my horn," he says. "That's kind of how it works."

In addition to Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons, Reid has also performed with pop bands such as The Temptations and numerous jazz musicians.

His biggest dream is to one day play alongside jazz guitarist Pat Metheny, whose band members performed on "Findings."

"When we were little, my dad used to pick us up and dance us around to Metheny," Reid recalls, citing that was the inspiration for the track "Dancing with My Father."

Reid says he's grateful for his par-

ents' dedication to pursuing the arts and their support in his endeavors.

"I live in New York now, but I teach here to be close to home once a week," he added.

In addition to private lessons and clinics at colleges, Reid recently spent three years co-leading the jazz band at WHS.

His next teaching endeavor will be a clinic at Indiana University. He will also perform around the country.

Spring Session of Musical Theater Workshop Begins

SCOTCH PLAINS - Veteran Broadway actor Juan Pineda will guide aspiring young actors who wish to participate in a professional theater training experience, involving acting, singing and performance techniques in the Musical Theater Workshop (MTW), a division of the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts (NJWA).

The spring semester of the MTW will offer three separate classes for a series of 11 weeks each. A Beginner Class will be held on Thursdays, from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m., at All Saints' Church, located at 559 Park Avenue in Scotch Plains, and on Saturdays, from 1:30 until 2:30 p.m. at the NJWA studios at 150-152 East Broad Street in Westfield.

This Beginner Class is designed for students 10- to 15-years-old, who will be given solos and will participate in acting and musical theater improvisational exercises. As the students gain experience, they will be given additional solos, duets and trios.

The Intermediate Class will be held on Thursdays, from 4:35 to 5:35 p.m., at All Saints' Church. Participation in the 11-session Intermediate Class, for students ages 14 to 18, requires an audition. This class will focus on more advanced acting, singing and audition techniques. Students will work on solos, duets and trios, and will stage their own scenes and work on improvisational exercises.

The MTW Thursday classes begin on February 22 and continue to May 24. The Saturday session runs from February 24 to May 19. Tuition for

each session is \$360.

Mr. Pineda, who spent seven years in the role of Thuy in Broadway's *Miss Saigon*, has appeared off-Broadway in *The Karaoke Show* and *Babes in Toyland*. Artistic Director of The Little Opera Company of New Jersey, he is also a private vocal coach and acting teacher. He has been on the faculty of the NJWA for the past seven years and has been the artistic director of the musicals presented at the Westfield Summer Workshop (WSW).

This July, he will co-direct both 2007 WSW productions of *The Pirates of Penzance* and *Thoroughly Modern Millie*.

For more information, call (908) 789-9696 or visit the offices in Westfield. Additional information about all NJWA programs is available on the web at njworkshopforthearts.com.

Union County Observes Youth Art Month

COUNTY - Artwork from various schools in Union County is being showcased for the Art Educators of New Jersey's (AENJ) Youth Art Month, an annual observance each March in the state to emphasize the value of art education for children and to encourage support for quality school art programs.

Union County's Youth Art Month exhibit will be held at IKEA Elizabeth through April 1.

Artwork from students in kindergarten through grade 12 will be on display and each student artist will receive awards. Youth Art Month provides a forum for acknowledging skills that are fostered through experience in the visual arts that are not possible in other subjects offered in the curriculum.

Visitors to the IKEA Youth Art Month Exhibit will see a variety of media used by the artists, such as pastels, acrylic paints and pencil. Three-dimensional projects, drawings, paintings, prints and photographs will be exhibited to showcase the art programs throughout the county.

All artwork can also be seen at artsonia.com/unioncounty1



IT'S FUN TO PLAY AT THE Y-M-C-A...Local bands Pick an Exit, 9:18, North of Spain, The Pull Out Method and Reinforcement joined forces on Saturday, February 24, at the Westfield Y Annex on East Broad Street. Money collected from Pick an Exit's performance went to the "I have a dream" Charity Program in Westfield. For more pictures, check out the photo gallery at goleader.com/services/photos or, if viewing online, click anywhere on the pictures at left.