



The Houston REVIEW

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The Arts in Houston

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON • CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY

From the Editor



I write this note sitting in a pleasant park in Helsinki, Finland. A statue surrounded by roses is my only companion as I watch people walking and cycling to work while trolleys and buses also roll past. The city is alive with the frantic tone of people squeezing the last warm moments out of summer before the onset of deep winter. Soon I will return to my city, Houston, where I will frantically squeeze the last bit of cold air from my dying car's air conditioner in the midst of deep summer.

But even on a sixty-degree morning, the weather is not much on my mind. I think instead of how pleasant it would be to live in a perpetual Helsinki August. As I look around at ample mass transportation, beautiful urban spaces, old buildings and history treated with the dignity they deserve, and the lack of widespread poverty, I wonder if my city will ever grow into a mature metropolis.

Yet one thing has become clearer to me in working on this issue of *The Houston Review*. For all of its rough edges, Houston has come of age in one important area—the arts. Yes, even in comparison to the old European cities which we have envied and imitated for much of our history, Houston has developed a lively arts scene that adds greatly to the quality of life in our region.

The vitality of the arts in Houston reflects the dynamism of the city. But good museums and symphonies and theaters did not spring automatically from a thriving economy; individuals had to step forward and will them into existence. The articles in this issue show that time and time again those who loved the arts banded together and worked hard to bring them here, usually against great odds. Those who made their fortunes in our region generously supported these efforts; many of their wives took the lead in making sure that this was so. Many of us who were raised with little knowledge of high culture gradually came to appreciate the symphony along with Willie Nelson, an impressionist painting along with a Nolan Ryan fastball.

This issue could not encompass all of the arts in our region. Instead, we included articles on a representative sample of the arts. Many of the pieces emphasize the human face of the artists and those who supported the arts. For the cover we chose a photograph of "Virtuoso," a sculpture by David Adickes. Like all art, this was a matter of personal preference—the editor has always felt good when he walked past this whimsical monument to the arts in Houston.

ON THE COVER— *Virtuoso* by David Adickes
Cover photograph by Julie Coan

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Spotlight



MARY SCHIFLETT, a consultant/vice president for the Texas Medical Center, first became involved with the *Houston Review* in 2001 when we began planning the issue about the Texas Medical Center. During our brainstorming sessions, she suggested ideas for articles and helped find authors to write them. Mary also wrote an introductory overview for the issue entitled, "The Second Downtown." Following publication of this issue in 2003, she graciously agreed to serve on our advisory board. She brought with her a wealth of experience, creative energy and deep commitment to make *The Houston Review* the magazine of our city's history.

Mary joined the Texas Medical Center in 1984 as associate director for planning and the following year she was asked to become director of public affairs. During her career, she has been a respected administrator and author. She has contributed chapters to several books and has published numerous articles on subjects as varied as biographic sketches, origins of music and art, ethnic groups in early Houston, and ranch life and folklore.

Throughout her career, Mary has made the time to get involved with organizations to help improve the quality of life in our city. Mary has served as a director on the original board for the Third Ward Redevelopment Council; president of the Downtown Club; president of the Houston Center for the Humanities; secretary and member of the executive committee of the Board for the Friends of Hermann Park; member of the Volunteer Service Council for the Southern Regional Office of the Institute for International Education (IIE); and president of the Rotary Club of River Oaks. Mary Schiflett's creative energy, wise counsel, and quiet elegance have been a welcome addition to our board of advisors and have enhanced the quality of our magazine.

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Table of Contents

Articles

Page 2	Art is All Around Us <i>by Julie Coan</i>
Page 10	Public Art in Houston—Walking Tour <i>by Leigh Cutler, Katy Oliveira, and Kimberly Youngblood</i>
Page 13	Presenting Edna Saunders <i>by Betty Trapp Chapman</i>
Page 23	The Orange Show <i>by Rebecca J. Jacobs-Pollez</i>
Page 27	Houston Works—Present and Future State of the Visual Arts <i>by Gus Kopriva</i>
Page 30	Changing Visions: A History of the Blaffer Gallery <i>by Claudia Schmuckli</i>
Page 33	Creativity and Collaboration: The University of Houston's Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts <i>by Karen Farber</i>
Page 41	Wille's Story <i>by Joanne Seale Wilson</i>
Page 45	Eldorado Ballroom <i>by Leigh Cutler</i>

Interviews

Page 17	Audrey Jones Beck <i>Steven Fenberg's interview with Thomas P. Lee, Jr.</i>
Page 37	Bettye Fitzpatrick <i>Interviewed by Penny Jones</i>
Page 50	A Woman and Her Violin—Rodica Oancea Weber <i>Interviewed by Ernesto Valdés</i>
Page 54	The Portrait of a Pianist—Abbey Simon <i>Interviewed by Ernesto Valdés</i>



Art is All

*“Art washes away from the soul,
the dust of everyday life.”*

Picasso

*Neuhaus Fountain by
artist Guyonn Murrill
in Sam Houston Park.
Photo by Julie Coan*



Around Us

by Julie Coan

That statement is particularly true of public art because of its placement and accessibility. Houstonians are very fortunate to have numerous opportunities to see and appreciate art in public spaces. In downtown Houston alone, there are over seventy pieces of public art.

So many of us pass by these pieces every day, but know so little about the artists or the effort that went into creating the work. Last year I had the pleasure of producing a documentary for HoustonPBS called, "Art is All Around Us: Downtown." The goal of the show was to celebrate public art in Houston, to help people realize how public art enriches our civic life and encourage people to go downtown and discover the treasures that are in our own backyard. We interviewed local artists and art experts to get the history of several prominent and not-so-prominent works.



Floyd Newsum

Photo: Fujio Watanabe



"The Art Guys" Jack Massing (left) and Michael Galbreth

Photograph: Fujio Watanabe

With The Art Guys, Jack Massing and Michael Galbreth, as our guides, our first stop was Main Street Square where we talked with Floyd Newsum, a professor of art at the University of Houston Downtown and the creator of *Planter and Stems*. The planter sits across from Foley's where the old Lamar Hotel used to stand. Newsum says the colorful and brightly painted stainless steel planter represents people like Jesse Jones, the Worthams, and the Abercrombies, who were instrumental in Houston's development. Newsum did some research of his own and found that there were other, lesser-known entrepreneurs who had an impact on their communities; people like O.P. DeWalt, a civil rights leader and owner of the Lincoln Theater, the first black theater in Houston, and restaurateur and philanthropist, Felix Tijerina, owner of Felix's Mexican Restaurant.



The Planter in Main Street Square by Floyd Newsum

Photograph: Julie Coan

A Stem by Floyd Newsum

Photograph: Julie Coan



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Julie Coan has been a producer with HoustonPBS since 1996, and has received over 30 national, regional, and local awards for journalistic excellence, including seven Emmy Awards. Since 2002, she has served as Managing Producer, overseeing local productions at Channel 8 including their prime-time community affairs program, 'the connection'. Julie serves on the board of directors for a number of local and statewide organizations including the Lone Star Emmy Chapter for which she serves as the Regional Vice-President of the Houston Area.



The Disappearing Gnomes
by Paul Kittelson in the
Courtyard between One
and Two Allen Center

Photograph: Julie Coan



Paul Kittelson

Photo: Fujio
Watanabe

Nestled between two towering buildings that make up Allen Center reside seven dwarf-like creatures that are known to dwell in the Earth. What are these creatures lurking about? They are referred to as the *Disappearing Gnomes* and they are not your ordinary garden variety, either. Artist and University of Houston Professor Paul Kittelson has created a magical scene amidst the hustle and bustle of the work place with his fairy-tale styled *Disappearing Gnomes*. These whimsical creatures are molded statues that appear to be coming up out of the ground greeting patrons from a hard day's work. According to Kittelson, they are a bit of a self portrait, with large noses and Nordic features. While some Houstonians may find them a bit strange, others say that they add a spice to downtown.

Back in the early 1980s, when local artist David Adickes created *Virtuoso*, the soaring cement cello player located in front of the Lyric Center, he had no idea what a commotion it would create. Commissioned by the Lyric Center's then owner, Joe Russo, Adickes was asked to create a sculpture that represented the arts. He designed a number of pieces that represented different aspects of the arts but Russo thought the cello player was the best of the bunch.

After its debut in 1983, people loved it and appreciated its whimsical and playful nature. Critics, on the other hand, hated it. Russo was so concerned about the criticism that he hired a company to poll Houstonians to get their reaction. The pollster went around with pictures of several prominent pieces that had been recently added to the downtown landscape including pieces like the colorful triangle at the Chase Tower by renowned Spanish artist Joan Miro and the multi-colored resin sculpture in front of the Louisiana building by French artist Jean Dubuffet. Turns out 67 percent of those surveyed liked *Virtuoso* the most and the Miro, the most expensive piece, was liked the least. Russo was satisfied with the results, and since then *Virtuoso* has become the face of downtown on a number of marketing brochures used by the Greater Houston Convention and Visitor's Bureau.



David Adickes



The back side of *Virtuoso* by David Adickes

Photograph: Katy Oliveira



Personage and Birds at the JP Morgan Chase Tower by Joan Miro

Photograph: Julie Coan

Monument to the Phantom at the Louisiana Building by Jean Dubuffet

Photograph: Julie Coan



The *Seven Wonders*, like the artist who created them, are fascinating and complex. From a distance, Mel Chin's seven stainless steel towers seem like a series of lanterns dotting the western wall of the Wortham Center. Upon closer inspection, you quickly realize that each tower is an intricate collection of 150 children's drawings stenciled in stainless steel.

Chin had been asked to create seven monumental structures that convey heroic ideas of manufacturing, technology, philanthropy and other areas that the founding fathers had been involved in that made Houston a great city. The piece was part of the Sesquicentennial Park project—a project that was years behind schedule. Many saw this as a public relations problem for the park and the city. Much to Mel Chin's credit, he used this as opportunity. One of the areas he felt was missing from the original list that made Houston a great city was education. At the same time, he started thinking back on his own childhood and recalled his involvement in the Houston Livestock and Rodeo Art Exhibition. He says it was that exhibition that made him feel less isolated and more engaged in the world of art. With that notion, he decided to use this opportunity as a platform to give voice to those children who had been born in the year of the sesquicentennial.

All HISD children who had been born in 1986 were asked to submit illustrations of those original concepts. Since they received thousands of submissions, Chin says one of the most difficult parts of the project was selecting which illustrations would be included in the *Seven Wonders*. In his unbridled enthusiasm for the themes, one child came up with the idea for an invention he would like to see in the future. There was a lot of discussion about how this invention would fit into the project. It finally made the cut. In the technology tower, you will find "The Butt Warmer," complete with an on and off switch.

For Chin, the most important aspect of the *Seven Wonders* was the confirmation that he, as an artist, is not alone. Through this project, he was able to give a platform for the voice of others to share their vision of what makes Houston a great city, butt warmer and all.



Seven Wonders in Sesquicentennial Park by Mel Chin

Photograph: Julie Coan

Sometimes there's a piece of public art that comes along and challenges our perception of what those two words really represent. Dean Ruck's *Big Bubble* is one of those pieces. When you think of public art, you imagine an artist creating something and the public reacting to that vision. With the *Big Bubble*, its very existence is dependent on the participation of the individual. So what does that all mean?

Behind the Wortham Center, hidden in one of the alcoves on the Preston Street Bridge, is a red button. There's no label, no markings saying what happens when you press the button. The very fact that it's red starts your mind questioning whether it should be pressed at all. Those brave enough to disregard that "don't do it" voice in their heads are treated to one of the most clever and engaging pieces of public art in all of Houston. Pressing the button releases a burst of air into the bayou creating an enormous bubble that explodes out of the water. Like David Adicke's *Virtuoso*, the *Big Bubble* has taken on a life of its own and become part of Houston folklore. Ruck, an artist who works as a project manager at the University of Houston, says he's heard all kinds of stories about what people think is lurking below. He's heard everything from old military hardware and bombs going off to sharks in the bayou. He's even seen fishermen running up the banks to drop a line hoping to catch Moby Dick.

I should warn you, pressing the red button can be highly addictive, especially if you choose to hit it just as an unsuspecting pedestrian is making his way along the promenade. It's cruel, but very funny to watch! That's the joy of this piece. Who doesn't like a good scare every now and then, right?



Big Bubble in Buffalo Bayou by Dean Ruck

Photograph: Julie Coan



Dean Ruck
Photograph:
Fujio Watanabe



Fountain at Prairie and Travis by Elena Cusi Wortham Photograph: Julie Coan



Elena Cusi
Wortham

Photograph:
Fujio Watanabe

One of the amazing things public art can do is transport us to other times and places. The *Seven Wonders* reminds us of the past and Elena Cusi Wortham's fountain at the corner of Travis and Prairie is a beautiful reminder of the natural world. Part of the Cotswold Project, an initiative intended to introduce a new type of environment in downtown that was more intimately scaled, Cusi Wortham's fountain brings color and vitality to what would otherwise be a blank, concrete garage wall. Instead, the fountain is a rich, sensuous swirl of color and water. The fountain is really best enjoyed at night. The way the fountain's light reflects the shimmering water as it gently trickles down the beautifully crafted ceramic swirling tiles provides a much needed oasis in the middle of an urban landscape.

Our last stop on the tour is Market Square Park, the former site of City Hall and the Market House, where Houstonians once came to buy their fruits, vegetables and meats. It was really the hub of activity for the city in the early days. But by the early 1990s, the market was long gone and city hall had moved to its current location after the original building was destroyed in a fire. What once had been a center of activity was now a vacant patch of land.

Caroline Huber and Michael Peranteau, co-directors at DiverseWorks, had their office right around the corner from the park and decided the space needed some help. Through private donations and grants, they collaborated with several artists to revitalize the park.

Artist Richard Turner, with the help of many people, collected fragments of buildings that were being torn down around the city and arranged them in patterns throughout the sidewalks.



Photograph: Julie Coan

On the perimeter of the park, Malou Faló, a Texas artist, added color and vibrancy with benches made of painted ceramic tiles that depict flowers and displays of fruit. These pieces help us imagine what Market House was like. The fountains in front of the benches were added later as part of the Cotswold Project.

Inside the park, on benches designed by Richard Turner, photographers Paul Hester and his wife Lisa Hardaway arranged photographs, some old and some new, into four different themes. One collection documents the history of the site and the buildings that were there. Another shows businesses in Houston and another the architectural history of the city. The last theme shows ordinary Houstonians throughout the years. Hardaway and Hester went to the Metropolitan Research Center at the Houston Public Library to find photographs that showed the diversity of the city. They didn't want this just to be the mayors and the CEOs but wanted everyday people represented. So there are pictures of people at barbecues, picnics and birthday parties. It's an incredible window into a side of our city's history that we don't often get to see.

The centerpiece of the park is *Points of View*, by artist James Surls. Surls felt the piece would bring people's eyes up and lead them into the city and be a hopeful and visionary piece.

There are hundreds of pieces of public art spread out all around the city, each with its own story. We hope that "Art is All Around Us" will continue to spotlight the efforts of the very talented artists in our community and that you'll get out there and explore these treasures in our own backyard! 📷



Malou Faló's benches and fountain in Market Square Park

Photograph: Julie Coan



Paul Hester

Photograph:
Fujio Watanabe

Photographs in Market Square Park

Photograph: Julie Coan

James Surls
Photograph:
www.jamessurls.com



James Surls'
Points of View
in Market
Square Park

Photograph:
Julie Coan



For more information on Public Art, including maps and tour information, you can visit our website at www.houstonpnh.org/publicart. If you'd like to order a copy of *Art is All Around Us: Downtown* you can call 713-743-1811.

Public Art in Houston

Walking Tour

by Leigh Cutler, Katy Oliveira, and Kimberly Youngblood

This self-guided walking tour can be done in one day or be separated into three excursions. The first tour is through Hermann Park and the Museum District; the Downtown tour is split into two tours, an upper and lower. The downtown public art pieces are described in length in the article, "Art is All Around Us."

"Art is the signature of a community. It is how we express truth, address humanity, and perpetuate joy. In it can be found the reflection of our past and the vision of our future. But as much as anything else, art captures and communicates the difference that we, as a people, can make. In Houston, that difference can be seen everywhere. Because in Houston, there is art all around."

—Houston Municipal Art Office

HERMANN PARK AND MUSEUM DISTRICT TOUR

From Hermann Park and the Museum of Natural Science, walk toward Hermann Circle Drive. Stay west of the museum, crossing over the drive.

1. SAM HOUSTON MONUMENT, BY ENRICO FILBERTO CERRACCHIO (bordered by Hermann Circle Drive)

In 1924, the Women's City Club commissioned Enrico Filberto Cerrachio to create a sculpture commemorating Texas hero and statesman, General Sam Houston. The bronze sculpture rests upon a granite arch constructed by Frank Teich. Unveiled on August 16, 1925, the monument depicts Houston in 19th century military attire upon his horse leading his men into the battle of San Jacinto and is also positioned to point in the direction of the battle site.

DIRECTIONS: Cross the street toward the Hermann Park Reflection Pool. Facing the pool, follow the dirt path to your left along Hermann Dr., walk uphill on the dirt path toward Miller Outdoor Theater. Stop at the top of the hill.

2. ATROPOS KEY, BY HANNAH H. STEWART

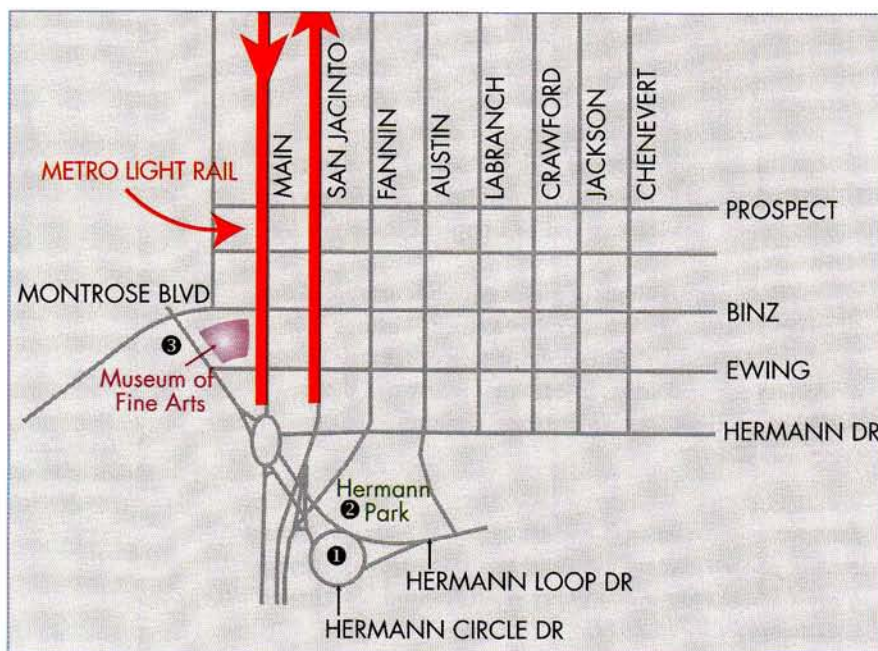
Patricia S. Woodard donated this cast bronze sculpture to the City of Houston in 1972. This piece refers to the Greek Goddess of Fate, Atropos, who, according to Greek mythology, cut the thread of life.

DIRECTIONS: Head west toward the Museum of Natural Science. Walk north along the sidewalk in front of the museum on Caroline St. (bordering the front parking lot and garage). At Hermann Drive, turn left, walk down Main Street to Binz. Cross Main and Binz (Binz becomes Bissonnet toward the west). Walk 1/2 block west on Bissonnet, toward Montrose, to the entrance of the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden, on the corner just across the street from The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

3. LILLIE AND HUGH ROY CULLEN SCULPTURE GARDEN, BY ISAMU NOGUCHI

The Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden was created in 1986 by sculptor Isamu Noguchi. This acre-sized garden is home to more than twenty 19th and 20th century masterworks from the MFAH and other collections.

At this point, you may want to visit any of the various museums in the museum district including the MFAH and the Contemporary Arts Museum.



UPPER DOWNTOWN TOUR

You may drive or take the train following the instructions below.

DIRECTIONS: Walk 2 1/2 blocks back down Binz, heading east to San Jacinto Street to catch the northbound Metro light rail to downtown. As you pass through the Downtown Fountains and approach Main Street Square, look to your left at *Planter and Stems* by Floyd Newsum. Exit the Metro at Preston station.

DIRECTIONS: Walk 1/2 block south along Main to Prairie, turn right. Walk one block down to Travis, the fountain is on your left.

1. ELENA CUSI WORTHAM'S FOUNTAIN—

at the corner of Travis and Prairie

DIRECTIONS: Take a right at Travis, one block to Preston. Cross Preston to Market Square Park on your left.

2. MARKET SQUARE PARK—

Market Square Park is home to several public art works including: Malou Faló's benches and fountain, Richard Turner's benches, and James Surls' *Points of View*.

DIRECTIONS: Continue walking down Preston to Smith Street, turn left and walk one block to *Virtuoso*.

3. VIRTUOSO, BY DAVID ADICKES—

SW corner of Prairie and Smith Streets, in outdoor plaza of Lyric Center Building.

DIRECTIONS: Continue walking on Smith Street one block to Texas, turn right for one and half blocks to Sesquicentennial Park.

4. SEVEN WONDERS BY MEL CHIN—

in Sesquicentennial Park.

5. BIG BUBBLE, BY DEAN RUCK—

located in Buffalo Bayou.

6. BUFFALO BAYOU ART PARK, VARIOUS

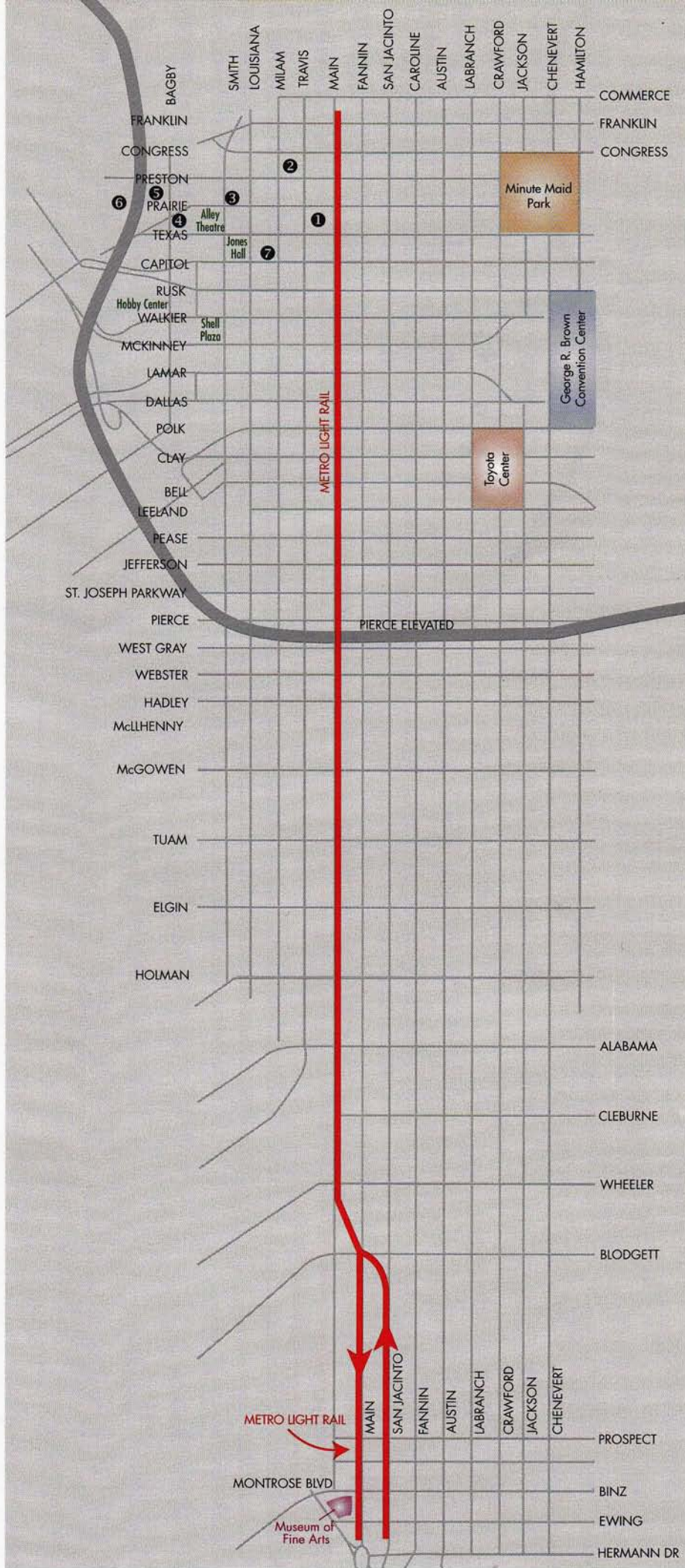
ARTISTS—Explore the temporary public art installed in the park along the bayou.

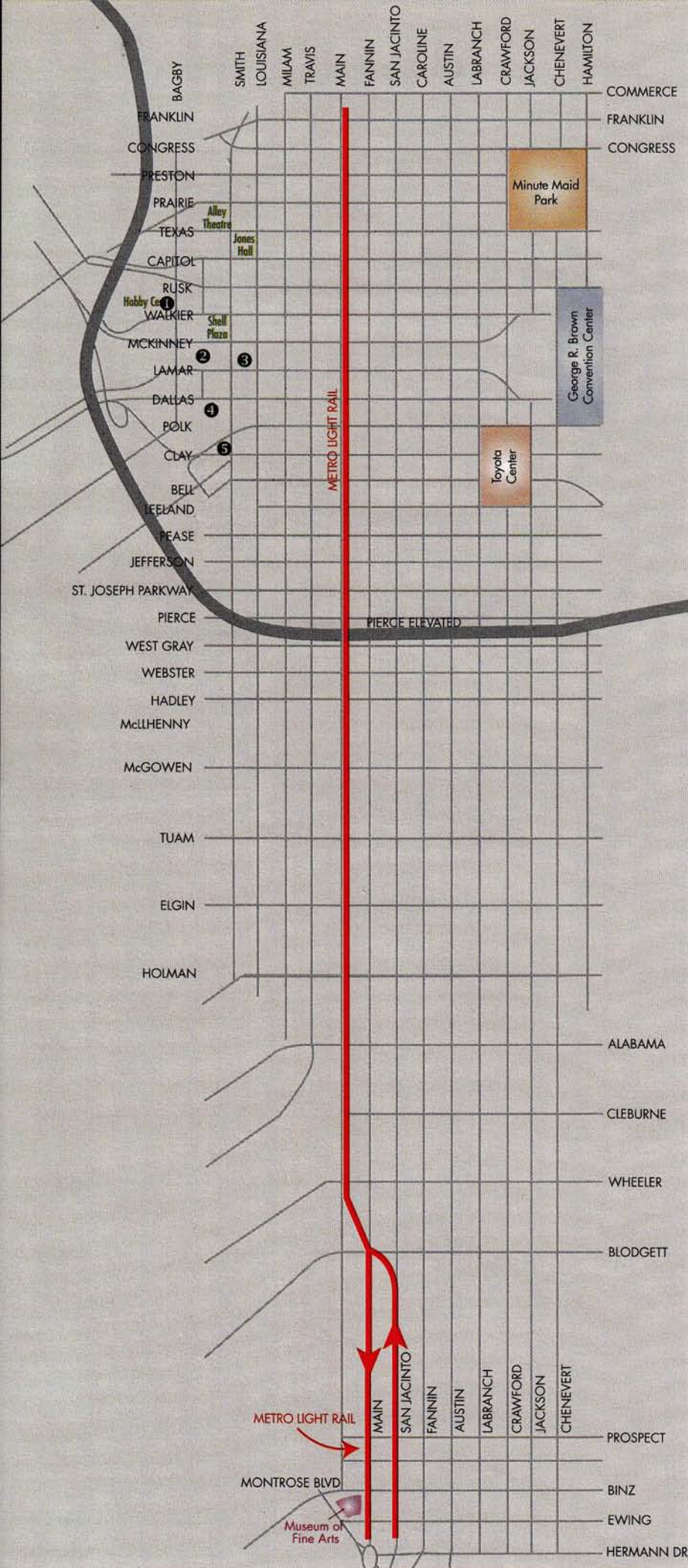
DIRECTIONS: Walk back on Texas toward downtown for three blocks to Milam, turn right, go one block to Capitol.

7. PERSONAGE WITH BIRDS, BY JOAN

MIRÓ—SW corner of Milam and Capitol Streets, in outdoor plaza of JP Morgan Chase Building, formerly the Texas Commerce Bank Building.

THIS CONCLUDES THE UPPER DOWNTOWN TOUR.





LOWER DOWNTOWN TOUR

From Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, (Bagby & Walker).

1. IN MINDS by Tony Cragg—SE corner of Bagby and Walker Streets, in Hines Plaza outside The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts.

DIRECTIONS: Walk one block toward City Hall, turn left on McKinney.

2. GEOMETRIC MOUSE X by Claes Oldenburg—NE corner of outdoor plaza at the Houston Public Library, bordering McKinney Street.

DIRECTIONS: Walk across the plaza to Lamar Street, head two blocks back toward downtown. On the corner of Lamar and Louisiana.

3. MONUMENT TO THE PHANTOM by Jean Dubuffet—NE corner of Lamar and Louisiana Streets, in outdoor plaza of 1100 Louisiana Building.

DIRECTIONS: Walk one block back down Lamar, away from downtown to Smith Street, turn left, walk two blocks to Allen Center. Follow the sidewalk beside Jason's Deli to the park between Allen Centers.

4. DISAPPEARING GNOMES by Paul Kittelson—located between Allen Center buildings.

DIRECTIONS: Walk back out to Smith St., turn right and cross Polk to the Bob and Vivian Smith Fountain, then stay on Smith and cross Clay to the front of the former Enron Building.

5. METAL SCULPTURE by Louise Nevelson—1400 Smith Street between Clay and Bell Streets.

THIS CONCLUDES THE LOWER DOWNTOWN TOUR. 

Presenting Edna Saunders

When Edna Woolford Saunders reported to her father in 1918 that she had been asked to book events for the City Auditorium, he protested, "that was no job for a lady."¹ Edna, however, was not dissuaded by her father's opposition and embarked on a career that would fill the remainder of her life. In the process of becoming one of the best known impresarios in the country, she instilled a deep appreciation for the performing arts among the citizens of Houston. Edna Saunders planted the seeds that would grow and flourish to make Houston one of the nation's major cultural centers.

Edna was born in Houston on August 31, 1880, and grew up in her family's spacious home on the corner of Texas Avenue and Fannin Street. The Woolford family was a prominent one, her father, John, serving as the city's mayor at the turn of the twentieth century. Edna's parents exposed her to the arts early in her life. She

Her Life and Her Legacy

by Betty Trapp Chapman

recalled later that, at the age of 4, she had accompanied her parents to a performance of Joseph Jefferson's *Rip Van Winkle* at the city's opera house and that it made a memorable impression on her.²

Edna graduated from Houston High School in 1898 and completed her education at the Stuart School in Washington, D. C., and the Gardner School in New York City. Although she was trained in piano and voice, Edna apparently had no ambitions for the concert stage and once said, "My music was never intended for that, but only as a part of a well-rounded education."³ The 20-year-old Edna returned to Houston where she was presented to society at a debut ball sponsored by the ZZ Club at the Capitol Hotel and again at a festive affair of the Thalian Club at Bryan's Hall. After marrying Ernest Saunders in 1902, she settled into the life of a young matron.⁴

Edna's interest in music, however, led to her active member-



Woman's Choral Club in 1913 during the presidency of Edna Saunders

Reprinted by permission of Rice Historical Society

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Betty Trapp Chapman is a historian who researches, writes, and lectures on Houston's history. Although she delves into all aspects of local history, her special areas of interest are women's history and historic preservation. She currently chairs the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission.

ship in the Woman's Choral Club, founded in 1901 as a performing group to present musicales for family and friends. During its second season, the club decided to sponsor visiting artists in concerts for its associate members. This activity continued for several years. As a club officer, Saunders was in charge of arranging these programs. In 1917, Judge Edwin B. Parker, whose wife, Katherine, was a member of the Woman's Choral Club, urged Saunders to undertake a larger project. He agreed to be her "silent partner" in bringing the Boston Opera Company to Houston to present excerpts from *Madame Butterfly*. Judge Parker also suggested that they invite dancer Anna Pavlova to appear in *Snowflakes* as the second act on the program. Although the concert's profits totaled only \$14, it was considered a great success.⁵ More important, Edna Saunders found her calling and, in spite of her father's disapproval, began booking well-known artists for appearances in the city.

Saunders' first major effort was in persuading the Chicago Civic Opera Company to travel to Houston for a performance in October 1918. Advance ticket sales went so well that the performance was sold out. Then disaster struck. The city's mayor ordered all entertainment venues to close because of the influenza epidemic sweeping across the country. An additional disaster occurred for Saunders when her father died on the day the concert was scheduled. She attended his funeral and then began refunding \$19,000 collected in ticket sales. Demonstrating the resilience that would become one of her trademarks, the fledgling impresario immediately rescheduled the Chicago opera troupe for the next season.⁶

Saunders ensured her reputation as a skilled impresario in 1920 when she brought Enrico Caruso to Houston. When the internationally famous tenor's manager asked Saunders why he should do business with her, she boldly replied, "Because I am the proper person to present Caruso in Houston."⁷ When she discovered that Caruso would be traveling through Houston en route from New York to Mexico City, she convinced him to stop his private railroad car long enough to give a concert. Saunders liked to recall that City Auditorium recital; "We were sold out.

But people jammed the hall anyway, hoping for tickets. Many were Caruso's countrymen and I didn't want to turn them away. We opened the doors, and Caruso sang from that old stage with a voice that could be heard by those hundreds packing the sidewalks

out front...I remember well. He sang 'Vesta la giubba' and 'O sole mio.'"⁸ Caruso's reminiscences were not so laudatory. The City Auditorium, though only 10 years old, was not a place of beauty or fine acoustics. Caruso was not favorably impressed with the facility, even though advance ticket sales totaled \$26,000. When Saunders remarked, "It would be wonderful if some day you could return to sing one of your operas," Caruso retorted, while thumping his cane on the floor, "Here...nevaire, nevaire."⁹

Nevertheless, this success spurred Saunders into action. She realized that Houston had a wealth of music lovers who would welcome the finest artists in the country. Although a theater had been established in Houston soon after the town was founded, cultural affairs did not take center stage in a place obsessed with commercial progress. Various artists appeared in Houston under the auspices of the businessmen who owned the performance facility, but bookings were usually considered on the basis of profitability rather than artistic quality. With the opening of the Sweeney and Coombs Opera House in 1890, musical productions became more prolific. Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers* was performed in Houston less than two years after it was written. By the turn of the century, individual artists such as Ignace Jan Paderewski were brought to Houston to perform at the Winnie Davis Auditorium. When the 3500-seat City Auditorium was built in 1910, it was apparent that Houston had a venue large enough to attract major companies. It was even more apparent that someone needed to take a professional approach in booking performances. Saunders, operating under the title, Edna Saunders Presents, stepped in to fill this role. Over the next six years she brought such celebrated artists as Serge Rachmaninoff, Ernestine Schumann-Heink, Louise Homer, Amelita Galli Curci, Freda Hempel, Fritz Kreisler, Feodor Chaliapin, and Mary Garden to the city. In addition, there were appearances by the Scotti Grand Opera Company, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, John Philip Sousa's Band, the French Army Band, and the Chicago Civic Opera Company, which returned for several consecutive seasons to compensate for that cancelled concert in 1918.¹⁰

Saunders' career as an impresario filled her life. Having divorced Ernest Saunders and being childless, she preferred to

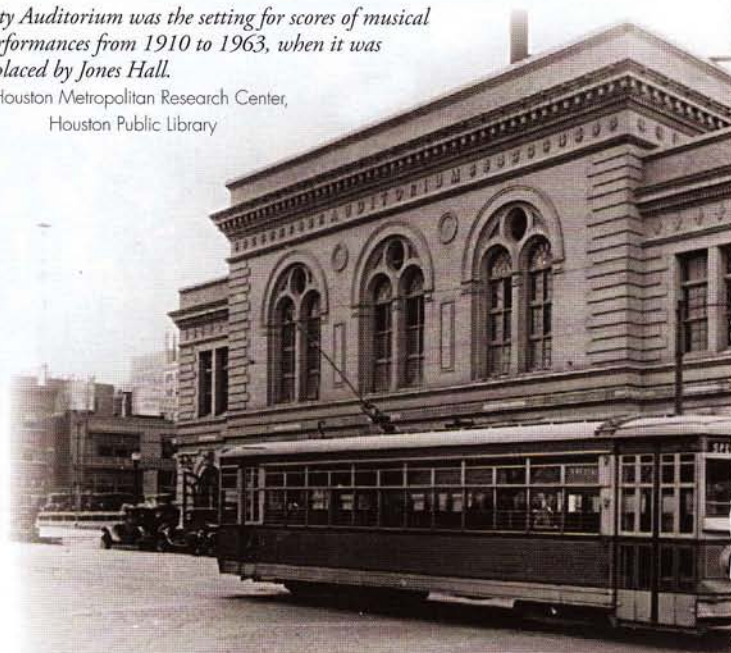


Edna Saunders and celebrated tenor Enrico Caruso, who performed before the largest audience of his career in Houston in 1920.

Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

City Auditorium was the setting for scores of musical performances from 1910 to 1963, when it was replaced by Jones Hall.

Houston Metropolitan Research Center,
Houston Public Library



operate alone in her business.¹¹ She never trained apprentices until she hired an assistant in 1959. Until then, the only employee of Edna Saunders Presents had been her faithful driver, Jesse, who guided the Chrysler Imperial to points north and east each year for Saunders to book upcoming events. Her reputation among agents in New York was such that she seldom had a written contract. Much of her business was handled by a handshake or a telephone conversation. She financed her own shows, only asking for guarantees from a group of citizens led by Jesse H. Jones when the expensive Metropolitan Opera Company was scheduled. It was widely acknowledged that concert management was not a profitable venture, but Saunders never discussed successes or losses. She would just say, "Now, the next show..."¹² She was willing to absorb losses on programs that were artistically, but not financially, successful. To offset low revenues from more classical programming, Saunders would present popular figures like Will Rogers, Katherine Hepburn, Al Jolson, Bob Hope and the Hour of Charm Girls. In an unusually canny move, she booked Jeannette McDonald and Nelson Eddy in separate concerts rather than in a joint appearance, ensuring two sold-out houses.

Her standards of excellence, however, never wavered. On one occasion, a local club asked her to handle the appearance of a singer Saunders considered lacking in quality. When she refused, the clubwomen remained insistent. Thinking she could end the discussion by setting a high fee for her services, she was dismayed when they agreed to the price. She ultimately staged the concert, but she spent all of her fee on advertising it rather than making a profit on something she found distasteful. Saunders, who was said to keep her records in shoe boxes, once commented, "I don't think of myself as a business woman. I'm doing what I so love to do."¹³

Saunders' business acumen, nevertheless, was recognized in 1927 when she was chosen by the Woman's Advertising Club for their Torchbearer award, which was given annually to the city's most eminent woman. On June 3, more than 300 persons gathered in the banquet room of the Rice Hotel to honor Saunders. Remarks were made during the evening by Congressman Daniel Garrett, *Houston Chronicle* editor M. E. Foster, Chamber of Commerce President J. W. Evans, and representatives of various civic clubs in the city. Many wires of congratulations came from New York City, Minneapolis,

Chicago, and Dallas. Arthur J. Gaines, manager of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, expressed the admiration and respect so many held for Edna Saunders when he sent this message: "In managerial circles she is, and for years has been, recognized as one of the most enterprising and far-sighted managers in the country. She enjoys the esteem and confidence of all the artists and managers who have ever had any dealings with her." In response to these laudatory addresses, Saunders replied, "I have heard some most astonishing things about myself and qualities have been attributed to me that I never dreamed I possessed."¹⁴ After less than 10 years on the job, the 47-year-old Saunders had obviously made a name for herself. While the approaching Depression would hinder many ventures, Saunders never let up in her quest to bring the best in cultural events to her hometown.

One of her greatest coups during those bleak years was scheduling the original Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo in 1936 during Christmas week, traditionally the toughest time of the year to get a booking. The city's response was so overwhelming that the troupe came back annually for several years, instilling a fascination for ballet which Saunders introduced in 1917 with the appearance of Anna Pavlova. This interest in ballet was further fostered by appearances of the Chicago Opera Ballet, The American Ballet Theatre, the National Ballet of Canada, the Royal Ballet, and Mexico's Ballet Folklorico. Two of the most acclaimed ballerinas in the 20th century, Moira Shearer and Margot Fonteyn, also appeared under Edna Saunders Presents.¹⁵

Saunders considered bringing the Metropolitan Opera Company to Houston one of her greatest accomplishments. In 1947, she was able to persuade the Met to break its contract with Dallas entrepreneurs which had given that city an exclusive area franchise. The Met had previously appeared in Houston twice—in 1901 with a production of *Lohengrin* and in 1905 when *Parsifal* was performed. These productions had taken place in the Winnie Davis Auditorium. In 1938, the Music Hall was built, providing a more desirable venue for the Met than the City Auditorium provided. After bringing the famed company to Houston in 1947, Saunders booked them again in 1951 and for seven successive years. The Metropolitan Opera Company, which commanded 80 percent of the gross ticket sales, always produced Saunders' most expensive programs since they brought not only their stars, but also their supporting artists, ballet group, orchestra, and technical staff. Although she had guarantors standing in the wings for these performances, she—much to her delight—never had to rely on them. Rudolf Bing, the Met's general manager, became Saunders' good friend, as did many of the opera stars. Houston's appreciation of operatic music instilled by Saunders resulted, no doubt, in the formation of Houston Grand Opera in 1955.¹⁶



Edna Saunders, shown here with Metropolitan Opera star Roberta Peters, always greeted the arriving troupe, which sometimes filled twenty rail cars.

© Houston Chronicle Publishing Company



Saunders developed a very personal relationship with the artists she recruited, frequently entertaining them in her home. When the 9-year-old violin prodigy, Yehudi Menuhin, appeared in Houston, Saunders invited the boy and his father to her home for dinner. Yehudi particularly enjoyed the peaches that garnished his meal. He ate several and after the meal when he was prodded by his father to perform for their hostess, Yehudi begged off because he was feeling quite dizzy. When Saunders tasted her own peach, she realized that the cook had inadvertently served brandied peaches instead of the intended pickled variety. Saunders' peaches came in handy years later when Jeannette McDonald arrived in town for a concert. McDonald insisted on being served burned rye toast, homemade cottage cheese, and home-canned peaches on the day of her performance. The chef at the Warwick Hotel properly burned the toast, the Star Creamery provided the cottage cheese, and Saunders' own kitchen supplied the peaches.¹⁷

While Saunders took great pride in presenting acclaimed performers such as Arthur Rubinstein, Jascha Heifetz, and Vladimir Horowitz, she was ever mindful of young, budding artists. She presented not only the youthful Yehudi Menuhin but also arranged concert dates for aspiring local prodigies, including pianist Drusilla Huffmaster, violinist Fredell Lack, and pianist Jacques Abram. She ardently promoted Texan Van Cliburn, booking him for a concert even before he won the prestigious Tchaikovsky competition in 1958. When he appeared in Houston under her auspices, Saunders abandoned her usual seat in the Music Hall's center Box C-5 and sat instead in a straight-back chair in the wings "just to be nearer." Cliburn repaid Saunders' faith in him by repeated visits to Houston.¹⁸

The appearance of Marian Anderson in the mid-1930s also created a shift in seating, but it occurred for a very different reason. Anderson, an acclaimed African American contralto, was scheduled in a back-to-back concert with Grace Moore, the glamorous star of opera and films. Anderson quietly asked to buy a ticket for Moore's performance. Rather than seat Anderson in the upper reaches of the City Auditorium balcony where black Houstonians were segregated, Saunders invited Anderson to join her in her own box. Although many in the audience stared in disbelief at this occurrence, Saunders did not bat an eyelid and even went a step further in rearranging the seating for Anderson's concert. She divided the house down the middle, reserving half for blacks and half for whites. Then Saunders



Marian Anderson appeared in Houston under Edna Saunders Presents numerous times, including the last concert in the City Auditorium before it was razed in 1963.

Houston Metropolitan Research Center,
Houston Public Library

and her coterie, which included the city's mayor, sat with the Houstonians of color. In the name of culture, Edna Saunders had taken a small step in the struggle for civil rights.¹⁹


Saunders' rapport with the press was a warm, collegial one. She understood that abundant publicity and commendatory reviews were necessary to the success of her endeavors. She was eager to educate newcomers to the field by explaining "pirouette," spelling out "arpeggio," and defining "entrechat royale." When one young writer went to England for a year, she sent him a

check, urging him to attend some concerts while there.²⁰

By the 1962-1963 season, her 46th one, Saunders was catering to the changing tastes of the audience by incorporating more entertainment influenced by Broadway. She insisted that a poll of patrons revealed that most of them preferred such attractions. In reality, her skillful blending of entertainment ranging from the popular to the classic was a key element in her success. The principal offering that last season was *The Sound of Music*, the romanticized version of the Trapp Family Singers. This was an interesting reflection of the past since Saunders had presented the real Trapp family singers some years earlier. The new Broadway productions were accompanied, however, by two of Saunders' tried-and-true venues: Van Cliburn and a premier ballet company (in this instance, the National Ballet of Canada).²¹

Saunders would plan one more season in spite of the heart attack she had suffered in late 1962. Death came on December 21, 1963, even as newspapers carried ads for two of her upcoming events: a one-night stand by Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians and a five-performance run of Robert Bolt's play, *A Man for All Seasons*. Just the week before, Saunders had been named honorary vice-president of the International Concert Managers Association. The president of ICMA had called her the "first lady" of local concert managers.²²

For some time before her death, Saunders had actively promoted a new auditorium that would not be "too large for small things or too small for large things." Ground was broken the month after her death for a new hall bearing the name of Jesse H. Jones. Houston Endowment, Inc., which had contributed funds to the project, dedicated the hall's public reception area, the Green Room, to Edna Saunders "to honor the woman who for half a century reigned as an Empress of the Arts and whose influence had much to do with the city's cultural momentum." John T. Jones, Jr. paid tribute to this extraordinary woman when he said at the Jones Hall groundbreaking ceremony: "Miss Edna gave 46 years of her vitality, vision, and good taste to the city. She left as a legacy the audiences which attend our Symphony concerts, the standing room crowds at Houston Grand Opera, the people who stand in line to buy tickets to the performances of the ballet... There were many who knew her, but among those who did not know her personally, there were hundreds of thousands who have profited from her effort."²³

Shortly before her death, a fellow concert manager suggested that a monument should be erected to Edna W. Saunders for bringing beauty, music, and culture to her hometown.²⁴ Perhaps, instead, her lasting monument is a city enjoying world-class renditions of the performing arts almost every day of the year.²⁵ 



Edna Saunders, seen in her office on the 5th floor of Levy Bros Dry Goods Co., is surrounded by photographs of artists she had presented.

Houston Metropolitan
Research Center, Houston Public Library

Audrey Jones Beck

Steven Fenberg's
interview with
Thomas P. Lee, Jr.

Renowned art collector Audrey Jones Beck always said she had two sets of parents: her own and her grandparents, Jesse and Mary Gibbs Jones. She spent as much time with the Joneses as she did with her parents and had her own room in her grandparents' Lamar Hotel penthouse in the heart of downtown Houston, where she grew up.

While undertaking several projects to renew and maintain knowledge about her grandfather, Jesse Jones, Steven Fenberg became close friends with Audrey Jones Beck. Mr. Fenberg recently interviewed Thomas P. Lee, Jr., who was at one time curator of the Beck Collection and, after his departure from the MFAH, remained Mrs. Beck's dear friend and advisor throughout her life.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER: Steven Fenberg wrote and was executive producer of the Emmy award-winning PBS documentary, *BROTHER CAN YOU SPARE A BILLION? The Story of Jesse H. Jones*. He is currently community affairs officer at Houston Endowment and is writing a biography about Jesse Jones.



Audrey Jones Beck was born in Houston, Texas, on March 27, 1922, to Audrey and Tilford Jones. Tilford was Mary Gibbs Jones's son from her first marriage to Will Jones, Jesse's first cousin. Jesse and Mary married in 1920 after her divorce from Will, and two years later Audrey was born. Even though Jesse was Audrey's third cousin, he was the only grandfather she ever knew and her grandparents treated her like the child they never had. Audrey attended The Kinkaid School, Mt. Vernon College and the University of Texas at Austin. She met Ensign John Beck in 1941, and eight months later they had

the first military wedding at Christ Church Cathedral in Houston.

Audrey ultimately inherited most of the 6,000-acre ranch her great-grandfather, M.T. Jones, had acquired on the banks of Buffalo Bayou in the 1880s after he arrived in Houston and had become immensely successful in the burgeoning lumber industry. The Houston Ship Channel grew up on the land where M.T. and his son, Will, raised cattle and cotton. The land was passed from Will to Tilford and then to Audrey. Once it became hers, Audrey sold the land and turned the proceeds into what is now The John A. and Audrey Jones Beck Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH).

In the most recent Beck Collection catalogue, Mrs. Beck recalled, "My romance with Impressionism began when I first visited Europe at the age of 16 as a student tourist, complete with camera to record my trip. I paid homage to the *Mona Lisa* and the

Audrey Jones (Beck) with her grandparents, Mary Gibbs Jones and Jesse H. Jones, 1937.

Venus de Milo, but the imaginative and colourful Impressionist paintings came as a total surprise. Works by these avant-garde artists, who had rebelled against the academic tradition of the day, were scarce in American museums at the time. For me, they were not only the epitome of artistic freedom, but a visual delight. I returned home with many pictures, but none taken with the camera. My images were museum reproductions.”

Steven Fenberg: When did you meet John and Audrey Beck?

Thomas P. Lee: I was a new employee at the Museum [of Fine Arts, Houston] in 1971, and the Becks had just purchased Guillaumin's *The Seine in Paris*. There is a lot centered on that picture: the beginning of my professional relationship with Mrs. Beck and Mr. Beck, and the first understanding of what she wanted to accomplish with her collection. When I saw the painting, I was absolutely astounded at the unbelievable quality, to say nothing of its size. It was clearly Guillaumin's greatest painting, and that is when I knew what Mrs. Beck was all about.

SF: What did you determine about her?

TL: That Mrs. Beck was going after absolutely the very best she could to create a student collection where people of all ages could come and learn not only about artists themselves but their interconnectedness, and that the only way one could truly learn was from high, high quality. That is when I realized they weren't clicking off a laundry list of artists that they wanted to buy. They wanted specific paintings. I don't think that they had known about Guillaumin's picture until it came up for auction and she just decided, I have to have it. That was 1971 and it followed a decade of fantastic acquisitions that Mr. and Mrs. Beck made on their own, really without professional consultation. They began collecting about 1961 or '62.

SF: How did the Becks become interested in collecting art?

TL: I think it was her dream, and John Beck finally came around. He was a businessman who enjoyed the financial aspects of the collection. Knoedler and several other dealers would come to town and set up shop at the Warwick or the Rice Hotel and have people in for cocktails or lunch and sort of show their wares. A couple of people asked Mrs. Beck, "Would you hang some things in your house? Why don't you take some of these? Just take them!" At that point the Becks were doing all kinds of things in Houston, from Jones Hall to the museum. She was a founding trustee of the Houston Grand Opera and the Houston Ballet, and at one time served on the board of the Houston Symphony Society. For almost all of her adult life, Mrs. Beck was also on the board of direc-



Audrey Jones (Beck) before inaugurating a high-speed train built during the Great Depression with funds from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, a government agency chaired by her grandfather, Jesse Jones. She frequently stood in for him at official events.



*John Albert Beck and
Audrey Louise Jones Beck,
1942.*

tors of Houston Endowment, the philanthropic foundation established by her grandparents, the Joneses. The Becks were everywhere, you know, and sought out by people because they were so interesting and so much fun. So, they would have these paintings at home and she would take snapshots of them and record the price. Well then later, they would appear at auction at Sotheby's and Christie's, and she would say to Mr. Beck, "Look, we could have had it for \$35,000. It just sold for \$120,000!" Well, that piqued his interest and coincided with his sale of his heavy equipment company, so he was able to spend more time assisting her. I think eventually he came around to see Audrey's full point of view before his untimely and tragic death.

SF: When did John Beck pass away?

*TL: In 1973, right at the pulse, at the takeoff of the art market. He never held back Mrs. Beck but he would sometimes ask, "Is something like this really worth this much money?" He wondered that when they bought their Seurat for \$350,000, which was the most they had ever paid for a painting. It was the last figural Seurat that was going to come on the market as a finished painting for a long time. There are lots of oil sketches but Mrs. Beck recognized it. She said, "If I don't buy this, I'll never have a Seurat." She never liked to settle on things. It was never a question of, "Oh, I've just got to have a Seurat, let's just buy that one." That was never the issue. It always had to be the best. And John Beck agreed and I think that was the launch of a very, very serious era. Even so, their earlier acquisitions—the Derain, the Bonnard, the Toulouse-Lautrec, the Mary Cassatt—all of those were bought in the '60s. And it is amazing at the clip that they came in. But in the early '70s, the Modigliani, Braque's *Fishing Boats*, and the Seurat were acquired. And that is a real turn in their collection.*

SF: Besides her trip to Paris as a teenager, where do you think the inspiration came from to focus on Impressionists and post-Impressionist artists?

TL: I think she saw them as a real change in painting. Some of them extremely courageous, some of them very Bohemian. She thought that was a lot of fun. She was interested in their lives and how they came to produce these remarkable things. And that is why there is such strength in the Fauve area in her collection with Derain, Dufy, Vlaminck, Maruquet, and Friesz. It is as if she were there in 1905, you know. She knew what they were trying to do.

Mrs. Beck could paint and she learned a lot about the artists and their painting by copying them. She had been



*Audrey Jones Beck
lunching with Jesse
Jones at the Rice Hotel's
Empire Room, 1940s.*



*Audrey Jones Beck handing the key to the Jesse H. Jones Hall
for the Performing Arts to Mayor Louie Welch, at the opening
ceremony, 1966. Houston Endowment built Jones Hall and
gave it to the city as a gift in honor of Mr. Jones.*



Amedeo Modigliani's Portrait of Leopold Zborowski in the Beck's living room during Christmas, 1960s.

looking for a Maximilien Luce and the *Rue Ravignan-Night* became available and cost some money, but when she saw it she flipped because of the scene with the street lights casting light. I remember talking with her and she said, "Imagine what it took to paint this painting." She put herself in the artist's frame of mind, in the artist's shoes in front of the pallet, in front of the canvas, and thought, how was this done?

SF: *When you met the Becks, the paintings were at their home.*

TL: They were all there. The Derain was at the end of the living room. You saw the Braque and Modigliani as you came in. That is the way students at Rice and the University of Houston experienced the collection. The Becks were very generous about letting people in to study and enjoy the collection. Then the paintings were loaned to the National Gallery in Washington, D. C., and after they came home, we began planning for the installation of some of them at the MFAH. That was the fall of 1973. And that is when John Beck died. It was so staggering.

We were all bewildered. We were all just completely in shock about it. It was during that period that I had to consult with Mrs. Beck a number of times about the signage in the galleries and how were we going to name the collection. And this was just one month after Mr. Beck had died. Well, I need

not have worried for a single minute. She was just as gracious and wonderful as she could be. But John Beck's passing ended her interest in having the collection at home, but did not stop her from buying paintings.

SF: *So from then on, the paintings were bought by Mrs. Beck for display at the museum?*

TL: That's correct. Sisley's *Flood on the Road to Saint-Germain* was one of the first paintings she bought after Mr. Beck died. She admired Sisley's paintings of the floods and did not want one of his landscapes. She lost one to Baron van Thyssen at auction, but within eight months she bought hers. I don't think I've seen another Sisley on the market of that rare and wonderful subject matter since then.

As I learned more about Mrs. Beck's taste and her intellectual interests, I would see things in catalogues and send them over to her with a little note, "What do you think about this?" "Does this interest you?" I'd get a phone call, "Well, of course it interests me! Find out everything you can about it." And, of course, she was very scrupulous. She started with the condition of the painting. She worked through the provenance. She wanted to know where it had been published, if it had been published.

I would go to her home with books from the museum library, and she had her own library. We would lay out all the books, and they were just everywhere, all over the floor. She would say, "Well, it's better than that one. It's better than that one. Look, it's the same year as that one." She began to finalize her ideas that started with more than intuition. She had a visual sense of how things had to be in a painting. Then, she would have time by herself where she worked out the money and decided, "I'm paying X number of dollars and that is it." This was particularly at auction. You know, Mr. and Mrs. Beck were very fond of buying at auction. And, of course, Mr. and Mrs. Beck were so fantastically appealing and attractive, everybody just liked them.

SF: *How long did you work with Mrs. Beck?*

TL: I left MFAH in 1977 and went to the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco. However, I remained very close with Mrs. Beck and helped her find and acquire paintings until she passed away in 2003. She never saw the last painting she bought. She just knew Ripple-Ronai's *Interior* from photographs. The Ripple-Ronai is interesting because Bonnard painted a Ripple-Ronai picture in his own painting, *In the Painter's Studio*, which Mr. and Mrs. Beck bought in 1964. When I saw the great Ripple-Ronai, I thought, well, we are coming full-circle. That purchase, along with the Kupka, perhaps suggested a new direction in the collection.

SF: *What can you say about the Beck collection today?*

TL: The collection is an almost artist-by-artist encyclopedia of

what was happening in Impressionist and early modern art. She wanted to show the great individual cornerstones of each movement, like Derain's *The Turning Road* to exemplify Fauvism, Mary Cassatt's *Susan Comforting the Baby* to show the best of American Impressionism or Bonnard and Vuillard to represent the Nabis. She also liked to explore less well-known artists and wanted them represented by their very, very best examples. There are all these great paintings she just responded to immediately. I think of Kirchner's *Moonrise: Soldier and Maiden* or Roualt's *The Three Judges*. The great Jawlensky's *Head of a Woman* is possibly one of the most under appreciated paintings in the collection because of the way it fits in with Fauvism but also represents a whole different trend as African masks and other cultures influenced European art at that time. Some of these artists were unknown to museum goers when she bought them. Albert André would typically not appear on any museum's list, but Mrs. Beck's painting just knocked everybody over when they saw it. There was no hesitation on her part at all when she first noticed it. But she was always cautious about size, especially in works by the lesser-known artists. She didn't want something to be too big because she did not want to send the message to students that a painting was important because it was big.

SF: *What were Mrs. Beck's intentions for the collection?*

TL: She wanted the Beck Collection to be a gift to the citizens of Houston and to those who come to visit the city. She wanted to enrich their lives. She loved seeing young people respond to the collection. She especially enjoyed reading comments from grade-school students and getting letters from dealers or connoisseurs who would write and say they had never seen anything like the quality in a particular painting before.

Mrs. Beck created the collection with as much intelligence as she did with resources. And I think that is where we really owe her a tremendous, tremendous debt. When a painting was the best quality she could financially handle, and it met her criteria of beauty and importance, then she would move. She had personal preferences. We can go back to something like the Renoir, the little portrait of the girl reading that was bought in the 1960s, very, very early on. I remember she would talk about it and say, "You know, there's really nothing I don't like about it." Her Renoir, small as it is, represents a kind of intimacy both of paint, subject matter and color that satisfied everything she needed to know about Renoir. After our conversation, I went back and looked at it and thought, You know, she's right.

The John A. and Audrey Jones Beck Collection can be seen at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in the Audrey Jones Beck Building. Thomas P. Lee, Jr. is a native Houstonian, lives in Houston and continues to pursue his interests in art. 🖼️

Audrey Jones Beck breaking ground for the Audrey Jones Beck Building at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, with then Houston Endowment chairman Jack S. Blanton, Sr. looking on, 1999.



Childhood friends and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston benefactors, Caroline Weiss Law and Audrey Jones Beck at the opening of the Audrey Jones Beck Building.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Rebecca J. Jacobs-Pollez has a Master of Arts in History from the University of Houston at Clear Lake.

THE ORANGE SHOW:

How Jeff McKissack's Vision Changed Houston

by Rebecca J. Jacobs-Pollez

The Orange Show is considered by many to be one of the most important visionary environments in the world. The American Institute of Architects called it the product of rare genius.¹ Its creator, Jeff Davis McKissack, wrote his autobiography when he built the Show, incorporating significant events from his life into his creation. Although described differently by every one who has visited it, McKissack thought of it as a monument to the orange, good health, nutrition, and hard work.





The Museum.

Paul Hester 1984



Sideshow foyer.

Paul Hester 1984

Wheels and tractor seats overlooking the pond.

Alain Pollez 2001



McKissack was born in Fort Gaines, Georgia, on January 28, 1902, to a mercantile family. The town, surrounded by dense green woods, looked down on the Chattahoochee River from a tall bluff. Living in one of the major ports along the river, McKissack became enchanted by the steamboats which traveled slowly past the town, propelled by paddle wheels churning the water behind them.² He left Fort Gaines to attend Mercer College in Macon, Georgia, where he received a degree in commerce in 1925. In 1929 he took and failed one of Thomas Edison's recruitment tests for college graduates. Edison told him that he would never amount to anything, a rejection that profoundly changed McKissack's life. That same year his father died and while his brother became proprietor of the family store, McKissack wandered from job to job.³ During the Great Depression he returned to Fort Gaines where he opened a fruit store and café in a small building next to his brother's store, grew fruit and vegetables on a tiny truck farm, and hauled oranges and produce from Florida to the Atlanta farmers' markets.⁴ Next to his mother's house he built a small concrete-block dwelling, with a detached brick garage, that he rented. Although he had taken a class to learn concrete building construction, water seeped through the walls of the small structure during a storm. He developed a reputation as a likeable, but unusual, man and began to have difficulties with his siblings, who expected him to behave like a serious businessman.⁵

McKissack moved to Jacksonville in the early 1940s. When the United States became involved in World War II, he joined the Army Air Corps but withdrew after only five months. He continued to support his country by building liberty ships at the St. John's River Shipbuilding Company in Jacksonville. At the end of the war he used his GI bill funds to obtain a beautician's license.⁶ He lived in apartments in downtown Jacksonville before purchasing property where he built his second concrete-block house, using some features that he later repeated or expanded at the Orange Show. He also probably operated a small nursery, selling his plants at the large farmers' market a few blocks away. While in Florida, he made his only proposal of marriage to a lady who refused him.⁷

The death of his mother in 1948 caused McKissack significant emotional strain. Adding to his stress were increasingly difficult relations with his siblings. Eventually, either driven by true concern or simply the desire to eliminate his often-embarrassing behavior, some of his sisters had him committed to a mental institution for evaluation. The experience was traumatic. Released after a short time, he found continued existence in Fort Gaines intolerable. He returned to Florida, sold his house and began a new life in Houston, Texas. He probably worked for a short while as a produce truck driver before becoming employed in 1952 at the post office, carrying special delivery mail. He first rented rooms in a downtown hotel, then moved to an apartment behind a house on Munger Street. In 1952 he purchased a lot on Munger and built another concrete-block house, filling it with the things that would eventually become part of the Orange Show.⁸

On December 12, 1955, McKissack bought the property at 2401 Munger, across the street from his house. He began building on it immediately, although apparently business was not his only intent when he acquired a permit for a beauty salon in 1956. He thought a salon would give him the opportunity to meet women.⁹ He never built it, though. Instead he opened the American Tree

Nursery and Worm Ranch, constructing high planters so that customers would not have to bend down to examine the seedlings. Those same planters surround the Orange Show today. The constant work and lack of income finally prompted him to close the nursery in 1968.¹⁰ His next idea proved to be inspired. He said that one day while standing in the street looking at the lot the words "Orange Show" just came to him. Although he admitted to having trouble getting started, working on the show seemed to make him happy and he captivated visitors, talking constantly and enthusiastically about everything in the Show.¹¹

In 1960, McKissack self-published the book *How You Can Live 100 Years . . . and Still be Spry*, providing all the information anyone would need to live for 100 years. The Orange Show is, in many respects, a physical representation of the book. The book describes the body's processing of food while a chemical plant model in the Show demonstrates that the body is a chemical converter transforming nutrients into energy. McKissack followed his own advice. He repeatedly claimed that he would live to be 100 years old and wrote his nephew that one of his goals was to be the oldest man who ever lived in Houston. Believing it would help him live to the age of 160, he ate three oranges a day.¹²

McKissack kept firm control of his finances. He invested conservatively with Paine Webber where, ironically, one of his investments was General Funeral Services. To save money, he replaced his car with a bicycle, often pushing it down the street loaded high with objects he scavenged.¹³ He figured he spent \$40,000 on the construction of the Orange Show, but estimated that "at \$4 an hour it's worth much more than \$250,000 and you couldn't duplicate it for \$15 million."¹⁴ As might be expected, McKissack had some interesting relationships with his neighbors. Some praised his work but others snickered and he knew it. While he took disparaging comments as a challenge, declaring that it took courage to build the Show, at times the negative statements depressed him. He also had difficulties with city hall and the county inspection agencies.¹⁵

On opening day, wearing orange pants, a white shirt, and an orange Panama hat, McKissack happily guided his 150 visitors through his creation. He installed a large drum where visitors could drop their invitations after they voted on whether the Show was the work of a genius. His goal was to have enough yes votes that Paramount Pictures would document his life in a movie titled *A Genius is Born*. He also hoped that a large orange juice company would use the Show to promote its product, and provide him some income at the same time. Convinced that "ninety per cent of the people in the United States will want to see it," he believed the Orange Show would make his fortune.¹⁶ Sadly, the anticipated thousands never appeared.¹⁷ It also distressed McKissack that the media called the Orange Show "odd" when he thought it was so beautiful. While he still worked on the Show every day, he began spending more time inside his house. Worried neighbors checked on him, only to find a sad, subdued man.¹⁸

On the afternoon of January 20, 1980, McKissack suffered a stroke. He died that night, 22 years short of one hundred. He had often said he did not like the idea of being buried. In a touching gesture, those who loved him placed him to rest in the place he loved best: his ashes were scattered over the Orange Show. At his request, his house was destroyed, but the Show remains, a monu-

ment to his extraordinary vision and passion.¹⁹

A tour of the Orange Show begins a block away, at the end of Munger Street, where the towering glass and granite forest of downtown Houston is visible. The view when McKissack arrived in Houston was entirely different. The elaborately carved masonry buildings that he saw were steadily demolished to make room for the oil industry's behemoths. It was from this destruction that McKissack obtained the materials to construct the Show.

McKissack created a two-story extravaganza of color, texture, and shape with rooms and courtyards connected in maze-like complexity. Tile, wrought iron, an incredible variety of wheels, vibrantly colored tractor seats, umbrellas, and flags all cheerfully mix. A bright white wall surrounds the entire structure. The Show represents the sum of McKissack's artistic, scientific, and philosophic ideas melded into a single construction. He also intended to educate visitors. In addition to nutrition information, he placed a mobile above the exterior wall surrounding the pond, depicting the "earth going around the sun and the moon going around the earth."²⁰ McKissack's choice of colors at first seems incongruous. However, as with the impressionist's pallet, the bright, cheerful colors combine with an overall harmonious effect. Elaborate shadows produced by the fences and railings weave intricate and complex geometric patterns across the walls and floors. Repeating patterns such as diamond tiles surrounded by a tile frame, rows of multi-colored tractor seats, walls of antique wheels, pink and red hearts, all sometimes resemble the view through a kaleidoscope.

The Show consists of several sections. The exterior walls are topped by crests of painted metal filigree. Arkansas rocks lining the base are from the many trips McKissack made to Hot Springs to absorb what he believed were the water's healing properties. The entrance is elaborately decorated. Past the entrance are the Oasis, which rests under an inaccessible terrace, the Ladies Room, and a series of displays affirming the nutritional value of the orange. A gift shop is located in front of the museum with its roof top observation deck. A monument to orange growers was constructed from a replica of the San Jacinto monument that once sat in the Texas State Hotel. The major educational area is the museum. Within it, McKissack both again expounded the virtues of the orange and provided examples of the benefits of hard work and persistence.²¹ The tools displayed in the museum were commonly used for laborious physical tasks during McKissack's childhood. Behind the museum is a fountain and the wishing well, one of the many pieces McKissack added to ensure that he had something for everyone.

Next to the museum is one of McKissack's beloved steam engines, like those he had admired during his childhood, also covered by an observation deck. He tied together his two passions by "associating" the energy of the orange to the clean, non-polluting



Looking through the wheel atop the Museum staircase.

Paul Hester 1984

energy of steam engines.²² Next to the steam engine, the pond is framed by terraced bench seats on two sides and rows of candy colored tractor seats on the other sides. The pond is a symbolic Chattahoochee River, its walls labeled with the river's four major steamboat stops. Within the pond, as if ready to dock at the stops along the way is the Tri-States Showboat, reminiscent of the brightly-lit steamboats where McKissack had danced as a youth. From one corner of the pond area a long hall begins with a fountain and ends at the men's room. Within the hall are the foyer and steps leading to the side show. Near the completion of the project McKissack, realizing he needed some live entertainment, came up with the idea of a side show like those he had seen in old-time circuses. He built a stage with seats for 175 people where he planned to "give a spiel on oranges," then have a beautiful lady play the organ on a revolving stage while a young boy tap danced. McKissack strategically placed some of his most prized items, his beautiful, historic wheels, some one hundred years old, to keep traffic flowing and to keep people

from falling off the second floor observation decks.²³

The Orange Show is only one of many environments created by self-trained artists. Because the artists work primarily for their own pleasure, they often baffle or amaze viewers. Their use of non-traditional materials and construction techniques, however, often create maintenance problems. At McKissack's death, rust already disfigured the iron railings and goo-goo-eyed birds, his cherished steam engine had stopped, and the steamboat would no longer turn in its pond.²⁴ The deteriorating structure was not fit for public visits.

One of the people who visited McKissack as he had diligently worked was Marilyn Oshman, who first saw the show in 1975. Returning many times, she became a good friend to McKissack, who left his heirs a note naming her as someone who would be willing to preserve his monument.²⁵ Oshman was an excellent choice. Involved in the Houston arts and accustomed to handling challenging situations, she had worked in the city's anti-gang office and had been chair of the board at the Contemporary Arts Museum between 1972 and 1978, and was a former Museum of Fine Arts board member.²⁶ She began a series of meetings with McKissack's heirs to discuss a plan for purchasing, preserving, and administering the show. She originally hoped the City of Houston would manage the show, however, it slowly became apparent that the city was reluctant to take up this challenge. As a result, while gathering public support to save the show, she also began the tedious chore of finding financial sponsors. Hoping the media could help, she invited Ann Holmes, the influential art editor for the Houston Chronicle, to the initial meetings to discuss the plans for saving the monument.²⁷ Several local magazines ran articles of support. Her timing and planning were lucky. In 1980, Houston's non-profit organizations had not yet begun to feel the financial pressures that

Continued on page 58

Houston Works— The Present and Future State of the Visual Arts

by Gus Kopriva

Many in the Art world recognize Houston as a major center of the visual arts on the third coast of the United States. The current Houston art environment is strong and conducive to making great art. Houston is the site of important art schools, which include the University of Houston, Rice University, and the Core Program at the Glassell School of Art. Our city is also the proud and fortunate home of two world-class museums, the Menil Collection and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. We have six spaces for alternative art: the Station, the Art Car Museum, Aurora Picture Show, Lawndale, Diverse Works, and the Art League of Houston. The city also has more than 65 art spaces for art dealers. Houston is home to an important contemporary museum, The Contemporary Arts Museum, as well as numerous foundations that aggressively support the arts and supportive media for the arts.

Houston's increasing prominence in the art world has captured international attention providing a historic opportunity for Houston artists to participate in an exhibition at the Shanghai Art Museum. In early 2005, the Mayor of Shanghai led a delegation to Houston executing a protocol that established Houston and Shanghai as "Friendship Cities."

Shanghai, the largest city in China, with a population in excess of 18 million people, is China's most important business and commercial center and contains a well-developed artistic and cultural scene including many museums, a famous concert hall, many parks and public spaces, and the famous, historic Bund along the river. The Shanghai Art Museum, considered by many to be the most impor-



Banner in front of the Shanghai Art Museum announcing the Contemporary Art Houston exhibition.

All photos courtesy Suzanne Banning

tant art museum in China, agreed to be the venue for an exhibition of *Contemporary Art Houston* from July 23 through August 8, 2006.

Christopher Zhu, a well-known critic of Chinese art, and Gus Kopriva jointly selected the Houston artwork to be exhibited.

UH alum, Gus Kopriva, has served as curator for more than 50 international/national exhibitions, and is currently organizing international museum exhibitions focusing on Texas art. Trained as a professional engineer, Kopriva began his visual arts career as a board member of the original Lawndale Art Annex at the University of Houston working with director, James Surls. He is the owner of Redbud Gallery in the Houston Heights, and balances an active engineering career along with all of his many roles in the arts.



Frank X. Tolbert and Suzanne Banning



The exhibition included 72 works of art representing about 41 artists. Many of Houston's best-known artists were represented such as: The Art Guys, Harvey Bott, Mel Chin, Joe Havel, the late Luis Jimenez, Nancy Reddin Kienholz, Paul Kittelson, Sharon Kopriva, the late Lucas Johnson; Ernesto Leon, Al Souza, Richard Stout, and James Surls, among many other key Houston artists.

A top quality color catalogue accompanied the exhibition with contributions from Patricia Johnson, art critic of the Houston Chronicle, Alison de Lima Greene, Contemporary Art Curator from the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Houston Mayor Bill White, Former President George H.W. Bush, Gus Kopriva, and Christopher Zhu.



The Art Guys



Overview of one of the spaces.

Throughout its history, Houston has been home to a vibrant and creative arts community. The historic invitation by the Shanghai Art Museum to hold the Contemporary Arts Exhibit from Houston conferred international recognition on the latest in a long list of Houston artists. 🎨

Public Opening



Changing Visions: A History

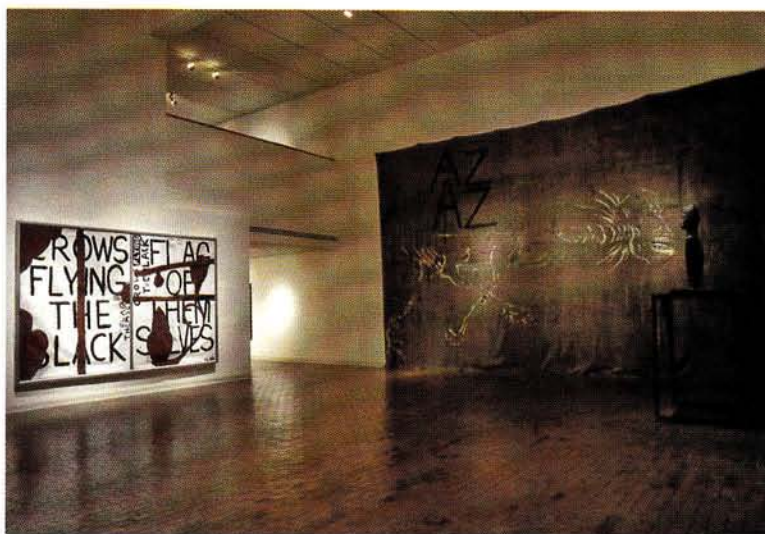
by Claudia Schmuckli

Blaffer Gallery, the Art Museum of the University of Houston, celebrates artistic imagination, stimulates creativity, and inspires independent thinking through a lively dialogue about art and artists. The gallery looks back on more than 30 years of history, during which the institution and its mission have been shaped by the changing vision of its leaders.

Blaffer Gallery was named in honor of the late Sarah Campbell Blaffer, a noted Houston art patron and collector. On the occasion of the building of a new \$5.3 million Fine Arts Center at the University of Houston, Blaffer, the daughter of William Thomas Campbell, founder of Texaco, and wife of Robert E. Lee Blaffer, founder of Humble Oil (later Exxon), promised major works of art in her collection toward the building of a teaching collection housed

Pollock Galleries at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Under Robinson's curatorial leadership, the Pollack gallery hosted exhibitions of world-renowned artists such as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, Edvard Munch, Willem De Kooning, and Frida Kahlo all during the late 1970s. One of the most glamorous—and heavily guarded—exhibitions ever to be hosted at Blaffer was French Royal Jewels from the Smithsonian in January 1975. During the brief, one-week viewing, Houston audiences were stunned by the pair of dazzling 36-carat diamond earrings belonging to Marie Antoinette, and the tiara and necklace given by Napoleon to his second wife, Marie Louise.

In 1976, the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, established by Mrs. Blaffer two years prior to her death in 1975, initiated a



Installation view Julian Schnabel Exhibition, 1988

Photo courtesy Blaffer Gallery

at the university. Dedicated on March 13, 1973, the new museum immediately became a vital force in the presentation and promotion of the visual arts in Houston.

Assistant professor of art, Richard Stout, served as Blaffer's first acting director and the museum opened its inaugural exhibition season with a solo show of the controversial work of Texas artist, Michael Tracy, in September 1973. One of Stout's first initiatives was to reinstitute the Houston Area Exhibition, originally mounted at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, which had discontinued the open juried competition 13 years earlier. From the very beginning, exhibitions of works drawn from the Blaffer Collection were augmented by regular presentations of student and faculty work.

In late 1974, William Robinson was appointed as the museum's first full-time director. Robinson had previously worked at the McNay Museum in San Antonio, and had been director of the



Mike and Doug Starn

Photo by Rick Gardner

touring exhibition program. The inaugural exhibition, American Abstract Expressionism, included important works by artists Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning. The program was one of the first of its kind in the nation to underwrite all major exhibition costs, offering exhibitions to museums and universities throughout Texas free of charge.

In 1979, the success of the traveling program prompted the Blaffer Foundation to reacquire the Blaffer Collection from the University of Houston and to take full charge of its care and circulation. The collection and foundation are now housed at The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Without the burden of caring for a collection of its own, Blaffer Gallery's focus shifted to the staging of temporary exhibitions.

Esther de Vécsey, director of the Sewall Art Gallery at Rice University, joined Blaffer as associate director in July 1983. De Vécsey expanded Blaffer's mission as a community educational resource by combining scheduled exhibitions with lectures, symposia, related artistic events, and programs for special community groups. She remarked in an interview, "Galleries shouldn't be

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Claudia Schmuckli is the Director for Public Relations and Membership at Blaffer Gallery.

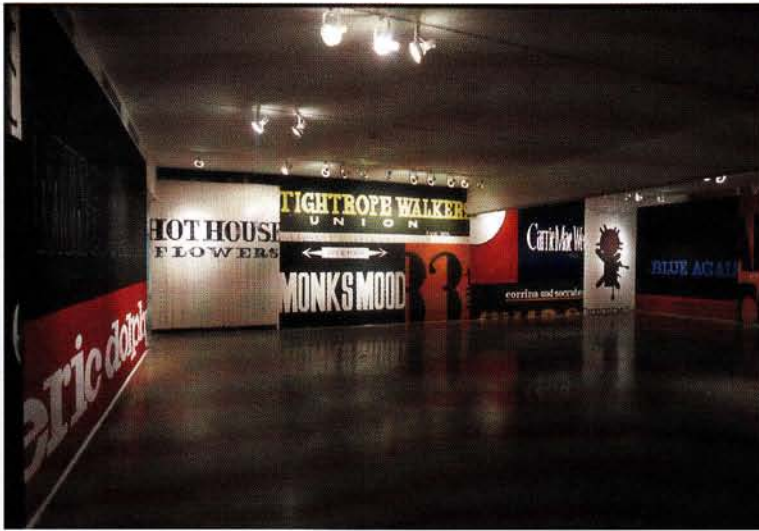
of the Blaffer Gallery

passive buildings sitting silent, full of art work, waiting for those who 'understand' art to come in. They should be active places of learning where people can bring their own experiences, knowledge and tastes and contribute to the art work that's there." She was appointed museum director in October 1984.

During de Vécsey's tenure, Blaffer Gallery presented many exhibitions and programs through collaborations with other departments on campus and Houston-area arts organizations. Reconsidered Modernism was a special lecture series co-organized with the College of Architecture in conjunction with the exhibition *The Architecture of Richard Neutra*, with guest speaker architect Charles Gwathmey. A juried festival of independent film and video artists, expo 85, was coordinated through SWAMP (Southwest

During this second decade the museum strengthened its commitment to exhibiting a wide range of art in a variety of media by both emerging and established artists from around the world, and established relationships with other organizations within the community with shared interests in the spirit of collaboration.

In 1994, after nine years as director, Marti Mayo resigned to return to the Houston Contemporary Art Museum as director. Don Bacigalupi, UH alumnus and former Brown Curator of Contemporary Art at the San Antonio Museum of Art, assumed the helm as director and chief curator in January 1996. His most notable project was *Michael Ray Charles, 1989-1997: An American Artist's Work*, which opened at Blaffer in 1997, and traveled to the Austin Museum of Art and the Contemporary Arts Center,



Installation view *My Favorite Things and Other Rent Party Songs: New and Classic Works by Tierney Malone, 2001*

Photo courtesy Blaffer Gallery

Alternative Media Project) in conjunction with the exhibition *Video: Media and/or Message*. And in the summer of 1984, as the Children's Museum of Houston completed negotiations for its own museum building, Blaffer Gallery hosted their inaugural project, *Kidtechnics*, a participatory exhibition and learning environment that explored modern technology.

September 1986 brought about another change as Marti Mayo, former curator at Houston's Contemporary Arts Museum, became Blaffer Gallery's third director. With her strong curatorial background, Mayo focused on gaining recognition for the museum by organizing exhibitions and publishing catalogues that addressed "art on a multi-disciplinary basis."

Also in 1986, the university administration and the gallery's advisory board refined exhibition policies, formalizing an emphasis on art of the past 100 years and committed to a more vigorous community presence and scholarly role within the city. In 1989, the advisory board and the university's Board of Regents adopted the mission statement that defines Blaffer's role as a bridge between the university and the general public.



Installation view *Robert Knox: Non-Fiction Paintings, 2003*

Photo courtesy Blaffer Gallery

Cincinnati. The catalogue won three first prizes for publication design from the American Association of Museums, Texas Association of Museums, and Houston Art Director's Club.

The museum celebrated its 25th anniversary '70s style, in 1998, hosting *A Night at Studio 25*, a retro-style disco dance party. From May through September 1999, the museum closed its doors for some much-needed renovation, including a new climate control system, passenger elevator, and additional second floor exhibition and office spaces. The makeover allowed for greater flexibility in the scope and scale of exhibitions that could be presented. That year, the 1999 Master's of Fine Arts Thesis Exhibition was held at Lawndale Art Center, an alternative space whose origins were in UH's Department of Art. Also that year, Bacigalupi departed to head the San Diego Museum of Art.

Following another nationwide search (the third in five years), Terrie Sultan was appointed to the post in June 2000, coming to Houston from Washington's Corcoran Gallery of Art, where she had been Curator of Contemporary Art for 12 years. Following a thorough review of the established long-range plan, staff and board

retreats in Fall 2000, and a series of discussions with community and university leaders, the museum further refined its mission and vision to strengthen the exhibitions, publications, and educational outreach program by focusing on contemporary art, with an emphasis on exploration of the creative process.

In November 2000, Blaffer hosted the first of what has become one of its most popular adult programs—the Contemporary Salon. Inspired by the turn-of-the-century cultural salons, the program encourages informal but informative dialogue between experts and members of the general public. Sultan also initiated a much-needed redesign of the newsletter and the first issue of NEWSLINE was published in spring 2001. In addition to information about museum programs, NEWSLINE also provides a forum for scholars to share ideas about contemporary culture.

On her one-year anniversary as director, Sultan faced her biggest challenge when Tropical Storm Allison arrived full force during the opening reception for the exhibit, *Radcliffe Bailey: The Magic City*, on June 8, 2001. The exhibition would be remembered as the shortest ever on view, having been open for only two hours during the preview. Flooding and loss of power from the storm forced the museum to close for the summer. The building and the art within remained safe—thanks to three 40-foot trailers with

artists by presenting one exhibition each year which focuses on or includes strong representation from Texas artists such as Tierney Malone, Margo Sawyer, and James Surls. In addition, the museum has presented the Houston Area Exhibition every four years since 1974 and has continued with nine such exhibitions over the past 30 years.

Over the past decade, Blaffer Gallery broadened its programming, audience, and base of support. In 1996 and 2001, Blaffer Gallery received a General Operating Support grant from the Institute of Museum Services, recognition by professional peers as a museum operating at the highest professional standard. This year, 2006, Blaffer Gallery was again awarded a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, this time for its innovative educational outreach program “Art Focus.”

In the past five years, Blaffer Gallery has also received highly competitive awards of support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., and Altria, Inc. The institution is now positioned for a new period of growth and development that builds on its many past successes.

In 2004, Blaffer Gallery became part of the *Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts* at the University of Houston, a permanent alliance with the Schools of Art, Theatre, Music, and the



Installation view Chuck Close Prints: Process and Collaboration, September 13–November 23, 2003 Photo courtesy The Art Museum of University of Houston



Installation view Terry Allen: Stories from DUGOUT, April 16–June 12, 2005 Photo by Rick Gardner

diesel powered air conditioning and dehumidifying units parked just outside the door.

Summer 2002 brought the collaborative project *Seeing and Believing: The Art of Nancy Burson* to the museum. Co-organized by Blaffer and the Grey Art Gallery at New York University, it was the first of several large-scale retrospective exhibition and publication projects that Blaffer would develop cooperatively with sister institutions. Under Sultan's leadership, the museum has expanded its program to present more than eight exhibitions each year, most of them originating at the museum before traveling the world. The exhibition program addresses the cultural diversity of its audience and encompasses artists from different backgrounds, gender, age, and ethnicity with a special focus on emerging or under-recognized artists to bodies of work by artists of international renown.

The museum continues its historical commitment to regional

Creative Writing Program, formed to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration between these five artistic units on the campus. Blaffer Gallery has taken a lead in developing programs with the Mitchell Center that fulfill its mission to explore, challenge, and celebrate the intersections between art forms through public programs, artist residencies, and curriculum in the performing, literary, and visual arts.

Over the past 30 years, Blaffer Gallery has grown into a world-renowned institution, now boasting 11 full-time professional staff members and dozens of student interns, education assistants, installation crew members, work study assistants and gallery attendants. While the focus of the museum's mission—the presentation of art that is culturally relevant and artistically significant that engages the community with the important issues of our time—has remained the same, the scope and ambition of those programs has grown significantly. 📺

Creativity and Collaboration: The University of Houston's CYNTHIA WOODS MITCHELL CENTER FOR THE ARTS

by Karen Farber

In a landscape of ever changing technologies, business practices, demographics, and methods of communication, societies rely on artists to respond and reflect back on complex realities. Artists often inspire others to come out of their individual towers and take off their blinders, to see the world from new angles.

However, there is little research and training dedicated to the breaking down of barriers between artistic disciplines. Artists themselves have little opportunity to experiment with the tools of their disciplinary peers, let alone support a new generation of interdisciplinary students. Creative professionals rely on collaboration. Maintaining a fluid definition of industries, disciplines, technologies, and methodologies is critical to innovation in any field—business, administration, engineering, the sciences, the humanities and certainly the arts.

It is within this context that the University of Houston created the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts in 2004, forming a permanent alliance among five existing arts entities at the university: Blaffer Gallery; Creative Writing Program; and the Schools of Art, Music and Theatre.

The leadership of the University of Houston, one of the largest urban research institutions in the U.S, firmly believes that a commitment to research and development extends to original artistic experimentation and scholarship. The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts was conceived to fulfill the university's vision of a cohesive, innovative arts program integral to campus life and the community at large. The support of Cynthia Woods Mitchell and

George Mitchell, Texas arts philanthropists who generously donated the Center's endowment funds, made the center possible.

The Mitchell Center's mission is to explore and celebrate the intersections between art forms through public programs, artist residencies, and curriculum in the performing, literary, and visual arts. As an "arts laboratory," the center aims to donate artists who have multiple tools at their disposal, a defiance against artistic and disciplinary silos, and an openness to new modes of creativity.

The Mitchell Center is particularly appropriate for the University of Houston, with its uniquely diverse campus and strong research programs. In turn, the university is well-positioned to embrace this initiative. The strength of the five existing arts entities demonstrates that the arts have long been viewed as a vehicle for immediate, visceral, and complex cultural exchange on the campus and in the greater Houston community.

Why the Arts?

Creativity is the catalyst behind innovation, invention, and independent thought. To neglect research, development, strategic thinking, and experimentation in the arts is to neglect our society's greatest asset in the professionals who are most dedicated to inventing, creating, and exchanging ideas. Tony Hall, chief executive of the Royal Opera House in London, said it best when he justified major new investments in the arts as an obvious benefit: "They are part of something fundamental and big, which is the creative economy, which is now what we live off...our future depends on creativity."

Why Collaboration?

Creativity is greatly enhanced when artists in various disciplines interact with one another. The role of the artist is to challenge society with new ways of thinking about our world. By providing a haven where artists can practice their crafts in an atmosphere of permeable boundaries and free flowing cross reference, the Mitchell Center encourages greater creativity, and sets the benchmark for other areas of the academy.

Interdisciplinary academic centers have long existed in universities throughout the world, but centers for research, development, and exchange in *the arts* are less common. The case for the value in such initiatives was well made by Mike Ross, Director of the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign:

Traditionally recognized as a touchstone in the realm of human experience, the arts are becoming even more highly and strategically valued in their capacity to facilitate cross-cultural understanding as domestic and international relations become increasingly complex. New research in understanding different types of intelligence (e.g., visual, aural, and kinesthetic) is bringing about greater acknowledgement of the inherent value of the arts. Broader and deeper connections are being drawn between artistic, scientific/technological, and economic creativity, leading in turn to the recognition of the rising influence of a "creative class in American society."

Reflecting the entrepreneurial mode that drives all aspects of growth and development of the city of Houston, the University of Houston is especially well-

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Karen Farber has been Director of the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts at the University of Houston since December 2005. She has worked in administration and advancement for a range of cultural organizations including Houston Grand Opera, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival (Massachusetts), the 92nd Street Y, the Eldridge Street Project, and International Production Associates (New York). Karen, a New York native, was raised in Los Angeles, and graduated from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts with an M.A. in Performance Studies, and a B.F.A. in Experimental Theater.

positioned for the creation of this forward looking interdisciplinary exchange.

Center Programming

The Mitchell Center program encompasses public performances and exhibitions, seminars, lectures, and artists-in-residence throughout the year. A special interdisciplinary course curriculum is open to students in all of the university's arts disciplines and overseen by a designated faculty team that facilitates visiting artists' integration with the students. The center is the conduit through which this vital current of creative interaction flows. The Center provides the space and tools needed for artists to fully realize their projects.

Recent artists in residence have included Terry Allen, who presented *DUGOUT III*, a music-theater performance in a collaboration between the Blaffer Gallery and the School of Theatre,

in conjunction with a major exhibition of his work in the Blaffer Gallery; osseus labyrinth, an intensely physical multi-media performance group from Los Angeles who created and performed *SWARM*, a site-specific work in massive shell of a former campus and London composer Stephen Montague, whose Horn Concerto was performed on the horns of Houston's famous Art Cars, followed by a concert of his music with original choreography.

In April 2005 Terry Allen, an internationally recognized visual artist, writer, and musician with strong Texas roots, and his wife Jo Harvey Allen, an actress and monologist, spent a six week residency with the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts at the University of Houston. During their residency, Blaffer Gallery mounted a major exhibition of Terry Allen's artworks, and the UH School of Theatre also presented a significant theatrical performance of Mr. Allen's in its Wortham Theatre, with music written and performed by Terry Allen and accompanying musicians, and featuring Jo Harvey Allen in the starring role. The Allens also co-taught in



Terry and Jo Harvey Allen

The Mitchell Center presented Allen's DUGOUT III: WARBOY, a musical theatre piece written and directed by Allen, featuring original music by Richard Bowden, Lloyd Maines, and Allen himself and starring veteran actress Jo Harvey Allen.



the new course, Collaboration Among the Arts.

DUGOUT III: WARBOY (and the backboard blues) is the third component of Terry Allen's epic *DUGOUT* series, which began in 1994 as an audio drama for National Public Radio and imparts a sweeping, non-linear narrative about the "Man," a minor league baseball player from St. Louis who meets, falls in love with and marries the much younger "Woman," a barrelhouse piano player from the mid-west. *DUGOUT III* conveys the curious tale of the couple's surprising and unexpected son. Two free performances of *DUGOUT III: WARBOY* (and the backboard blues) were held on April 29 and 30, 2005 at the University of Houston's Wortham Theatre, located inside the new Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts building.

SWARM, presented on March 31, 2006 in the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture's new Keeland Exploration Center, was a performance-based project created by osseus labyrinth, a Los Angeles-based artist collective led by Hannah Sim and Mark Steger. osseus labyrinth's work is recognizable by its unique convulsive movement performed amid eerie, self-made environments. The duo has been exhibiting and performing around the world since 1989.

As explorers who frequently wander into the place where science and art intersect, osseus labyrinth responds to, feeds off and attempts to illustrate the irrational, mysterious, infinite nature of reality. Its artistic context is a funnel, pulling in influences from an expansive array of sources ranging from Charles Darwin and Richard Dawkins' study of life sciences, to the experimental, psychotropic and humanist narratives of Philip K. Dick and Olaf Stapleton, and to the cinematic essays of Charles and Ray Eames. Visual sources of inspiration include Hieronymus Bosch, Jan Svankmajer, David Wilson, Andy Goldsworthy, Ernst Haeckel and the Hubble Space Telescope.

The evening of Steven Montague's presentation consisted of two distinct sections. It began in the Fine Arts Quadrangle with Houston Art Cars



On April 17, 2006, The Mitchell Center presented a festival of music by composer Steven Montague.

performing Horn Concerto, an orchestra piece for automobiles, which was presented in collaboration with the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art, and featured Houston's famed duo, The Art Guys, as guest soloists. Following the outdoor performance, the audience proceeded to the Moores School of Music Opera House for a presentation of *Dark Sun*, an evening length concert of dance and music composed by Montague and performed by students and faculty from the UH Schools of Music and Dance.

The Neo-Futurists on April 14 and 15, 2006. The Neo-Futurists are a collective of wildly productive writer/director/performers who create theater that is a fusion of sport, poetry, and living-newspaper. The company, founded in 1988, has grown to become one of the most highly regarded experimental theater companies in the country, offering annual seasons of adventurous, smart, interactive theater. The Neo-Futurist's non-illusory, interactive performances convey experiences and ideas as directly and honestly as possible. They explain, "We embrace those unreached or unmoved by conventional theater—inspiring them to thought, feeling, and action."

Too Much Light Makes

the Baby Go Blind, with its ever-changing "menu," is an attempt to perform 30 plays in 60 minutes. Each short play is written by a performer, honed by the ensemble, and randomly collaged with 29 other plays through audience participation. Each night of the performance, the company creates an unreproducible living newspaper collage of the comic and tragic, the political and personal, and the visceral and experimental.

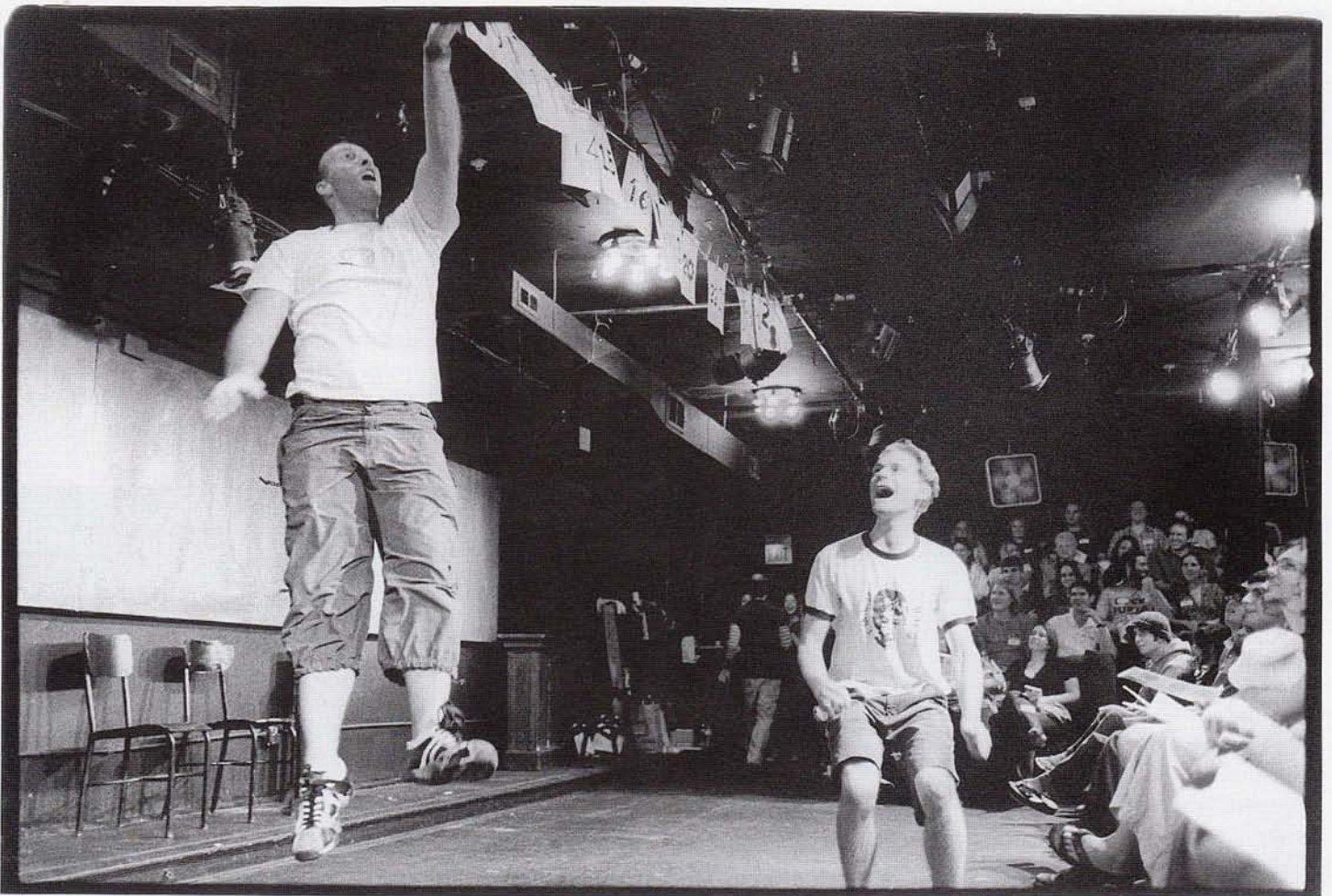
The Mitchell Center for the Arts celebrated its 2005-2006 season finale with a performance by Signal Operators. The artists included: Golan Levin, Tommy Becker, Sue Costabile, Scott Arford, Tree

Wave, and Rick Silva. Presented in collaboration with Houston's Aurora Picture Show, the center further extended the collaborative reach into the arts landscape of the city.

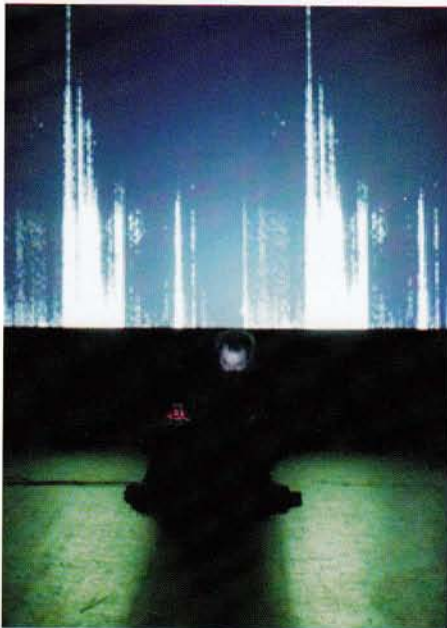
While widely varied, each of these programs embodies the Mitchell Center's central mission—to explore, challenge and celebrate the intersections between art forms through the presentation of public events supported by artist residencies and curriculum. That such an acute focus on collaboration can produce such a broad range of results only further encourages the Center to pursue its ambition to delve into the practice of artistic collaboration.



osseus labyrinth's new piece SWARM was a comparison between individual and swarm behavior; a comment upon shared and divergent traits of such behavior and the way in which simple interactions lead to complex behavior.




The Center presented two performances of Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind by Chicago-based experimental performance troupe The New-Futurists, on April 14 and 15, 2006.



On April 20, 2006 the Center presented Signal Operators, an evening long microfestival of performances by new media artists.

The Future Of Artists And Audiences

The Mitchell Center has already experienced significant success in engaging new audiences within the student body, throughout the Houston community, and, increasingly, on the national arts landscape. The center goes beyond the role of presenting organization—it is a real nexus for creative communication among a diverse range of “stakeholders” that includes the students and faculty of the University of Houston, the Houston community, and artists from across the nation and the world. While the art museum, Creative Writing Program, and the Schools of Art, Music, and Theatre, have been regionally and nationally lauded for decades, the Mitchell Center is a relatively new partnership that has provided each of these units a structure for communication among differing media, and a mandate to use their imaginations and forsake their traditional creative “comfort zones.”

As a university center for research and presentation, the Mitchell Center’s goals reach far beyond simply selling tickets or counting visitors. The center seeks to be an ongoing experiment in the tools and practice of collaboration. In the future, the center will produce a new generation of artists who are well versed in the vocabulary of interdisciplinary arts, and this vocabulary will become the centerpiece of our field, creating new leaders who can pave the way for an integrated artistic and cultural exchange. 



An interview with *Bettye Fitzpatrick*

by Penny Jones

Steel Magnolias, 1989

All photos courtesy of the Alley Theatre

Bettye Fitzpatrick is celebrating her 50th season with Houston's Alley Theatre. A protégé of the Alley's famous artistic director and founder, Nina Vance, Ms. Fitzpatrick has played a wide range of roles throughout an impressive career on the Alley's stage. Favorites include Player/Lady in *Hamlet*, Olga in *You Can't Take It With You*, Miss Goodleigh/Mrs. Dilber in *A Christmas Carol*, Izzie Truce in *House and Garden*, Mrs. Dudgeon in *The Devil's Disciple*, Olympe in *A Flea in Her Ear*, The Abbess in *The Comedy of Errors*, and Mrs. Tarleton in *Misalliance*. In addition to performing, Ms. Fitzpatrick has mentored theatre students in the Alley Theatre/University of Houston collaboration of *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Her travels have taken her to foreign stages, including Alan Ayckbourn's Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough, England as Grandmother in *Close Ties*. Perhaps her most beloved role for Houstonians of all ages is that of Cousin Sook in Truman Capote's *A Christmas Memory*, which she performed at Christ Church Cathedral for nineteen holiday seasons.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER: Penny Jones is the editor of *PROPERTIES* magazine, a real estate magazine published by Martha Turner Properties, and is a contributing writer to other Houston feature magazines. She received a B.A. in political science with a concentration in history from Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia. Penny interviewed Bettye Fitzpatrick at the Alley Theatre in Ms. Fitzpatrick's memorabilia-stuffed office. The article was transcribed by Suzanne Mascola.

Penny Jomes: Ms. Fitzpatrick, it is an honor. I have enjoyed your performances over the years and I think the one that always sticks in my mind, probably like a lot of people, is Truman Capote's Christmas Memory.

Betty Fitzpatrick: Oh, I enjoyed doing that for twenty years. When Christmas time rolled around this past year and I realized we weren't going to be doing it, I got very lonesome for it, lonely for it.

PJ: That was sort of your fruitcake season, wasn't it? Like in the play.

BF: Yes, I am so lonely!

PJ: It got to be Thanksgiving time, Sookie, isn't it? Sookie made fruitcake and you got ready to play that role.

BF: Absolutely. Then Charles Sanders, who always played Buddy with me, I got a card from him after Thanksgiving and he said, "When do we go into rehearsals?" He knew we were closing. But he missed it, also. It was a lovely experience. But we figured twenty years was enough.



Charles Sanders and Betty Fitzpatrick in A Christmas Memory, 1986

PJ: Well, never say never because I know people were looking for it.

BF: Well, we didn't say never. If we got missing it too much, why we would go back.

If I had to name three roles that I enjoyed the most in my career, that would be one of them.

PJ: What would the other two be?

BF: Oh, probably Weezer from *Steel Magnolias*. I played that four times and would play it another four times given the opportunity. And also Betty Meeks in *The Foreigner* because that is such an insane script. It is such a pity that we lost the playwright, Larry Shue. Yes, that he had to leave us at such an early age because he was a brilliant writer. A plane crash or something. Auto crash or something.

PJ: Bettye, you are in, will be, your 50th season here?

BF: Yes.

PJ: Well, then, you started when this was kind of a Mom and Mom operation.

BF: It was ten years old. Well no, then they had been making pretty good headway the first 10 years because I came in July and in November; they had the 10th anniversary dinner. And for that dinner, they had a guest speaker by the name of Ilka Chase. Now, older people will remember her. She was a very well-known actress of the time. But oh, we were very honored to have her down here. That is when I first came in. I hadn't really been on stage I don't think. I first got on stage; I believe it was in November in one of the major productions. We had done a production of *Seventeen* that summer and in that cast, we had some wonderful young people including Carlin Glynn. She was an apprentice that summer, also. Larry Hovis wasn't an apprentice but he was around and Ms. [Nina] Vance invited him to join us in *Seventeen*. And we had a choreographer that was 14-years-old but he stood well over six-feet-four. His name was Tommy Tune. He was hard to miss. We had fun doing that. But it wasn't until November that . . .



Nina Vance, founder and director of Houston's Alley Theatre

the first time I went on to the stage at the Alley Theater was as a replacement in *Chalk Garden*. One of the ladies had to leave the show early. We didn't have understudies in those days so when Ms. Vance heard that the lady was going to have to leave, she came to me and she said . . . it was only a spit and a whistle of the very first show. She said, "You can do that and still do your backstage work."

PJ: What were you doing backstage?

BF: Oh, I was running the props, making sure that everything was running smoothly because Ms. Vance had come to me and she said . . . you know, I was never an ingénue nor a leading lady because I had a character type personality and voice and so she said, "But if you want to work in the theater, learn another craft." She said, "Would you be interested in learning stage management?" I said, "Yes, I would, but I know nothing about it." And she said, "I will teach you." And so, that is what she did. She taught me everything I knew about it. And it was funny, people said . . . she would nose it about that I was the best stage manager in America today. Well, no. I was the best stage manager for her. I probably could not have gotten a job anywhere else. But for her, I was ideal because she had taught me to do exactly what she wanted done by a stage manager.

PJ: So, for a while, you were wearing at least two hats.



Bettye Fitzpatrick in *Volpone*, 1961

BF: At least two hats – would run sound, would run lights whenever we needed them because, in those days, the stage manager did not call cues as they do in this building.

You sit and you listen to the show and you could tell, by listening to the show run, you could tell if anything was wrong. If somebody missed a line, you would say, "Oops, is the prop there?"

We had a wonderful technical director and he told me once, he said, "Bettye, when you are onstage as an actress, forget about being a technician because you handle props as if you had to watch them," meaning you had to bring them into the theater. You should handle them as if they were a teacup that you handle every day. And so, he said, "Forget that you are a technician when you are an actress. Don't forget it to the point that you would be reckless with anything." We did an original play around here and we had to have a shotgun in it. And we had a very loose-knit young man who was playing the lead. And he broke the shotgun. Well, I went out and borrowed another one, brought it in for him and he broke that one.

He broke the stock off of it. He turned around and whacked a desk or something with it and it snapped the stock right off of it. And so, I handed him the third one and I said, "I'm not taking the first two out of your salary because I don't think your salary would cover them but if anything happens to this one, it will come out of your salary." So he said, "Well, we'll see." He was a little bit hateful. But it made the run. It got through the run.

PJ: *Where are you from originally?*

BF: I am a native Texan. I was born in Henderson, Texas, but I moved to Decatur, Texas, when I was like three or four years old. I went to school there in Decatur and went to the junior college when it had a junior college there. Decatur Baptist

College. It has now become Dallas Baptist University. Then I went to North Texas in Denton. It was a nice school. That is where I became a speech major. Prior to that, I was going to major in math. My last two years in college but prior to that, the junior college, I was majoring in math and history. That was because I liked those. I didn't know anything about speech so, you know, I couldn't major in something I didn't know anything about. On the staff of North Texas, there was a lady by the name of Myrtle Hardy who ran the drama department and she kind of took me under her wing, taught me especially to get rid of that Texas accent. That twang. "Git goin.'" So, she would keep an eye on me. But, bless her heart, she passed away after my first semester there. So, that was a shock and a blow. But I tried to hang on to the values and philosophies that she shared with me even after she was gone.

Yes. When I got out of North Texas, I went to Fort Worth and got a job there to support myself. And just at that time, they were organizing the Greater Fort Worth Community Theater. Now, this was in 1956, I believe it was. Or it may have been 1955. So, I went to an audition that they had for something called *The Solid Gold Cadillac* and a character woman by the name of Josephine Hull had played it when it played on Broadway. And I thought, holy smokes . . . she is a woman of 55 or 60 now – I was in my early 20s, of course, then . . . I said, "I can't even read for this." It was the director but the associate director came to me and said, "Why don't you read for it?" It couldn't hurt anything because at North Texas, I had played the wife to a Scottish person so I had to be careful in the theater. I played some other roles that were interesting. So, sure enough, I wound up playing in *Solid Gold Cadillac*. And after that, why I did a lot of work and played my first production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* with that Greater Fort Worth Community Theater.



Tony Russell and Bettye Fitzpatrick in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, 1975

PJ: *Who did you play?*

BF: Blanche. Livin' on the Delta-h. But after I had been there working to support myself and I was out of college, a friend of mine met Ms. Vance at a cocktail party and he asked her, he said, "Do you accept apprentices at the Alley?" She said, "Oh, yes. Some are apprentices. We do." And so, I wrote a letter and she said, "Come on down for an audition." This story has been told so many times but it has been told because it has been true. She came in to watch my auditions and I got a letter back three or four days later that I had been accepted as an apprentice. And, I don't know, three or four years later, I was helping her clean up her library and I saw some cards that obviously she had been taking notes on from auditions. I saw my name on one of the cards. Now, that is an awful lot to ask a person not to read. If you are all alone putting up books and all of a sudden, you are confronted with a card that has your name on it, you stop long enough because there weren't a whole lot of notes on there, to read what it said. And on that card, it just said, "has a car." So, she figured that if she brought me in as an apprentice, I could go get props, and I did. So, who knows – if I hadn't had a car, I might have never come to the Alley Theater.

PJ: *And then, when you met Ms. Vance, what was your impression? I mean, did she frighten you?*

BF: No, she was a wonderfully warm and personable being. I didn't learn fear and fright until I had been in a few rehearsals with her. As a person, she was very old South. She was raised in Yoakum, Texas. And so, she was very charming to people, especially meeting a person, a stranger. But she had eyes . . . the only other person I think on the earth that has eyes that color is Elizabeth Taylor; they are kind of violet. And they were piercing in auditions. I didn't have to audition for her after that for many years. And thankfully. But when you were in rehearsals with her, she was very specific and you had to listen very carefully to make sure that you understood what she was talking about because she had something very specific in her mind and if you were missing a point in a scene, it was up to you to understand what she was talking about to correct it. And so, yes I learned to fear, respect, and had all kinds of admiration for her as a director. But that came from having been in rehearsals with her and from that time on, from 1957 through to the time that she passed away February 18, 1980, I either was in every play she directed or I stage managed it, except no, when I was performing upstairs and she directed *The Purification* downstairs. In those days, if I was playing the show, Beth Sanford would stage manage. Or if Beth was playing in a show, then I would stage manage.

PJ: *Another jack of two trades.*

BF: Oh, yes. Beth Sanford, who was on the staff, came in around 1963. She had never directed in the theater. She had directed for film, children's theaters, children's films. But Ms. Vance recognized an ability in directing. And so, she was bringing Beth along as a director, not grooming her to be an artistic director because as far as Ms. Vance was concerned, she was going to live forever. So, she didn't need somebody to take her place – she was going to be here forever. That was fine with Beth. Beth just wanted to learn to direct and be the best so she

could stay in the rehearsals and watch her work. But directing was never my bag. I didn't want any part of it.

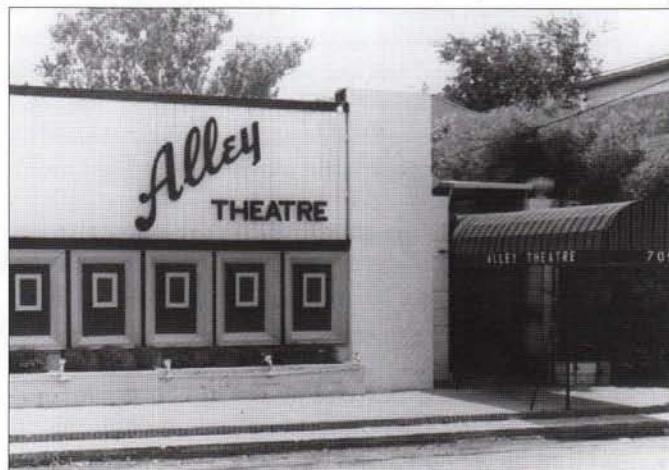
Ms. Vance came to me and she said, "Now everybody else on the staff is directing a scene with the apprentices." I had been there about five years, and she said, "You have to do it." So, I said, "All right, if I have to, I have to." And I directed the scene for our apprentice night and it was all right. I lived through it. Ms. Vance came to me later and she said, "Well,



what did you think of it?" and I said, "I hated it! I don't want any part of it. Directing is not my niche in life."

PJ: *Where was the Alley at this time?*

BF: It was on Berry Avenue. The first year of its life in 1947 was on Main Street down the Alley Way. I think those buildings have been torn down since then. But it was kind of an



The little fan factory turned into the Alley Theatre at 709 Berry Avenue.

outdoors patio with a tree in the middle of it. And the fire marshal came and said, "No, you can't do this because you only have one entrance, one exit. Not an entrance and an

Continued on page 62

Mrs. Wille's Story

The Houston Post, February 9, 1914

by Joanne Seale Wilson

Houston Pioneer, Cultural Leader, Dies at Home Here, Mrs. Wille Hutcheson, Long Resident Leaves Scores of Friends.¹

The death of Mrs. Wille Hutcheson Sunday night, at her apartment in the Rossonian, brought to a close a life devoted to the cultural developments of Houston for the past 45 years. She was 67 years old and had lived in Houston practically all of her adult life. During childhood she spent much time with relatives in Virginia and went to school there, although she was born on a plantation in Texas. In 1876 she was graduated from the Sorbonne in Paris, and on her return to Houston immediately became one of the belles of Houston's social life.

Mrs. Hutcheson was the daughter of a pioneer family. Her father lost his life as captain in the army of the Confederacy while leading a gallant charge. She was a niece of Captain J. C. Hutcheson, and has many relatives in addition to the scores of friends who admired and loved her for her fine intellect and her goodness of heart. She met life and its joys and tragedies with a high courage and she met suffering and death with the same fortitude and cheerfulness, according to those who shared her confidence.

As contributor, literary editor, music critic and writer of her travels abroad, Mrs. Hutcheson was connected with *The Houston Post* for about 25 years. She taught in the public schools, she lectured on literature and music, she wrote for newspapers and magazines and after her public work became more restricted she taught private classes in the languages, literature, history and musical diction. Indomitable will power, loyalty to her convictions, generosity, and an inimitable sense of humor were among the characteristics that won admiration from all who knew her.

She had a hand in organizing practically all the cultural, civic and educational clubs and societies of her career in Houston, and was the first president of the Woman's Choral Club. Her acquaintance with musicians extended throughout the United States. She was the author of a compendium of music that is the most complete so far as is known, of its kind. Her musical charts for illustrating the subjects are not like anything else in the way of musical references, and are considered very valuable.

Her writings scintillated with brilliant anecdotes, metaphor and humor. There was a chuckle underneath much that she wrote and her wit and fit of repartee made her a brilliant conversationalist.

Mrs. Hutcheson was a member of the Episcopal church. Her independence of thought and action did not extend to the renunciation of her faith which was a very sincere one in the goodness of God and after her health forbade attendance at church she frequently

spoke to her friends of the satisfactions of having a belief in God. During her public activities she was a member of the music committee of Christ Church, one of the oldest in the city and had much to do with building up its tradition for good music.

She was an insatiable reader and the librarians of Houston were wont to remark that "Mrs. Hutcheson had read every book in the libraries." At the time of her passing she was reading regularly, with some of her pupils, the leading foreign periodicals and the newest books on political problems, scientific discoveries, and historical research.

So far as is known she was the first woman in the South to become an accredited music critic for a daily newspaper. Her writings were so full of verve and wit that Texas scrapbooks are full of them to this day. Her literary reviews were original and attracted attention throughout the country. Few persons could read and grasp the contents of a book as readily and soundly as Mrs. Hutcheson.

Mrs. Hutcheson is survived by her husband, Wille Hutcheson, of Eastland, who died in Houston Monday morning. She became serious so suddenly that she summoned him before her passing.

The funeral arrangements for Mrs. Hutcheson are being made by the arrival of Mrs. Hutcheson.

Wille Hutcheson, music editor of The Houston Post, 1903-1920, was the first female music critic in the South.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Joanne Hutcheson Seale Wilson is a native Houstonian. She has a BA in History from Rice University and a Master's in Architectural History and Preservation from the University of Virginia. She is the author of a recent article in the Montgomery Herald about John William Hutcheson, the father of Wille Hutcheson.

Descended of a distinguished family on both sides of her heritage, Laura Baker Hutcheson was born on a plantation in Grimes County, Texas, in 1856 and died in downtown Houston, Texas, in 1924. From the 1870s to the mid-1920s, she lived in Houston, watching the city grow from a regional center of about 10,000 people to a booming city of more than 200,000. In the last 25 years of her life she enjoyed a successful and highly visible career as a music critic, writer, and educator. In the process, she fostered the spread of a rich cultural life in a region still far removed from the national centers of culture.

A newspaper article written after her death suggests that she did this with her own special style:

One of the most remarkable of Houston socialites of an earlier era was Mrs. Wille Hutcheson, who was known as Mrs. Wille....Mrs. Wille carried two sets of false teeth with her at all times, one for eating and one for talking, and she had a special nail file that she used to sharpen the eating teeth....Her interests were music (she was once a critic), reading (she often read till dawn) and eating, and to prove the latter she once ate four Thanksgiving dinners the same day. She may have been the first Houston woman to get a divorce and the first to tour Europe alone. Far ahead of her times in many ways, Mrs. Wille was truly one of the grand old ladies of Houston.²

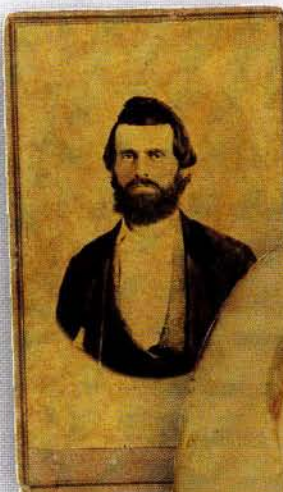
Tragedy in her early life helped shape her independent nature and forceful personality. Her father, Captain William Hutcheson, was killed in battle early in the Civil War. She had been named Laura, for her mother, but in memory of her father her name was changed to Wille while she was still a very small child.³ She loved the name and revered her father's memory.⁴

When her mother remarried in 1867 and moved to Galveston, Wille moved to Virginia to live with her paternal Hutcheson grandparents.⁵ She went to school at Staunton, Virginia, at the Wesleyan Female Institute, where she studied vocal music, moral philosophy, Greek natural philosophy, French, German, chemistry, history, English literature. She graduated in 1875 with the highest honors.⁶ She then attended the Sorbonne which exposed her to European culture.

In 1876, Wille moved back to Houston to live with her uncle, Captain Joseph Chappell Hutcheson, who had become her legal guardian at her mother's remarriage, and his wife, Mildred Carrington Hutcheson, and their growing family of six children.⁷

She married in 1879 and began the next, and most conventional, phase of her life.

She and her husband, R. E. C. Wilson, had five living children in addition to a prematurely born first child in 1880. Tragically, only one of these five children, James, survived to adulthood. The other children all died within the two years from 1888 to 1890.⁸ Such death and sadness, plus the deaths of her stepfather (1881) and mother (1884) in less than a 10-year period, must have taken a terrible toll on the marriage. Wille and her husband divorced in 1896 when she was 39 years old. At that point, she resumed her maiden name.⁹ Divorce was practically unheard of in this era, and it must have been very awkward for her and for the family. Her one surviving child, James, gave up the name Wilson and thereafter was known as James Hutcheson. As far as it is known, he never saw his father again nor was he mentioned in his father's obituary.¹⁰



John William Hutcheson (1829-1862), father of Wille Hutcheson, at the time of his enlistment in the Confederate Army, in August, 1861. He was elected Captain of the Grimes County Greys, later the 4th Texas Regiment, and served under John B. Hood in Virginia. He was injured on the 27th June of 1862 at the Battle of Cold Harbor, outside Richmond and died two days later. He is buried at Mt. Airy, in the Hutcheson family cemetery in Mecklenburg County, Virginia.



Laura Baker (Wille) Hutcheson at the time of her wedding to R. E. C. Wilson in Houston, on June 25, 1879. Wille was a descendant of three Texas pioneer families; the Hutchesons, the Bakers and the Womacks, and lived in Houston for 45 years, all of which time she was intimately connected with the cultural growth of the city.



Baby photo is of James Hutcheson (Wilson), 1883-1934, son of Wille Hutcheson and Robert Wilson and the only surviving child of five born to the couple. James Hutcheson, who left school at 13 to go to work as a clerk at the time of his parents' divorce, became a successful executive with Rio Bravo Oil Company, an avid tennis player and president of the Houston branch of the American Kennel Club.

A Music Critic in a City Reaching Out for Culture

Wille never remarried. Instead she began another remarkable chapter of her already unusual life, this time as a professional woman. She went to work to pay the bills, to use her trained mind, and to promote causes in which she believed. She worked initially as a teacher of languages and music, and as assistant to the principal at the Houston Academy, an early high school in Houston.¹¹ By 1903, she worked as both a German teacher and as a musical reporter for *The Houston Post*. Within a few years, she had become quite prominent as an intellectual and social leader; she was, for example, the founding president of the Woman's Choral Club in 1901, a musician of note, a music critic and by 1904, and the music editor for *The Houston Post* newspaper.¹²

At least twice a week for 20 years, she wrote for the *Post* an article entitled "Tête-à-Tête with The Musicians, Some Points About Music in Houston and Elsewhere."¹³ In the early years of her work at the *Post*, she also wrote the literary and drama columns.

In addition, she was the Houston correspondent for *Musical America*, a weekly publication in New York City with a national reputation and circulation.¹⁴ Through its pages, she introduced

Houston to the wider world, and the wider world to Houston.

After 1914, Wille contributed at least two articles a month in *Musical America*. She was one of eight critics on the masthead in 1914 and the only female music critic writing for *Musical America* until after World War I. Her reviews for both publications described the local Houston music scene, including the various organizations and the local talent. She also critiqued the traveling celebrity performers who came through Houston on national tours, sponsored by one or the other of the local cultural institutions. She was a versatile advocate for culture in all forms; music, theatre, literature. She wanted in particular to help build an audience in Houston for the performing arts. This made her a very important component of Houston's intellectual growth.¹⁵

According to historian Kate Kirkland, "Culture at this period implied immersion in the European tradition of music and the other fine arts as studied in universities and heard in concert halls, and viewed in public and private collections. Like other well-traveled Americans, Houston's elite came to believe that music first heard by dukes and princes and paintings commissioned by kings and tsars could be understood by all citizens of a democratic republic and appreciated in concert halls or museum palaces erected by the people for the use of the people."¹⁶ Hutcheson's reviews sought to build and educate a literate and cultivated audience. Improved travel opportunities by rail and ship allowed her to travel to Europe and the British Isles, where she enjoyed the rich cultural life, and she sought to bring back to Houston a sense of European culture.¹⁷

The Houston cultural community was extremely active after the turn of the century when Hutcheson began her columns. Clubs and organizations were an integral part of the new social structure. Choral and musical societies provided music. Drama societies provided the local theatre. Reading societies furthered the library. Social clubs determined the elite and set the pace for society.¹⁸ As Houston prospered and grew in these years, a larger audience for high culture developed, and voluntary "clubs" and "societies" grew to foster the arts. Wille Hutcheson was there to help organize these groups and to comment on their activities in her own inimitable style.¹⁹

In her regular Sunday column for the *Post*, she gave a rundown of the church music for the day, including the name of the piece to

Tête-à-Tête *Some Hints About Music* With The *In HOUSTON AND ELSEWHERE* **MUSICIANS**

Cadman, American Composer, and the Indian Songstress Come Here This Week

By Wille Hutcheson.

Charles Wakefield Cadman, under the auspices of the Art League, is to be heard, along with the wonderfully singing full-blooded Indian princess, Tatinina Redfeather, in the city auditorium here on the evening of this week.

PART ONE

And Him on the Mesa Cadman
In a Rose Tree Cadman
A Thrush at Eve Cadman
Tatinina Tatinina

Piano music:
Melody in G flat Cadman
The Pompadour's Fan Cadman
Mr. Cadman

Songs:
Incantation Over a Sleeping Infant
(Zuni) Troyer-Cadman
At Dawning Cadman
Princess Tatinina

PART TWO

Songs:
The Place of Breaking Light
(Ojibwa) Cadman
The Moon Drops Low (Omaha) Cadman

Tickets for this uniquely interesting concert will be on sale in the lobby of the Rice Hotel by the Texas Avenue entrance, from early Wednesday morning until the time of the concert.

A banquet, given at the Rice hotel, in Mr. Cadman's honor is to follow the concert on Friday night and those who desire to reserve seats for that event should call up Hadley 332.

The wide platform extension from the stage front in the city auditorium from which the Cadman-Redfeather program is to be given, will bring both the speaker and the singer almost intimately near to the great body of their audience and will make the view and the sound effects almost as good for those occupying seats on the sides as for those holding positions anywhere else in the house.



woman said to me, "Just think, I am the only little thing here from New York." "Oh," I said, "that's nothing. I am the only little thing here from Texas." Well, she replied, "of course you

January 8, 1916

WEEK OF CHRISTMAS MUSIC IN ST. PAUL

Community Spirit Ruling Factor in Impressive Succession of Ceremonies

ST. PAUL, MINN., Dec. 31.—The effort to "unify St. Paul" launched by the St. Paul Institute found expression in a series of festivities for Christmas week in which music was an essential feature. The outline of the plan presented by Charles W. Ames, president of the institute, and Mrs. Robert J. Seymour, manager, was indicated in a printed program distributed to the number of 20,000 in different sections of the city. Three Christmas carols were chosen by a committee appointed to superintend the music. The words of these ("Adeste Fideles," "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing!" and "Holy Night, Silent Night"), were twice printed in the local papers with the request that they be committed to memory, that they be rehearsed in the public schools and sung at "assemblies" by way of "preparation" for the great week.

The general program began Thursday afternoon with a municipal Christmas tree in the Auditorium. The singing of carols was led by the Girls' Glee Club of the Central High School, conducted by Florence Dickinson. A program of orchestral music was played under the direction of W. W. Nelson. Jessica De Wolf, with Katherine Hoffman at the piano, sang Adams' "Cantique de Noël" with fine feeling. The performers were grouped around the huge and brilliantly lighted tree, with Santa Claus appearing for a brief but ecstatic moment. Children predominated in the audience. They came singly and in families, rich and poor, sick and well, well-clad and ill. J. Claire Stone was in charge of the entertainment, which was designated "The Children's Christmas" in the general program.

To Friday evening was assigned "Christmas in the Home." Householders were requested to put candles in the

SUCCESS of FRANCIS MACLENNAN

in "GOTTESDAEMERUNG"

with the Chicago Grand Opera Company

Herman Devries, Chicago Evening American, December 20, 1915.

"Mr. MacleNNan was equal to his task and singing test and a satisfactory result."

James Whitaker, Chicago Examiner, December 20, 1915.

Mr. MacleNNan's great talent but slight raven when he sang resplendently of Mimi and the program and all the Bobby MacleNNan of Stuttgart."

Erie De Lamarier, Chicago Tribune

MUSICAL AMERICA

Basso and Pianist in Notable Texas Tour of Joint Recitals



Harry Evans, Basso-Cantante, and Otto L. Fischer, Pianist, on Their Tour of Texas. From Left to Right: Mr. Evans, Miss Lawson of Waco, Tex.; Mrs. Stella P. Wren, President of Euterpean Club of Waco, and Mr. Fischer

HOUSTON, TEX., Dec. 31.—Among the best concerts heard in Houston was that given recently by Harry Evans, the English basso-cantante, and Otto L. Fischer, American pianist, in the City Auditorium. Most of the seats in the immense theater were occupied by an audience which applauded with fervor. Memorable features were Mr. Evans' singing of "It Is Enough," from

windows, a request very generally heeded. Many bands of singers went about the streets singing carols. Saturday was given over to "Christmas in the Church."

"Christmas in the City" was made significant by a mammoth gathering in the Auditorium for the Municipal Festival. The Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra had been engaged for a program of orchestral music and to lead the audience in the singing of the three carols previously mentioned. The orchestral numbers were Mr. Oberholfer's "March of Homage," the Overture to "William

Lied," for which he was heartily applauded by the large audience, which was composed almost entirely of Jews, by whom he was highly complimented on his pronunciation in a language unfamiliar to him.

AID CLOTHING WORKERS

Jacobs Orchestra, Macmillan and Mrs. Axman in Anniversary Concert

Music and consideration of industrial problems were the strange companions

be performed, its composer, and the performing artist. She also reviewed the upcoming programs of the major singing societies, the Treble Clef (originally the Ladies Singing Society at its founding in 1896) and the Woman's Choral Club, the Houston Quartette, the Diehl Conservatory programs, the Houston Harmonic Society, and detailed the schedules of currently performing or upcoming local artists. She followed with specific reviews of visiting celebrity artists of national reputation, private amateur musical events, concerts, recitals, school events, and concluded with a news and notes and personals column.

Hutcheson encouraged the public to attend the musical offerings by giving the schedule, by taking a box and going herself, and by being a member of the organizations that sponsored the programs.

In addition to being a music critic, Hutcheson was also an emerging musicologist, that is, one who pursues an analytical study of the history of music in addition to judging its quality. In 1914, Wille published the "Synchronized Musico-Historical Charts."²⁰ In it, she combines her musical and critical abilities with her academic knowledge of the historical development of music over many centuries.²¹

On June 21, 1913, Wille wrote about the initial performance of what would become the Houston Symphony Society. The day was "intensely warm" but "the concert was in many ways a revelation to Houstonians, who, while realizing in a sort of offhand way that there is much musical talent in Houston, were yet unaware of the intensity of music study and the breadth of understanding and artistic conception of the majority of Houston's musicians. If any want to criticize, the criticism must at least have become tempered with sympathy and appreciation; for while no one would claim an afternoon of perfected offerings, there was far more to enjoy and admire than to condemn or sharply criticize."²²

The scheme for the first season was for a series of "twilight" concerts in the Majestic Theatre. The series was underwritten by 138 guarantors who pledged \$25 each. Julian Paul Blitz, a Dutch cellist, was the conductor. The first concert of the season was on December 19, 1913, with a simple program.²³ This was symbolic of a burgeoning interest among Houstonians in live artistic performances. Wille noted that "Touring companies recorded their most successful year nationwide in 1912-1913 but even so, visiting performers, local chamber groups, and club recitals taxed Houston's limited theatre space."²⁴

Culture, Religion, and Race

The lack of adequate venues was not the only challenge faced by those who worked to foster cultural events in Houston. For a time in 1913, the advocates of culture and those of religion clashed over the staging of secular entertainment on the Sabbath. The Houston Pastors' Association led the protests against such events on Sunday afternoons in the City Auditorium. The pastors wanted to substitute religious programs in their place as they felt that the programs were too secular.²⁵ The city erupted in protest against the cancellation of the public entertainments which had become very popular and well attended. Representatives of all religions and the newspapers joined in the controversy.²⁶

Wille defended the Sunday performances, noting "the established popularity of the Sunday afternoon entertainments in the City Auditorium." Her article on an event held in May 1913

reported the fact that "the big civic building was filled to overflowing by an audience representative of Houston's citizenship." She reported that "Negro citizens occupied every available seat in the upper gallery, the place reserved for them; while the lower galleries and the orchestra and boxes were occupied to the last seat by white citizens." She concluded that "the proof that the municipal entertainments on Sunday afternoon are popular with all classes of citizenry was never more thoroughly brought home than it was by the presence of yesterday's gathering."

According to Hutcheson, "The piece de resistance of the program was the appearance of the massed chorus of students from Prairie View Normal, the institution maintained by the state for the education and training of young Negro men and women. Their efforts met with deserved applause." Perhaps this was particularly true of the older citizens, who, with the memories of antebellum days alive in their reflections, heard again the songs so dear to the Southland, the old plantation melodies and "camp meeting" songs. The entire assembly stood and sang "The Sweet Bye and Bye."²⁷

Letters to the editor flew fast and furiously debating the Sunday concerts. At the heart of the dispute was a growing tension between religious values and secular values in a society being transformed by rapid growth. Just under the surface were also tensions about race relations in a society in the process of putting in place Jim Crow laws to enforce legalized segregation of the races in public accommodations. Events such as those described by Hutcheson raised questions about religion and race that brought a mixed response from Houstonians.

The next step in this municipal quarrel was detailed in an article by Hutcheson that sought to justify the concerts not as mere entertainment or cultural enrichment, but rather as fund raising opportunities providing needed charitable money for the poor and out of work men. Hutcheson reported, "A free will offering of \$500.01 for the Social Service Federation was taken up at the municipal concert at the city auditorium on Sunday afternoon. There were about 2,000 persons in the attendance in spite of the cool weather....Dr. Lockhart (the director of the event)...told of the unusual condition which made it necessary to depart from the custom of not taking up collections of any character at the municipal entertainments. He said that an impartial investigation shows that there are 10,000 idle men in the city at present, embracing every conceivable trade and calling, and that in consequence the amount of suffering is so great as to demand that every man bear his part of the burden. He urged that all give what they could afford." Hutcheson went on to give the concert high marks and concludes with the information that unfortunately, all the program was not given on account of the time consumed in taking up the collection.²⁸ Clearly she disapproved of the fuss.

Eventually Mayor Ben Campbell (1913-1917) and other ministerial groups and city educational and sociological leaders overruled the Pastor's Association and the shows went on because the citizens of Houston were entertainment minded.²⁹

World War I and the Music of Patriotism

The 1913 season had been a huge success. Houston was booming and growing up. But the beginning of World War I in June 1914 changed everything. Though America was not yet in the war, and since the 1914-15 season was already planned, Houstonians decided

Continued to page 65

ELDORADO BALLROOM

by Leigh Cutler

Writing during the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes penned these words: "I, too, sing America.... I, too, am America." His poem "I, Too," makes a statement about the inferior position of blacks in a Jim Crow society while looking forward with assurance to a future of national racial equality. At the same time, Hughes seems to emphasize that, despite segregation, people of all backgrounds, not just whites, represented America. The words "I am" resound throughout the twentieth century historical struggle by African Americans to gain equal recognition under the law and in society. In Houston's Third Ward neighborhood,

where the city's largest and most diverse black population lived, residents created a nearly autonomous community built upon the principle of "I am." This fully developed black society allowed businesses, churches, schools, hospitals, and entertainment venues to flourish.

Howard Beeth and Cary D. Wintz, in *Black Dixie: Afro-Texan History and Culture in Houston*, describe the ways segregation encouraged the growth of a self-contained black Houston community: "Most blacks responded to segregation by turning inward, relying on their own families and communities, creating their own institutions, and avoiding, as much

as possible, contact with the outside white world... In one sense segregation thus stimulated the black community."¹ These institutions met the needs of the community and provided safe spaces for cultural life to exist in a racially segregated urban environment.

One such space was the landmark Eldorado Ballroom, which was representative of the last pinnacle of black culture in Houston before Jim Crow laws dissolved. Appropriating the epithet of Harlem's more famous Savoy Ballroom, which opened in 1926 and where the lindy hop and other jazz dance crazes of the 1920s and 30s originated, the Eldorado billed itself as the

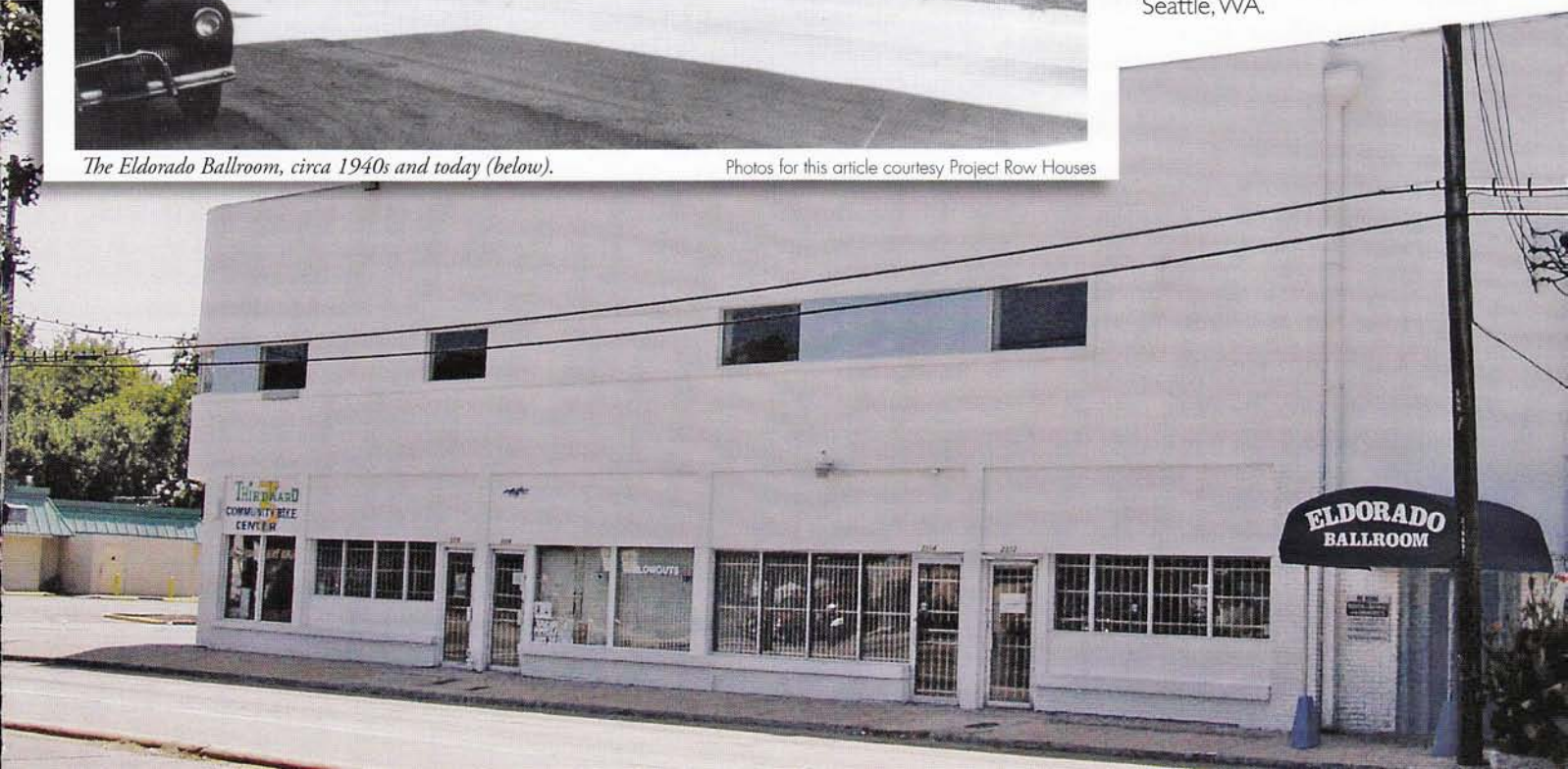
"Home of Happy Feet."² This label characterized the venue's reputation as "a special haven for dancers." The dancing that blacks came to the Eldorado to do held distinctive significance because it occurred in such a fashionable, dignified environment.³ Jackie Beckham, who

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The Eldorado Ballroom, circa 1940s and today (below).

Photos for this article courtesy Project Row Houses



grew up in the Third Ward in the 1940s, recalled that, "most of the people who went to the Eldorado loved to dance. You couldn't do that at the other clubs. They served food and drink at those. You didn't have room to be dancin' in them." She went on to say that the crowd ranged in age from early 20s to 40s and 50s, but despite generational differences, the one thing that the patrons had in common was that they all loved to dance.⁴

Local black newspapers often included regular advertisements and brief articles announcing upcoming acts and events at the Eldorado Ballroom. Aware of the club's unique opportunity as a high-class dance venue, these features sometimes highlighted dancing as a way to lure readers to the Eldorado on particular nights. For example, a 1949 column in *The Informer*, considered to be the oldest black newspaper published west of the Mississippi, reported the scheduled performance of Hollywood saxophone player Charles "Leap Frog" Bennett, ensuring that "Lovers of jitterbugging will delight in Bennett's jump and be bop numbers, yet he can play lots of that soft, sweet mellow dance music which many dancers love."⁵

The "rado," as patrons who frequented the Eldorado Ballroom during its heyday in the 1940s and 50s called it, was for three decades one of Houston's premier showcases for local and national African American musical talent. At the corner of Elgin and Dowling Streets and across the street from the historic Emancipation Park, local black business leaders C.A. and Anna Dupree built the venue as a classy ballroom for African Americans during an era of segregation. Because of its centralized location along Dowling Street, the area's main thoroughfare, and its prominence overlooking the street, as it occupied the Eldorado Building's entire second floor, many considered the ballroom to be the Third Ward's most prestigious focal point.⁶ The closing paragraph of a 1956 announcement in *The Informer* about a show by the popular jazz band "The Midnighters" defined the Eldorado as "the most aristocratic, spacious and beautiful in the South West playing only the best in entertainment for your complete evening of pleasure."⁷ For many, the space evoked a sense of nobility. Blues vocalist Carolyn Blanchard once said that the Eldorado Ballroom "made us feel like



we were kings and queens. We always held our heads a little higher after leaving the Eldorado."⁸ At the same time, it represented a physical symbol of community pride.

The Eldorado Building was a mixed-use development with a storefront of small black-owned businesses on the first floor, including the Walker-Brantley Appliance Company, which at one time was Houston's only black authorized Frigidaire dealer.⁹ The ballroom itself was a somewhat upscale, but not totally exclusive, space outside of church where people dressed up to go and where they could socialize with others in their community. "When you went to church, you were very conservative in your dress, but when you went to the Eldorado, you put on your best glittery stuff you had. It was like party time," remembered Beckham.¹⁰ In this sense, the Eldorado stood apart from the common juke joints that existed throughout the Third Ward, where people gathered to hear music and dance.¹¹

The Duprees established this "class" venue in 1939. The Eldorado was the centerpiece of several profitable enterprises that the couple owned and operated in Houston. After marrying in 1916, Anna and C.A. moved from Galveston to Houston, where their business careers and, later, philanthropic endeavors began. Anna achieved success as a maid and beautician, traveling across the city by streetcar to pursue her work in wealthy white residences. In 1936, she opened her own beauty shop, "Anna's Institute of Health and Beauty," complete with a Turkish bath and massage services.¹² While Anna worked in her shop, Mr. Dupree was a porter and eventually locker room manager at the River Oaks Country Club. Regarding the couple's financial situation, Mrs. Dupree once said, "We went without many of the necessities of life in order to save money." Working as a team, the Duprees put aside most of C.A.'s tips from the club and lived

on his meager salary. Despite hard times during the Great Depression, the couple reportedly saved \$20,000 during the 1920s and 30s. Gradually, they invested in real estate ventures that provided important services to the black community, and which led to the creation of the Eldorado Ballroom.¹³

In Anna Dupree's own words, the Eldorado was a "showcase for the great black entertainers of the era and the launching pad for many show-biz careers."¹⁴ In Houston, black culture and popular black music evolved in the isolated social context of the local African American community, and more specifically, under the roof of the Eldorado Ballroom. Such musical forms included gospel, blues, R&B, jazz, and zydeco, and for many musicians performing at the Eldorado represented the peak of local success. As trumpeter, bandleader, former B.B. King orchestra director, and Houston native Calvin Owens related to Roger Wood, in an interview for his book, *Down in Houston: Bayou City Blues*, "Playing at the Eldorado Ballroom – I mean, that's like saying: Okay, I've made it."¹⁵ Like Owens, other musically talented black Houstonians gained valuable experience as members of the house bands at the ballroom. From this opportunity, some later became internationally famous bandleaders and recording artists.

The Eldorado was much more than simply a musical training ground for local talent. Distinguished Houston bandleaders and horn players such as Milton Larkin, I.H. "Ike" Smalley, and Arnett Cobb directed big jazz and swing bands that performed at the historic venue. These house orchestras enhanced the ballroom's aura as a classy place, and they featured musicians who provided instrumental backing for locally produced floor shows (where performers took over the dance floor, the band played from the stage, and patrons watched from their tables), as well

as for touring artists. The Eldorado thrived during the big-band heyday of the 1940s, playing host to such famous entertainers as Duke Ellington, Count Basie, and Louis Armstrong. In the 1950s, and continuing on into the 1960s, it was the home of rhythm and blues, welcoming some of the biggest names in the entertainment industry, including Della Reese, James Brown, Little Richard, B.B. King, and Fats Domino.¹⁶

Before desegregation in the 1960s, racial separation in Houston and the South inhibited the mobility of jazz and blues musicians, although less so than it did for most occupations. The popularity of this type of music, among both black and white audiences, combined with a generally higher racial tolerance in the arts, allowed controlled crossings of the color line to occur.¹⁷ As Conrad Johnson, a leader of an Eldorado house band before touring with several groups, noted, "Musicians have always broken the barriers."¹⁸ In Houston, blacks who performed at exclusively white venues generally were restricted to the dressing rooms between acts and were prohibited from using the lobbies when entering or leaving buildings. Clubs like the Eldorado, however, provided black musicians with an atmosphere free from racial tensions.¹⁹ Artists who routinely performed for all-white crowds modified black music culture to accommodate this different audience. In doing so, this culture, which embodied a sense of community pride and that people celebrated in the Third Ward at the Eldorado Ballroom, lost to assimilation much of its unique character.

"A community good time place" is how former radio DJ and Eldorado emcee Skipper Lee Frazier described the ballroom in a recent interview and, as Allan Turner noted in a feature article in the *Houston Chronicle*, the venue "transcended its role as a nightclub."²⁰ Over the years, the Duprees hosted many events there to raise money for community projects, such as the Negro Child Center, an orphanage for black children and the couple's first philanthropic undertaking. Additionally, a fundraising function at the Eldorado Ballroom was instrumental in improving the pay of black teachers. The club owners held dances there to collect donations to supplement the meager salary that the teachers received.²¹ These charitable dances featured the music of local headliners, such as an event benefiting crippled children and

showcasing I.H. Smalley and his orchestra, which *The Informer* advertised to its readers in 1949.²² The Duprees and other affluent blacks in Houston formed a bridge between the poor and the financially prosperous. They never forgot where they came from and they worked to better the lives of thousands of African Americans in their city. These individuals found opportunities to secure land and businesses within a segregated society and then to use their wealth to provide needed services for blacks. Their work exemplifies the process through which Houston's black population achieved greater racial autonomy by generating both the leadership and the funding necessary for community building.²³



The Eldorado also held weekly talent shows and sock hops for teenagers. These events demonstrate the venue's function as a cultural institution that welcomed various levels of the black community. On weekday afternoons or Sunday evenings, middle and high school students competed by singing and dancing in talent shows. Three African American high schools existed in Houston during the Eldorado's prominent years: Phyllis Wheatley, Jack Yates, and Booker T. Washington High Schools. Yates and Wheatley had active marching bands; therefore, a rivalry existed between the schools in both music and football. According to saxophonist Arnett Cobb, who was from Houston and toured internationally, the unofficial competition caused musically inclined students to work even harder at their talent, practicing to be the best. As a result, outstanding musicians came from both schools.²⁴ Perhaps the Eldorado's talent shows furthered this drive toward musical excellence, all the while encouraging young people to pursue opportunities that had roots in a cohesive black culture. Roger Wood pointed out that

the kids in the talent competitions might perform on the same stage that Ray Charles would occupy later that same night.²⁵ Such proximity to musical greatness and fame was likely inspiring to black youth, sending them a message of limitless possibility that began as close to home as the spaces that defined their own community.

Sometimes on Sundays from around 4:00 in the afternoon until 8:00, young people could attend matinee dances, or sock hops. No alcohol was available, and these instances represented the only time that teenagers were legitimate patrons. Popular radio personality, Skipper Lee Frazier, or "Daddy Deepthroat," often acted as emcee and disc jockey at the Eldorado's youth functions. At times, he hosted live afternoon broadcasts on Third Ward-based KCOH, the oldest African American owned and operated radio station in Texas, where he worked as a DJ for 22 years.²⁶ Kids from other wards often rode the bus from their neighborhoods to the Eldorado because such youth-centered entertainment was rare and was available elsewhere only at the YMCA and YWCA. Moreover, the opportunity to attend a social function at a club normally exclusive to adults was probably more attractive to black teenagers than the historically community-center atmosphere of the Ys. Social and entertainment venues for blacks, similar to the Eldorado, existed in other wards, such as the Bronze Peacock in the Fifth Ward, but because it offered elite chef-created dinners and was routinely accessible to black youth, the Third Ward venue stood apart as more of a family-friendly, community institution.

Additionally, the ballroom provided a centralized space for black social clubs to meet and stage special events. Some social clubs, like the Amboy Dukes Social Club, advertised their functions in *The Informer*, highlighting the date and time, ticket prices, and guest performers. Former Third Ward resident, Jackie Beckham, however, does not remember spending much time reading about upcoming Eldorado shows and events in the newspaper. She remembers that, "We spent most of the time just saying, 'Girl, do you know who's going to be at the 'rado on Sunday?'" According to Beckham, news about performances came mainly by word of mouth or from flyers posted on neighborhood telephone poles.²⁷ Many of the features that *The Informer* published about such gatherings

at the Eldorado in the 40s and 50s emphasized common identity, an empowering characteristic of black culture and society under segregation. For example, in a short article recapping the annual ball of a local men's fraternal organization, the Eldorado Club, the concluding statement reads, "The El Dorado club's ball was one of the loveliest of the season and it served to bring Houstonians closer to each other."²⁸ Undoubtedly the article is suggesting that the occasion brought black Houston residents closer to one another. By not separating African American Houstonians from any other Houstonians in its description of the ball, the newspaper indicates that members of the black community were secure in the self-contained society they had established. In other words, Houston was a city that belonged to them as much as it did to any other racial group that called it home.

Another *Informer* news item from the 1940s featured a photograph of the winners of the Franklin Beauty School style show, celebrating their accomplishments at the Eldorado Ballroom. The Franklin Beauty School, which found a permanent home in Houston in 1935, was one of the first private cosmetology schools to receive a license in the state of Texas. It opened many doors for African American women to pursue professional careers as trained, skilled beauticians. A black-owned family business since its beginnings, the school is still in operation today. Similar to the description of the fraternal club's ball, the caption under the style show winners' picture identifies the Eldorado as a place "where good friends get together."²⁹ Again, the ballroom's distinctive quality is evident. The space offered a pleasant community environment where the clientele could expect dignity and respect from other patrons, and where celebrations and social fellowship were commonplace.

Many blacks who lived through segregation recalled it as a time when families were closely knit and when neighbors kept an eye out for each other. In discussing her experience of growing up in Houston's Third Ward, Jackie Beckham mentioned the common practice of friends helping raise others' children. Her mother, in particular, relied on these people for such support. "It was a community where whatever you did, good or bad, Mom was going to know about it before the sun went down."³⁰ The



Big band at the Eldorado Ballroom

work week was difficult, but people looked forward to the weekend as a chance to socialize with friends and family, attend Sunday worship services, and enjoy other diversions – such as dancing to bands at the Eldorado.³¹ Beckham reminisced about being a teenager and walking a few blocks from her house to attend Sunday matinee dances there with her girlfriends. This type of social activity was an exciting distraction from routine responsibilities at home and school, and therefore provided the girls with gossip stories for the remainder of the week.³²

Carroll Parrott Blue, who also grew up in the Third Ward, lived in the same house until she left for college. During those years, which coincided with the heydays of the Eldorado Ballroom, she remembered that her neighborhood was a quiet and safe part of town.³³ Blues singer Jewel Brown, whose career took her on a regular touring circuit with Louis Armstrong, graduated from Yates High School and started out singing at the Eldorado to the piano music of her brother, Theodore Brown. They lived so close to the club that they walked there from home, with their mother serving as chaperone. "Those were the good ol' days when you could sleep on your porch and not have to worry about anything," Brown reported about her childhood days in the Third Ward.³⁴

The area's character began to change in the 1960s and early 1970s, however, leading to the decline and eventual closing of the Eldorado. Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, the city's black popu-

lation experienced rapid growth. A dramatic increase of more than 400 percent took place between 1940 and 1980. While the traditional black communities, including the Third Ward, absorbed some of the newcomers, most of the growth occurred outside these historic neighborhoods. New, generally more attractive black enclaves developed, especially in the southern part of the city. Desegregation in Houston began to take shape around this same time period. As a result, more and more blacks patronized white-owned businesses outside their immediate neighborhoods and new suburban shopping malls. This transition negatively impacted black businesses.³⁵ Addressing this socioeconomic and residential dispersal of blacks to other parts of the city, acclaimed guitarist and Eldorado performer Roy Gaines commented, "After years and years of being denied the opportunity to visit certain theaters, restaurants, stores, banks, and what-have-you, do you think black people wanted to stay put...?"³⁶ With desegregation and the breakdown of overt public displays of racial discrimination, political, economic, and social opportunity improved for blacks, but the cohesive culture that thrived in the Third Ward and at the Eldorado suffered. As Roger Wood noted, "one of the great ironies of the civil rights movement is that as we made progress, some of these wonderful neighborhoods suffered economically."³⁷

Although the decline of the Eldorado Ballroom is largely attributable to the economic setbacks that desegregation triggered for black-owned businesses

along Dowling Street, as well as the demise of the self-contained black culture existing in the Third Ward, other factors undoubtedly contributed to the club's downfall. First of all, as times changed, so did popular musical tastes. In the 1960s, many of the younger African Americans began to abandon blues culture for more progressive sounds; they associated the older jazz and blues traditions with their parents' generation and life in an oppressive society.³⁸ Furthermore, the rise of automobile culture paralleled desegregation, and parking space at the Eldorado was scarce. According to John Green, road manager for big band star Bobby Bland, "Back when the Eldorado was jumping, people used to ride the bus and get off right on the corner [of Elgin and Dowling Streets]. But then after the Korean War and everybody started getting cars, there was nowhere to park. They used to park on Elgin, on both sides, and around the corner. And those school kids would go and jack the cars up, take the tires off, and strip 'em! So that went on and helped kill the Eldorado."³⁹ The financial stability that many African American Houstonians gained from the economic opportunities available to them in a self-sustaining black society permitted possession of personal automobiles. Ironically, it was this increase in car ownership that factored into the decline of a key cultural institution, which owed its success to the once tight-knit black community surrounding it.

Finally, perhaps a major reason for decline of the Eldorado Ballroom was the emergence of militant black activism and police involvement in the Third Ward. The People's Party II, the local Black Panther affiliate, maintained its headquarters at 2828 Dowling, just around the corner from the ballroom. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was probably the most famous expression of the Black Power movement and the most widely known black militant political organization of the late 1960s.⁴⁰ In his study, *Race and the Houston Police Department, 1930-1990*, Dwight Watson asserts that as the civil rights movement gained momentum, blacks in Houston began to increase their demands for legal, political, and economic change.⁴¹

One major incident that contributed to the rise in tension between police and the Houston black community occurred on July 26, 1970, when an HPD assault team killed People's Party II chairman,

21-year-old Carl Bernard Hampton, and wounded four other activists. No policemen suffered injuries. The Dowling Street area had been tense for several days, since a week earlier police entered the activists' headquarters and seized rifles, ammunition, and clothing. This spot was the scene of nearly 100 gunfire shots in a confrontation that started when police arrested two teenaged party members for pointing weapons at the officers after they stopped the boys in the street. The HPD's intimidation methods and repressive reaction to black activism made the Dowling Street area of the Third Ward a somewhat fearful, unpleasant space for the older, middle class blacks who once frequented the Eldorado Ballroom. Most likely, these particular patrons were uninterested in revolutionary ideas and police confrontations, and therefore chose to avoid an entertainment venue with that sort of activity surrounding it.⁴²

In his book, Watson argues that Third Ward rioting "permanently altered the city's political and social culture, as more blacks rejected police domination and white political control."⁴³ In response to the highly political context of the time, the leading local black newspaper, *The Informer*, greatly decreased its coverage of entertainment features and advertisements, including those about the Eldorado Ballroom. Beginning in the 1960s and continuing into the 1970s, the editors concentrated more on political activity and news stories than on social and cultural items of interest. For example, an op/ed-style column in a 1970 edition of the paper responded to the division between members of the black community in the aftermath of the death of People's Party II leader Hampton. In its closing remarks, the article proclaims to readers, "We believe that the various Black factions in Houston are going to have to get together, sit down and work out accommodations and stand before the common enemy united."⁴⁴ The timing of this shift in approach to reporting makes sense, considering the near non-existence of the self-contained black culture and society from segregation era Houston. Focusing on activism in a newly desegregated city seemed to take precedence over social diversions.

The Eldorado Ballroom closed to the public in the early 1970s and, until recently, the second floor lay empty for years, but was available for lease as office space. In

1999, Herbert Finkelstein, the oil tycoon who bought the property as an investment after Anna Dupree died, donated the Eldorado and 17-lot block bordered by Elgin, Dowling, Bastrop, and Stuart Streets to Project Row Houses.⁴⁵ This local neighborhood-based art and cultural organization is located in the Third Ward, just blocks away from the Eldorado, on a site of 22 abandoned shotgun houses (c. 1930). The non-profit group's mission is to connect the work of artists with the revitalization of the community. Today, the renovated Eldorado Ballroom plays a significant role in realizing that mission. On May 17, 2003, following restoration efforts to return the building to its elite status among Houston clubs, Project Row Houses opened the doors to the Eldorado again, hosting the first major event there in more than 30 years.⁴⁶ The fundraising gala brought in \$75,000 to support continuing renovations. The facility now functions as a special performance venue and a meeting site available for rental, while maintaining small-business tenants on the building's street level.⁴⁷

Longtime Third Ward resident, professional saxophonist, and 30-year veteran as a Houston public school music teacher and band director, Conrad Johnson used to take the stage at the Eldorado with his own band. When asked for his opinion on the revitalization of the ballroom, Johnson commented, "Bringing the Eldorado back to life is a beautiful idea. You talk to a lot of people, and they're negative. They say you never can bring back the Eldorado the way it was in the old days. But, you know, maybe we can bring back something that's just as important for today's times."⁴⁸ Although the reborn Eldorado differs considerably from the club that thrived in the 1940s and 50s, its owners' intended purpose—to create a community haven for black cultural and musical expression—remains the same. For many, the music at the Eldorado was much more than entertainment. It was a source of freedom, an escape from problems, and a way to express one's soul.⁴⁹ Just as the jazz and blues songs of Harlem performers in the 1920s inspired Langston Hughes' poetic declaration, "I, too, am," the Eldorado Ballroom, as a space for music, dancing, and community activity for more than 30 years, established a cultural identity and the sense of "I am" for blacks in Houston. [C]

A WOMAN AND HER VIOLIN

By Ernesto Valdés

Artistic expression needs two ingredients: creativity and freedom of expression. Of all human activities, it rises above the rivalries and platitudes of politics and economic theories. The tragedy arises when the artist's expression cannot be heard, read, or seen by the rest of the world without political acquiescence of an oppressive government.

In December 1967, Nicolae Ceausescu, an orthodox communist, became head of state of Romania. His economic policies plunged the nation to levels of poverty brought about by shortages of food, energy, medicines, and other basic necessities. By the forces of corruption, terror, and isolation, Ceausescu's regime was able to survive for 25 years until his army rebelled and executed him and his wife.

In the capital of Bucharest, living beneath Ceausescu's cloud, were two young sisters learning the craft of playing the violin. Rodica and Michaela Oancea began in their kindergarten years and after enduring the bureaucratic mindless maze of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, wound up playing at New York City's Carnegie Hall. The story of that journey and the perils in between is the essence of this article.

I was a friend of the attorney who took on the immigration case and at her request I accompanied her in hopes that my knowledge of Spanish and smattering of Italian could offer a linguistic bridge to another

Latin language of Romanian. It was an ambitious thought with modest success.

Seventeen years later, I met Rodica in her downtown flat to for this interview.

Rodica Weber (RW): [My name is] Rodica Cristina Weber. My maiden name is Oancea. I was born in Bucharest, Romania, on September 21, 1966.



Ernesto Valdés (EV): Tell me something about your family. Was it just you and your sister?

Rodica Oancea Weber: Just the two of us. My mother was an only child and my father had two brothers and sisters. In Romania, Dad was a mechanical engineer. Mom was a chemist, taught chemistry, and was principal of the high school. Neither of my parents read music. When my sister and I were very young, our grandfather's sister took care of us, she never had any kids. Because everyone else in the family was working, she took care of us and took us to school, actually she was a kindergarten teacher. One day, I was playing and singing with my dolls.... From my singing she realized I had a musical ear so when I was 4, she took me to music lessons, violin lessons. I asked her later about her reasoning, I asked, "Why didn't you pick another instrument, a piano or another stringed instrument?" She said, "Because I knew that in an orchestra there are more violins than there are pianos." So when I was 4, I started the violin with a teacher right there in the kindergarten. Then when I was six, I transferred to a special music school in Bucharest...you had to test in (audition)...and you start in the first grade and you go all the way to the 12th grade. I started there in the first grade and I stayed there in the George Enescu Music School.

EV: And did you go all 12 years?

RW: Yes. And then my family recognized that my sister (Mika or Michaela) had a musical inclination but they wanted her to do piano so we could do duets together, but you know how little sisters are, "No, I want to do exactly the same thing my older sister does." So she ended up going into the violin, too....It was required in this school starting in sixth grade until the twelfth to learn another instrument. So we both play piano, and actually we play a little viola, too. It is a similar instrument, the same position—you just read different notes. This was a very intense music school, you know, and you start theory lessons in the first grade and, I think, we started orchestra in the fourth grade.

So at an early age, I guess somewhere between 7 and 8, we went and took this audition and we were on TV every week—every Sunday, on a children's series on TV we were singing, we're acting, we're dancing, whatever little kids do. So when I was 13, I was picked to go and represent the Romanian television station, the only one that we had there, at an international convention of TV stations in Jordan—Amman, Jordan. So that was my first outing.

Actually, at the time, I was singing and accompanying myself on the guitar, so I wasn't even playing the violin for that event.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER: Ernesto Valdés was born and raised in El Paso, Texas. He has a B.A. from Trinity University, San Antonio, Texas, a D.J. from South Texas College of Law, Houston, Texas, and he is working toward a Master's Degree in Public History, University of Houston. Abbey Simon's interview was transcribed by Suzanne Mascola.

As is so often the case in life, major events often begin surreptitiously like seeds buried in the desert that may wait years for rains that nourish germination. This first outing from Romania was to linger inside until it was transformed by each visit to the West into an irrepressible desire to be free. At this point in her life, Rodica met the reality of how political repression can impede artistry and creativity.

EV: *So when you went out of town, did they [Romanian government] send anybody with you to make sure that you didn't run away, or to stop anyone who might want to take you away?*

RW: Actually, we did have, what do you call them? Spies? In every group, you know, every time we traveled outside.... Sometimes we knew who they were, sometimes we didn't, but there were always one or two people watching our backs. I remember since we were young, we were taught by Mom and Dad, never to complain, not to talk on the phone about it with anyone, or even on the bus [about] being unhappy with the system. Talk about the president, or anybody that was a political figure. So we are trained at an early age not to talk about anything. We didn't know if the phone had bugs. So I guess the first time we started talking about it was the first time we traveled at age 13 or 14. I started traveling every year after that [Amman, Jordan] and coming home to Romania and seeing all the differences between the West and the East, the communist system, made it harder and harder and harder. And then when you are 14 or 15, you start to ask questions.

EV: *After you went to Jordan for your first outing, which western countries did you go to?*

RW: Oh, afterwards we started, we both started going to competitions. I went to Italy, I went to Switzerland, France.... We were in a children's chorus, the best in Bucharest. When I was 14, we traveled to Luxembourg and toured France, Belgium, Germany, we stayed with host families all over. But then we started going every summer to different festivals and competitions. Coming back home the first time wasn't too bad, but then repeating it every time, we started asking questions. You don't understand it at the time, exactly... what does freedom of speech mean? We didn't have the diversity of food, or chocolates, or fruits. But little things like clothes—you know, we were very narrow in diversity and that. "Look at all those kids, the way they're dressed," and then slowly, growing up you feel you could go West and you would be able to send a letter to someone overseas or in the West asking for a scholarship or stuff like that, which is how it happened that I got into the States.

EV: *How was it that you got to the West?*

RW: It's a long story, I'll try to make it short. I was eighteen years old and in the 12th grade and a good friend of mine, also a violinist, was a year older than me. In 1985, he was traveling with a little orchestra in France and saw a brochure about this festival in Lucerne, Switzerland where Mr. Sergio Luca was teaching. So what he did in France, he immediately wrote a letter [to Mr. Luca] and said, "We are two violinists from Bucharest. We'd love to attend your festival." So he came back and told me, "Look what I did. I don't know if anything is going to come from this." And actually that year we got a full

scholarship for the summer of '86 to go and we just had to pay our way to get to Switzerland. We both went, of course, pulling some strings.... My mother had some connections because we were on TV and we knew kind of high placed people who could help us get a visa. And we both got a visa and we went and we met Mr. Luca. [However] that year was the year I entered the conservatory after an entrance exam that was just the hardest I ever went through... 120 to 150 kids audition for five spots; every year there are only five openings for the violin. I passed the exam and I was number two out of the five, but the competition was unbelievable.

EV: *Just for the record, please explain who Mr. Luca is.*

RW: Right now, he is the head of the violin department at Rice.

EV: *And he was the person who was conducting this seminar in Switzerland?*

RW: He was called the director of the program and said, "I'd like for those two Romanians to be invited and have full scholarships."

EV: *That was for you and your boyfriend?*

RW: Yes. We got there late because of the visa, of course, but we got in. We played for him the next few days and afterwards he said, "Oh, I would love for both of you to come



Sergiu Luca

and study with me in the States. You're very talented and blah, blah, blah." Florine says of course because there is nothing else for him in Romania, but I hesitated and said, "Oh my God, I just passed this exam [for the conservatory]" and I was looking forward to going there and I had a great concern for my sister. I told him, "I have a sister and if I defect now, she's not ever going to be able to pursue a career."

If we were going to defect, we had to defect at that time; one could not just write back and say, "Sorry, I'm going to be studying for two or three years." They didn't allow that at that time under Ceausescu. You could not study abroad.

Another point I want to make... my sister is three years younger, we are both traveling with separate competitions — they wouldn't let us travel together. We were in different countries [at that time]. So while I was in Switzerland that summer, she was actually in Italy and when I was in Italy, she was someplace else.

Of course you could defect, but the other one had to suffer the consequences, you know. So I asked Mr. Luca to send scholarships for two. I went back and my friend, Florine, stayed there, as a matter of fact he is still in Switzerland, he ended up not coming to the States. He plays in a big orchestra in Geneva, so he's fine.

I went back the next year, '86 and Mr. Luca sent us scholarships for the Aspen Festival in Colorado. But that year, right



An 18-year old Rodica meets Pope John Paul II, in Rome, Italy, during a concert tour in Italy. About two years later, she defected to the United States.

when we were ready to get a visa, one of the famous violinists in Romania defected so nobody traveled that summer anywhere. I got so upset. Mr. Ceausecu was the one who personally stamped the artists' passports. So after we had to be really careful in corresponding with him [Luca] or talking to him on the phone, so we decided we should try for the following year, in '87.

While I was at a competition in Rome, my mother decided she's going to file for both of us to go to this other festival later on in the summer in Aspen. We had developed this code, so when I went to Italy toward the end of the trip, I was going to call her to say that if the United States visa doesn't happen, I'll just stay there [Italy] and I'll see what's going to happen, I'll get my sister out somehow. I told her...I was 20 and I cannot come back, it's harder and harder for me to go back. I'll find my way to the States somehow and try to get my sister, Mika. So when I called her and told her all I had decided, she said, "No, no, no, no, come home. We have the visas." My mother had bribed the right people and a few weeks later we left for the States. My parents had paid for our tickets to New York so we entered the States on a 30-day visitor's visa.

But two things happened to us. Before we left, my mother had some security problems at the school that week. She was interrogated for different kinds of suspicious things and my father was actually on a kind of blacklist the past few years before we left. So I guess we were really carefully watched. My parents decided, all of a sudden, to put us on the plane the week before Mr. Luca was expecting us. Events happened so fast...Mom said, "You're leaving tomorrow, I got your tickets for tomorrow." I asked her where we were going to stay, and she answered, "Oh, I spoke with a friend of a friend who lives in New York and he'll be able to help you for a day or two or three. Talk to Mr. Luca, see if he can change your ticket."

We got to New York a week early and didn't know anybody. We were just stranded, literally. The man we were to meet in New York only knew to look for two girls who were carrying violins; he didn't know what we looked like.

Our second problem was we could not purchase tickets from New York to Houston because you needed dollars.

Besides, we just had about 25 or 50 bucks, something around there, we had little pocket money. The next day after we arrived in New York, I called Mr. Luca to see if maybe we could come to Houston sooner...to see if there was a way we could change tickets.

When he called back he asked me, "Do you think you are safe there, because it will cost much more money to change the ticket with three day's notice." I assured him we were safe so we stayed in New York for five days with this really nice gentleman.

We finally arrived in Houston where Mr. Luca and his wife waited for us at the airport. We went to his house where we stayed for the first two months, July and August. Once we were settled in we took off to the university [Rice] and Mr. Luca said, "We need to talk...I want to know if you really want to decide to stay in the States or are you just planning to do the festival and then go back?" You know, he wasn't sure. And I said, "No, we really want to stay, we really want to study with you." He said, "If doesn't make any sense to go to Aspen now, you can go here. So let's start and get your papers in order." So, that was the next step. We really need to get you settled legally. Our American visa was good for six months but our Romanian visa expired after a month.

EV: *What were some of the major problems you experienced when you first got here?*

RW: Although we had traveled a little bit before, it was still a little different. We were really growing up but we were still a little afraid. Like, a few weeks after we arrived, Mr. Luca had to go to Oregon where he had a festival. He said, "You are going to stay in the house with my parents, and in case of an emergency this is the telephone number you can call to ask for help if something happens in the house." So, one day the four of us were at lunch. Mr. Luca has this beautiful skylight over the dining room and in the middle of the day, just sitting there, part of it collapses. All the glass comes down, and we all just (makes the sound of gasps). So we had that telephone number, his friend that lived close by. She comes over and the first thing she says is, "Oh my God, what happened? Let's call the police." And my sister and I said, "No, you cannot call the police! (Laughter). No, we just applied for...you know, we want to stay here, we applied for asylum. No way, they're going to put us on a plane and send us back." "No, no," she tried to make us understand. "No you don't understand. This is just to make a report." We said, "NO!" So of course she called the police but we...the whole time the police were in the house looking around, we were in the closet hiding. We were literally in the closet with the door closed, you know...yup!

We were so scared. I said, "There is no way police can find out you are not legal and not send you back home." So what she [Miss June] did was she made a little joke and told the policemen, "I have two little girls from Romania, they are so scared [of you]...." Then for the next few days, when they were patrolling around there they saw us and waved at us and they'd yell, "Oh yeah, oh yeah, we are going to call immigration to tell them you are here." So you know, to us...we were so scared...we couldn't understand that the police had a different role here.

Mr. Luca Romanian was born in Romania and left when he was four or five years old and immigrated to Israel so he speaks Romanian. And then when he was 16, he made it into Julliard School of Music. Isaac Stern discovered him and brought him to New York.

EV: *Do you have a sense that you lost your childhood because of music?*

RW: No....We loved it so much that we never felt deprived of our childhood. Yeah, we had to work a little harder than the other kids but in the summer we would go to the beach for two or three weeks, we'd go skiing in the mountains. During the school year, though, we had to put away play time.

EV: *When you got here, were you still able to communicate with your parents?*

RW: Yes, we called them when we arrived and we called them when we applied for asylum. My mother lost her job...Both my parents were members of the Communist Party, so of course if you have a relative defect, [they] cannot force you to resign, but you are not a worthy member of the Communist Party if you allow that to happen. So, they were pressed to make sure they would find us, where we were and try to get us back home....And our parents would say, "We don't know where they are."

EV: *How long was it before your parents came over here? Did they have to wait until the collapse of the regime?*

RW: Only Mom had to wait until the collapse. My father came a year later. He was able to get a visa and come visit us with a visitor's visa...he bribed someone. This proved how at that time it was who you knew, who could help you in Romania under the Communist regime. What we did was we sent him a VCR. At that time there were not VCRs [in Romania]. You have to understand that the color TV came 10 years later after the States. So we sent a VCR and then it was delivered. Four hundred bucks at that time...four hundred bucks.

EV: *Were you supporting yourself by that time, were you making money?*

RW: No. Dad was still working. I mean, we would send little packages of coffee and stuff like that, but not actually money, no...we didn't have any money. We were lucky that Rice gave us a stipend to be able to pay our rent. I had a \$350 stipend and my sister had \$200. So with rent at \$400, whatever we had left was for food. We were very tight for six to eight months. Then once school started people started hearing about us and we started giggling a little bit, you know...quarters, weddings, slowly...

EV: *Slowly becoming capitalists...*

RW: (Laughs) Right....But we found out that without a social security card, we couldn't even get the stipend. Mr. Luca paid the rent for two or three months. Then the dean at the time, he has passed away, Michael Hemmings, he paid for the rent one time. They were anxious to give us the money but the paperwork was not there, they said, "Sorry, we just can't give you...we have the money but...." It took awhile to get all that settled at immigration....At one point, about six months into it, we really missed our parents, we were very close to them and ...my sister was 17 and I was 20....At one point my sister

even told my Mom, crying on the phone, "I'm going back. I can't take it any more."

That was actually triggered by the [Immigration & Naturalization Service] rejection only six months into the application. They came back and said, "You need to be deported...we can't give you asylum. You don't have enough reason for defecting. Your parents...if your father comes in tomorrow...he was the one that was tortured, he was the one on the black list." We tried to explain, "But we live in the same family, the same house, the whole family was affected." But I guess they didn't understand. We literally got a letter that said we had to be deported by a certain day. That's when Rice stepped up, and the dean and Mr. Luca said, "My God. No, no, no, this is not happening, this can't happen."

So they started calling TV stations and we were interviewed on television. They were trying to get community support and we started getting letters, affidavits of support, letters of support from Bela Karoli, who was a Romanian, and the musical director of the symphony...people who would write, "If you are sending them to Romania now, they are going to go straight to prison." Well, it all worked and our application was approved and we finally got our social security number.

I started my master's when I arrived and Mika entered undergraduate. We didn't speak enough English but we had to learn really fast and the first semester was really tough, you struggle all the time. I remember one of my first exams, the teacher said, "If there is something you don't know how to say in English, write that word or phrase down in Romanian and then come to my office with a dictionary. I just want to make sure you know the answer and we'll translate it together."

We got a lot of help like that, but I don't think it took us too long to really get a grip...We had in high school some English classes but not like we had private lessons at home. We could understand but it was harder to converse and speak right. I guess in six months we got it. We were watching TV, which helped, plus we were always talking to people around us in English so I guess we were forced to learn it.

In November of '89, I finished two years of my master's and this was my third year. Mr. Luca was already telling me, you can graduate now or you can graduate in May, so you can stay three or four years. And I asked him if I could audition for the symphony, and (laughs) he said, "Hmmm, you don't really need to audition right now, you can still wait till May. You don't need to right now." But I wanted to get my feet wet. Actually that year, '89, I auditioned for the Houston Ballet and I made it and I was playing there for a few months every year while I was in school. Finally, I went and auditioned for the symphony, I really didn't stress out over it because I knew I could stay for two more years if I wanted to be in school.

I was just lucky. I finished school in December and my job with the symphony started in January, right on January 3, I remember to this day, 1990. In May I graduated. My mother made it...in March 1990. This was after the revolution happened in December of 1989 so she was here for my graduation.

EV: *So from the Houston Symphony how did you get to Houston*

Continued on page 57

The Portrait of a Pianist

By Ernesto Valdés

Admittedly, any interview I would do of Abbey Simon would not be objective because I have known him as a friend for several years. I am ashamed to say, however, that several months had passed after our initial meeting before I learned of the magnitude of his professional standing.

Once equipped with his education in New York City and Philadelphia, he began to play with American orchestras. Although engagements were limited, the youthful Abbey Simon went to Europe in order to play with established orchestras whose audiences, weary of hearing the same soloists, yearned to hear fresh new talent. It was a call Abbey answered, although it kept him away from home for many years.

Eventually he came to play engagements on six continents from which he drew the highest accolades from critics throughout the world. To this day he keeps an active agenda of concerts around the world maintaining his permanent residence in Geneva, an apartment in New York City, and another in Houston, where he teaches piano at Moores School of Music, University of Houston.

Ernesto Valdés: Tell me something of your background.

Abbey Simon: I was born in 1922 in New York City...in Manhattan. My parents were of Russian origin but they both came here when they were very young.

EV: Were they musically inclined?

AS: Enormously musical but not professional musicians. My mother died in her 30s when I was maybe 15. The rest of the family were all doctors...if you got sick between Boston and Miami you will be treated [by family].

My son, Jonathan, who should have been a pianist because he is so naturally gifted, is a doctor in Geneva but he is a successful jazz pianist. He is a professional. Absolutely. As a matter of fact, I just left our jazz professor here, Noe Marmolejo, a record of my son.

EV: Do you have other children?

AS: No. My wife is in Geneva, and I have two grandchildren. As you know, I live in Geneva. I have three homes: I have one here [Houston], I have an apartment in New York City, but my home has been in Geneva for 50 years.

EV: Are your grandchildren musically gifted?

AS: Oh yes. They all play musical instruments. My 17-year-old granddaughter plays the piano and the harp. I believe every child should play an instrument. It has nothing to do with being a professional musician...a concert pianist or harpist or anything. I think it has been proven that any child who has a musical background does better in school as he progresses.

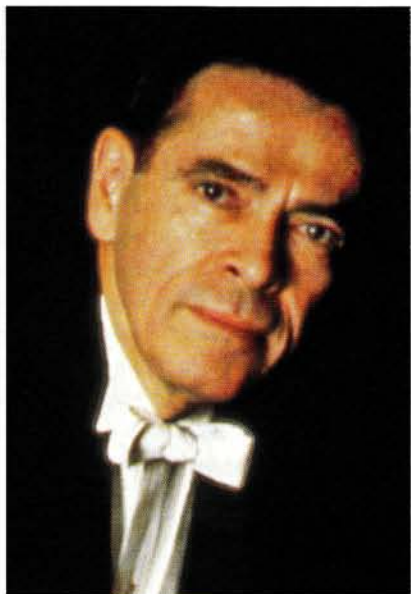
EV: What was your education like?

AS: My grade school education began in New York, but when I was 8 or 9 they saw I was very gifted in the piano, I had a facile gift. I enrolled at the Curtis Institute of Music, in Philadelphia, a remarkable school. I went off to school there and received the rest of my grade school education...We had English, we had history, math, and various languages. When I was at school, I could do whatever I wanted. I could go to bed at 2 o'clock in the morning, 3 o'clock in the morning. But when I came back to New York and school closed for the summer time, I had to become a 12-year old boy again. And while I loved my family dearly, I still thought of reasons to get back to Philadelphia early.

EV: So you went to high school there, too?

AS: Well, during that period...today they give degrees, like at Julliard, but in those days, they didn't, and you graduated when they felt you were ready to graduate. The result was that I graduated when I received the Naumburg Prize, which is a big competition, a very distinguished competition.

Today there are hundreds, maybe thousands, of music competitions in the



world. Every town here in the United States has a competition – whether it is Dallas, Fort Worth, Shreveport, New York – you name it. But in those days that was one of three competitions in the country and it was a very distinguished one to win. So when I won that, I was ceremoniously, or unceremoniously, graduated from the school. I was 19 or 20, something like that.

EV: *What was your first professional “gig,” as they say?*

AS: Oh, I don’t remember that. I remember playing my first professional “gig,” as you say, as a student. My first date was to play at the girl’s junior state penitentiary. Yes, it was a prison, a jail for under-aged girls.

And I remember sitting in what was then backstage and I was given this enormous steak to eat, which was very tough. There was this gigantic dog laying there and I gave it to the dog. I will never forget that.

EV: *Were you ever in the military?*

AS: Yes, but they lost.

EV: *They lost?*

AS: It is very funny. I went down to enlist in the Navy Symphony Orchestra but I couldn’t pass the physical. I went to the Air Force, and I couldn’t pass the physical. And then the Army took me, but then my disabilities came up. I was an asthmatic and very allergic...so I was discharged after about eight months. I was sick, I was really ill with asthma and terrible allergies.

Whatever it was, and I still suffer from the same thing. When I was a kid they once did scratch tests on me and according to the results I couldn’t wear wool, I couldn’t wear cotton. Everything came up positive. And when I went off to Curtis, my family was all alarmed because they said I couldn’t last a month. But from the day I arrived in Philadelphia, I never missed a day of school except for one severe reaction. Without that single period, I never missed a day.

EV: *Why did you pick Geneva as your home?*

AS: I was having career difficulties as a very young fellow. It wasn’t that I wasn’t successful, it was that I wasn’t getting the kind of engagements that I wanted to get. I played community concerts all over the United States and Canada, but my manager at one point said, “You need an international career. You aren’t getting any engagements anywhere here with the major orchestras.”

I couldn’t get any engagements in the United States so I went back three months later to play in the orchestras in England and Amsterdam. There was this 12-year period where I really didn’t set foot in the United States, well, 13 years, maybe it was more than that. The only time I set foot [in the United States] was when I wanted to come back because the Far East, Australia, New Zealand, they all opened up to me. So, I was staying and we were living in Paris and we had a newborn son.

EV: *So your professional career really got its boost in Europe?*

AS: It got boosted, yes. My first records were made in Europe.

EV: *I remember back in the late 50s and early 60s that one of the complaints about American artists was that one had to go to*

Europe in order to become known...the United States didn’t really have a taste for its own artists.

AS: Well, I don’t know how true that is. It just so happens that at that time, which was the post-war period, the Europeans had been hearing the same artists throughout the war years and the immediate post-war years and so if anybody had a great success, they were eager to embrace your name and make a new hero. As a result, Europeans discovered that Americans were really quite gifted.

Here, the opportunities were much smaller. Our orchestras in those days did not have 52-week employment for musicians. Most of them, with the exception of what we called a few “major symphonies,” had big seasons. The smaller orchestras like Indianapolis and New Orleans had seasons of 16, 20 weeks a year so to maintain their public [support] they had to have superstars of the day. They had to have Yasha Heifetz or Arthur Rubenstein. They might have a concert with no soloist at all. So by the time you got up to 16 concerts a year, there were limited opportunities for a young artist. I think it was in the 1960s that things began to change.

EV: *Other than the classics, what genre of music do you like?*

AS: I love jazz, but I love real jazz, the jazz of my infancy – the 1940s—you know, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Larry Benton, all those men.

While I do play jazz, I don’t play real jazz. When I was younger, I played in restaurants in the summer time. There was one in Fenton, New York where I played. I think it’s still there.

EV: *Do you have a favorite venue that you look forward to?*

AS: Whichever one I’m playing at.

EV: *Is there a favorite conductor you like to play with?*

AS: Dimitri Mitropoulos, one of the great conductors. One day, the phone rang and it was a friend of mine, he said, “What are you doing now?” I said, “Nothing.” “I’m coming over with Dimitri.” Well, I mean, I practically went into hysterics! I had no idea I would be auditioning for one of the outstanding conductors of my time. And 20 minutes later, he [my friend] came in with Dimitri Mitropoulos. And I, of course, met him at the door and sat him down in the chair. Mitropoulos started to laugh. He said, “Come on, sit down, relax. We’ll sit here and we’ll talk.” We talked for about one hour and then he said, “Well, play me something.” And I played for him for perhaps another hour. I remember after playing he invited me to dinner. Later, I got a letter from one of the big management firms who informed me of an invitation to play. Mitropoulos was a wonderful person and he was apparently wonderful to many young people.

So, if you ask my favorite...my heart belongs to Mitropoulos because he went to so much trouble for me.

You cannot stop loving to play with the Boston Symphony or the New York Philharmonic or the Philadelphia Orchestra. Any of those orchestras...American orchestras now are very good.

EV: *Have you done any composing?*

AS: You asked me that question years ago when I had come in late

to the bar of the restaurant—"Do you compose?" I answered you, "Yes, but the trouble with my compositions is they sound like other people's music, like Ravel and Chopin," and you looked up and said, "Those bastards." I've quoted that story all over the world. No, [I don't really compose] and the fault is because I was lazy.

EV: *How many students do you carry here at UH?*

AS: It varies. I only take the very talented ones.

EV: *Do you hand pick those students from auditions?*

AS: Yes, that goes for all the teachers here. We have very selective auditions and pick only the best students. Sometimes we say that so and so plays well enough to get into school but not as a piano major. If he wants to choose another instrument but not to play the piano. There is no messing around with that. As a matter of fact, I think our standards get higher and higher all the time.

To come play with me, you have to be a pianist. But, I have seen people who really did not study the piano very well, come in with a great love for music and with a different degree where they could teach music with love, enthusiasm. And you would hear them and say, what a pity that he didn't start earlier because he was so gifted.

EV: *Is there any danger in those kids getting burned out or is this the kind of creativity...*

AS: No. Nobody is driving these kids eight hours a day. I repeat. I mean, some of them practice one-half hour. They are young. Some of them are only 6 years old, 5 years old. And some of them practice more than one-half hour and they are already interested in music. The idea of the preparatory school is to surround them with other children who have talent to give them a basis of comparison with the other children.

EV: *How do you find these children? Do they audition?*

AS: No. I don't know how they get into the preparatory school. I don't know if they have to audition. I don't know how that works, except that there is no question that the school is very beneficial.

EV: *How did you wind up at UH?*

AS: I had taught at Julliard, one of the best schools, for a number of years but it got to be too big. I loved the school but I realized I wanted to teach in a university setting. By that time, Julliard was already at Lincoln Center. Milton Kaditz, who was the director of the school (UH, Moores School of Music), asked me to come here and he sort of chased me around. In



Abbey Simon performing at his piano.

Photos courtesy Gurtman & Murtha Artist Management

world. Every town here in the United States has a competition – whether it is Dallas, Fort Worth, Shreveport, New York – you name it. But in those days that was one of three competitions in the country and it was a very distinguished one to win. So when I won that, I was ceremoniously, or unceremoniously, graduated from the school. I was 19 or 20, something like that.

EV: *What was your first professional “gig,” as they say?*

AS: Oh, I don’t remember that. I remember playing my first professional “gig,” as you say, as a student. My first date was to play at the girl’s junior state penitentiary. Yes, it was a prison, a jail for under-aged girls.

And I remember sitting in what was then backstage and I was given this enormous steak to eat, which was very tough. There was this gigantic dog laying there and I gave it to the dog. I will never forget that.

EV: *Were you ever in the military?*

AS: Yes, but they lost.

EV: *They lost?*

AS: It is very funny. I went down to enlist in the Navy Symphony Orchestra but I couldn’t pass the physical. I went to the Air Force, and I couldn’t pass the physical. And then the Army took me, but then my disabilities came up. I was an asthmatic and very allergic...so I was discharged after about eight months. I was sick, I was really ill with asthma and terrible allergies.

Whatever it was, and I still suffer from the same thing. When I was a kid they once did scratch tests on me and according to the results I couldn’t wear wool, I couldn’t wear cotton. Everything came up positive. And when I went off to Curtis, my family was all alarmed because they said I couldn’t last a month. But from the day I arrived in Philadelphia, I never missed a day of school except for one severe reaction. Without that single period, I never missed a day.

EV: *Why did you pick Geneva as your home?*

AS: I was having career difficulties as a very young fellow. It wasn’t that I wasn’t successful, it was that I wasn’t getting the kind of engagements that I wanted to get. I played community concerts all over the United States and Canada, but my manager at one point said, “You need an international career. You aren’t getting any engagements anywhere here with the major orchestras.”

I couldn’t get any engagements in the United States so I went back three months later to play in the orchestras in England and Amsterdam. There was this 12-year period where I really didn’t set foot in the United States, well, 13 years, maybe it was more than that. The only time I set foot [in the United States] was when I wanted to come back because the Far East, Australia, New Zealand, they all opened up to me. So, I was staying and we were living in Paris and we had a newborn son.

EV: *So your professional career really got its boost in Europe?*

AS: It got boosted, yes. My first records were made in Europe.

EV: *I remember back in the late 50s and early 60s that one of the complaints about American artists was that one had to go to*

Europe in order to become known...the United States didn’t really have a taste for its own artists.

AS: Well, I don’t know how true that is. It just so happens that at that time, which was the post-war period, the Europeans had been hearing the same artists throughout the war years and the immediate post-war years and so if anybody had a great success, they were eager to embrace your name and make a new hero. As a result, Europeans discovered that Americans were really quite gifted.

Here, the opportunities were much smaller. Our orchestras in those days did not have 52-week employment for musicians. Most of them, with the exception of what we called a few “major symphonies,” had big seasons. The smaller orchestras like Indianapolis and New Orleans had seasons of 16, 20 weeks a year so to maintain their public [support] they had to have superstars of the day. They had to have Yasha Heifetz or Arthur Rubenstein. They might have a concert with no soloist at all. So by the time you got up to 16 concerts a year, there were limited opportunities for a young artist. I think it was in the 1960s that things began to change.

EV: *Other than the classics, what genre of music do you like?*

AS: I love jazz, but I love real jazz, the jazz of my infancy – the 1940s—you know, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Larry Benton, all those men.

While I do play jazz, I don’t play real jazz. When I was younger, I played in restaurants in the summer time. There was one in Fenton, New York where I played. I think it’s still there.

EV: *Do you have a favorite venue that you look forward to?*

AS: Whichever one I’m playing at.

EV: *Is there a favorite conductor you like to play with?*

AS: Dimitri Mitropoulos, one of the great conductors. One day, the phone rang and it was a friend of mine, he said, “What are you doing now?” I said, “Nothing.” “I’m coming over with Dimitri.” Well, I mean, I practically went into hysterics! I had no idea I would be auditioning for one of the outstanding conductors of my time. And 20 minutes later, he [my friend] came in with Dimitri Mitropoulos. And I, of course, met him at the door and sat him down in the chair. Mitropoulos started to laugh. He said, “Come on, sit down, relax. We’ll sit here and we’ll talk.” We talked for about one hour and then he said, “Well, play me something.” And I played for him for perhaps another hour. I remember after playing he invited me to dinner. Later, I got a letter from one of the big management firms who informed me of an invitation to play. Mitropoulos was a wonderful person and he was apparently wonderful to many young people.

So, if you ask my favorite...my heart belongs to Mitropoulos because he went to so much trouble for me.

You cannot stop loving to play with the Boston Symphony or the New York Philharmonic or the Philadelphia Orchestra. Any of those orchestras...American orchestras now are very good.

EV: *Have you done any composing?*

AS: You asked me that question years ago when I had come in late

1978, I guess, he invited me here for one day to come and “see for yourself.” I had known him for a long time so I came. I stopped off, and he showed me what I would have to do, and what my duties were and I have been here ever since.

When I decided we should organize the Houston International Piano Festival, Milton, who died a few years ago, helped me enormously. I mean, I had the grandiose idea of starting this piano festival but if it had been left in my hands, the detail, the nitty-gritty, it probably would have never seen the light of day but with the assistance of Miriam Strain, it suddenly came into fruition and it has been here now for over 20 years or so.

EV: *Is the goal of your teaching more technique and mechanics?*

AS: No, it is not that. I am teaching first and foremost an interpretation of what is on the printed page. In other words, some of them think that because a composer writes notes on a page that that is all there is to it. But it isn't that. I mean, we can all recite a Shakespearean speech and it is the same. Put another way, we can all read the Bible but everybody reads it and understands it in a different way. The same thing happens with the printed page of music. The notes on the page are just the first step, how we get to understand them within the piece of music is another. In other words, if you see a forte, an F forte, it doesn't mean you have to play it like you are hitting someone in the nose. If you see a pianissimo, it doesn't mean a pianissimo that you don't project.

Pianissimo to me, at the piano, may be the most challenging if I am playing on stage of Carnegie Hall, which has 3,000 seats. That pianissimo has to be heard by the student who sacrificed his meager funds. Or, if an actor in a drama whispers into the ear of his beloved, “I love you,” the guy in the last seat in the theater also has to hear, “I love you.” That is an element which people in the theater, people in music, in opera call “projection.” The public wants to love what a performer is doing and if they are not being reached by the music they may not know how beautifully he may be playing.

I have always had friends who were artists, not because I pretend to be one of them but because I envy them. Over the years I have found they have one thing in common: an incessant urge to convert the intangible into impressions the rest of us can grasp. Thus from notes inked on paper in a distant time, the pianist lends his interpretation in a way that carries us into worlds beyond us or, perhaps, within us. As Abbey reminds us, however, it is not the degree of the artist's mechanical perfection that moves us; it is the artist's interpretation that illuminates the music.

*They said, “You have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are.”
The man replied, “Things as they are
Are changed upon a blue guitar.”*

“The Man With the Blue Guitar”
Wallace Stevens, poet (1879-1955) 🎨

A woman and her violin *continued from page 53*



The Houston Symphony Fidelis Quartet, in front of Carnegie Hall, June 10, 2005. Left to right: Cristian Macelaru, Jefferey Butler, Ilgin Aka, Mihaela, Rodica and Wei Jiang.

Baptist University?

RW: In 1995, I got a call from the dean, I was in school at the time. Dr. Ann Debour, and she got a referral from the dean who used to be there who was a conductor, Dr. Bob Linder. He knew of me from performing with him and he recommended me to Dr. Debour who was looking for a violin professor; they had only one student that year. So she called and I said, “Sure, I'd like to give it a try.” I started with one student in '95 and now I have six. So, you know, we are trying to build this within the department.

EV: *Tell me how “Tre Voci.”*

RW: Professor John Henderson at HBU, and the cello professor, and I started playing together and we formed “Tre Voci.” We went to New York in 2003 and had our debut there. I made my Carnegie Hall debut there in 2002 with John on the piano and Tre Voce. Then I went back in 2004 with another pianist friend of mine. In 2005, Fidelis Quartet, which is a quartet from the Symphony, which includes my sister, my cellist from Tre Voci, Jefferey Butler, are going to New York to make our debut as a quartet.

EV: *Have you ever returned to Romania?*

RW: Four times. I went back starting in '93, right after the revolution. It was sad because the people who were still there have a hard life. In a way, during communism everybody was the same, everybody had enough food, nobody was starving. Everybody had jobs, right now, it is very hard, there is very rich and very poor, there is no middle class. You know, it's shocking. It's very hard for us, I realize going back, to talk to my old teachers or friends that are still living there and they somehow expect a little bit from you, from us coming from the West, to give them presents, or money to help... It's tough.

My sister and I are very lucky to be where we are today and of course I'd like to thank Mr. Luca for bringing us to the States, but to also thank our parents for bringing us to the level where we are now and everything that we are and for our education from such an early age, you know, in music the earlier you start the further you get. Anyway, I'll try to make a career out of it. It's really hard, but that's what I love to do. 🎨

THE ORANGE SHOW *continued from 26*

would come less than two years later.²⁸ Oshman's enthusiasm helped her convince an eclectic mix of twenty-two academics, rock musicians, artists, architects, and business people to donate funds to buy the Show. On September 15, 1980, Marilyn Oshman, Trustee for the donors, purchased the Orange Show.²⁹

The donors determined that a community-based private foundation was needed to make the Show an integral part of Houston's culture. On December 3, 1980, the Orange Show Foundation was incorporated. A board of directors was chosen and the processes begun to obtain tax-exempt status, insurance, and to search for grants and funding. The earliest funds came from private individuals and from the sale of the 1982 Houston International Festival posters which featured the Orange Show.³⁰ In the fall of 1982, the foundation received its first grant from the Atlantic Richfield Foundation. Through its existence, the foundation has operated the Show with no major debts except mortgages; virtually all money received has been used for programming or maintenance.³¹

Initially, the Orange Show was a hazard for visitors with its structural problems, faulty handrails, and dangerous steps. Restoration was needed immediately to return the Show to its full glory while saving its integrity and protecting it for the future. One of the first difficulties facing the foundation was acquisition of a building permit because the structure was outside the classification scheme for permits. It was finally classified as a cultural monument. Before the work began, volunteers catalogued all the items in the Show. Since McKissack had used hundreds of colors, all metal surfaces were color-coded. In addition to painting, McKissack's unfinished wooden boat was given a metal superstructure and floated. Walls were braced, the rotted wood and plaster ceilings were replaced by galvanized steel, and new awnings and flags were installed.³² The exceptional results prompted the American Association of Architects to honor Barry Moore, who lead the restoration effort. Both the American Institute of Architects Journal and Texas Architect featured the restoration in articles. A subsequent yearly maintenance program has been a success. A visitor to the Show in December 2000 noted that it looked the same as it had when he first saw it during McKissack's life.³³

A ribbon-cutting ceremony on September 25, 1982, initiated a two day fund-raising party before the official "unpeeling" on October 9. A year later, a second benefit was also held at the Show. The overcrowding at both benefits prompted the board to institute a membership program and a yearly gala. Since the galas are held within days of Halloween, guests are encouraged to dress in costume, and the orange is, of course, a decorating and menu staple. The featured entertainers are usually blues legends. Sometimes a raffle or unusual game raised additional funds. In 2000, self-taught artist Mr. Imagination donated a charming bottle cap covered guitar to be auctioned.³⁴ While the money raised by the gala is significant, production costs are also high with efforts made to save expenses. The budget for the first galas could not include funds to buy the expensive party favors usually provided to guests by other non-profit organizations. Instead, in true Orange Show fashion, each year volunteers craft handmade, sometimes goofy, gifts such as bead encrusted shoes, giant sunglasses, and picture frames.³⁵

Continuous operation required a permanent director.

In January, 1983, the board hired Susanne Theis, who had been program coordinator in the office of the chancellor of the University of Houston. The number of other staff members has varied and have predominantly been women. Staff members have always been overworked, each having to perform several tasks. To meet with volunteers who have their own jobs, the staff is often required to work evenings and weekends. This stress has caused several resignations.³⁶ Despite the overwork, the staff seems very proud to work at the Show, maintaining a sense of humor, joking with each other, with visitors, and returning to attend events even after their departures. Some board members work closely with the staff and participate significantly in the various committees. The board provides policy guidance, makes all major programming decisions, performs strategic planning, and assists in acquiring remuneration. To provide programs that benefit not only the foundation, but also the city of Houston, people with diverse community or ethnic interests are sought as board members.³⁷ Volunteers are essential to help with the annual Show maintenance, to guide tours, conduct art workshops, and ensure successful events. The media are also an integral part of the foundation's success by keeping Orange Show activities before the eyes of the public.³⁸

Fulfilling one of McKissack's wishes, many activities sponsored by the foundation are directed toward children. Programs are evaluated to determine whether they would meet with McKissack's approval.³⁹ Youngsters have been entranced by puppet shows, concerts for children, story-telling, and a tribute to dinosaurs in honor of the dinosaur diorama built into the Show. The programs have become increasingly varied, accentuating education and interactive activities, specifically hands-on workshops where children and adults, guided by artists, are encouraged to experience the creative process in an uncritical environment. Events often center around presentations of unusual or ignored art forms, especially those that showcase the artist in everyone. Children's classes have included dancing, making decorated envelopes, books, masks, jewelry, collages, handmade percussion instruments, and wearable art from junk. Programs for youth have helped "fill in the gaps created by cuts in funding to the arts and elementary schools."⁴⁰ To assist and encourage educators to teach folk and visionary art in the classroom, staff members have presented numerous workshops to Houston Independent School District teachers. Children's programs have also been shown on Houston's public television channel.⁴¹ Special programs have been developed for students attending Harper Alternative School for juvenile offenders. Recognizing the need to combat increasing gang violence in its community, in 1994 the foundation began an effort to reach the at-risk youth in the neighborhoods surrounding the Show. A long-term program to paint murals on buildings scarred by graffiti has successfully helped many local youth relinquish gang activities. The teens learn problem solving, self-discipline and teamwork, begin to see themselves as contributors to their community, and improve their school grades.⁴²

Education programs for adults encourage self-expression and self-esteem, but public interest is usually first captured simply by the fun. Music has been the focus of numerous programs. One of the more unusual performances was given in 1988 by the Austin group Liquid Mice, who played a multifarious collection of traditional instruments together with percussion and stringed instruments they had "made from found objects like bicycle wheels and washing machine parts." In October 1993, one of many multi-



The St. Louis Banana Bike Brigade entries at the 1997 Art Car Ball.

Tom LaFaver 1997

cultural programs was a celebration of Sukkot, the Jewish festival commemorating the wandering of the Israelites. In August of the next year, Taoist monks from the Teen How Temple blessed the Show with goodwill and prosperity.⁴³

The Foundation supports the scholarly aspects of folk and visionary art study by publishing articles, maintaining a library, and working with other educators, local universities, and scholars. The newsletter includes scholarly articles on visionary art, and information about environments in areas other than Houston.⁴⁴ Lectures offered by the foundation have provided the public with an opportunity to hear first-hand from scholars. In 1988, Dr. Robert Bishop, director of the Museum of American Folk Art, presented the historical perspective of visionary environments. In October 1997, curator Genevieve Roulin presented a survey of the 5,000 objects held in the Collection de l'Art Brut of Lausanne, Switzerland. The museum holdings include one of McKissack's birds. Films, such as the series *Visions of Paradise*, documenting several American visionary environments, also provide an avenue to explain and foster appreciation for visionary environments.⁴⁵ Foundation members have been invited to speak at other visionary environments, at symposiums, and to write articles. In 1992, Theis was the second presenter for *Fantastic Spaces*, the first lecture series produced by the Chicago-based Intuit: Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art. Jennifer McKay was co-author of an article on art cars for the British outsider art magazine *Raw Vision*. In 1998, thanks to the work of board members John and Stephanie Smither, the foundation was one of the hosts of the eleventh annual conference of the Folk Art Society of America.⁴⁶

In the early 1980s, the steadily increasing number of visitors prompted the foundation to publish the *Visitors Guide*. The staff collected information on McKissack's life, writing to everyone

they could find who had known him. They then produced a 1986 exhibit chronicling McKissack's life and revealing his construction techniques. Coinciding with the exhibit was *What Did the Neighbors Think?* a presentation by Rice University Professor Dr. William Martin.⁴⁷ The year 1986 also saw the introduction of two major programs. The foundation's art car, the Fruitmobile, had been created in 1984 to be auctioned at the gala. When the purchasers donated it back to the foundation, it became a "roving ambassador of goodwill." Inspired by the Fruitmobile, on June 29, 1986, the Foundation held a Road Show that featured 12 painted and decorated automobiles including lowriders, pin

stripping demonstrations,

and workshops for children. The Road Show drew 1,400 admirers and was broadcast on WFAA-TV and National Public Radio. The event was such a success that the Houston International Festival asked the Orange Show Foundation to organize an artist's parade for the 1988 festival. When the foundation proposed a parade of art mobiles, the festival agreed. On April 9, 1988, the world's first Art Car Parade, 40 vehicles, plus a few marching bands, cruised the streets as part of the Houston International Festival.⁴⁸ Roadside Attractions: The Artist Parade, more popularly known as the Art Car Parade, has grown to an entire weekend of events with over 1500 participants and 255 "decorated, augmented or otherwise embellished" vehicles from 36 states, watched by 250,000 spectators, and has captured the interest of media worldwide.⁴⁹

While the number of entries in the first parade was small, several well-known artists participated. Dallas resident Willard Watson, "The Texas Kid," was renowned for his art car and glittering costumes. Susan Stone of Austin drove her Holstein Car featuring a grill made of pink lips.⁵⁰ In the following years, cars have arrived from Canada and Mexico, and caravans of art cars have traveled from California, picking up additional vehicles on the trek to Houston. Many parade spectators return in later years to drive art cars of their own.⁵¹ Like the Orange Show, art cars are highly original, unique works of art. Vehicles that have participated in the parade are generally awash in color, covered in beads, glass, toys, feathers, tennis balls, tile mosaics, beans, mirrors, or living grass, and many feature gyrating movement. Some of the loudest cheers are given to contraptions, motorized sculpture on wheels no longer recognizable as autos. Virtually every parade contains entries making political statements. The 1991 Exxon Valdez protested the damage done to the Alaska coast by the Exxon Valdez. Some partici-

THE ORANGE SHOW continued from 59

pants have chosen to express themselves with a non-auto entry. The banana, giraffe, cow, hot dog on a bun, and other transformed bicycles of the St. Louis Banana Bike Brigade are frequent parade participants.⁵² Vehicles compete for monetary prizes and trophies. Judges, usually artists, museum curators, or art patrons, decide all winners except the participants' and people's choice. The miniscule budget for trophies for the first parade inspired the foundation staff to create their own by decorating old bowling trophies with dried macaroni, and found objects, creating awards as unique as the cars they honored. Each year since, the public is invited to participate in trophy-making workshops.⁵³

In addition to the parade, Art Car Weekend includes a series of other events. In 1990, the day before the parade, an impromptu procession of cars visited the Texas Medical Center. This mini-parade has become an annual event much appreciated by the hospitals, schools, community centers, and assisted living centers that are visited. The Art Car Symposium was begun in 1991 to promote public dialogue about art cars. Discussions have included the motivations for modifying vehicles, the effect of an art car on the lives of the owners, and the social impacts of the art car phenomenon. In 1988, the out-of-town participants in the parade were welcomed with a party. This party evolved into the first Art Car Ball, held on May 1, 1991. While the entry fees partially defrayed the parade costs, the balls also provided the public an opportunity to examine each vehicle closely, although without the motion that adds to the drama of many cars during the parade. The Art Car Ball was probably the only ball held in a parking garage. By the late 1990s, up to 6,000 exuberant people were attending the party, which featured live music, food, drinks, and unique entertainers. In 2002, when the ball was replaced by a free party held after the parade, art car artists produced a ball of their own. Two years later, the foundation's party moved to the streets of downtown Houston on the evening before the parade.⁵⁴

As several teachers have attested, students who create art cars learn problem solving, self-discipline, teamwork, the ability to compromise and resolve conflicts, as well as color theory and design. Art teacher Rebecca Bass believed that participation in the art car project kept several of her pupils from dropping out. Inclusion in the Houston Art Car Parade increases the students' self-esteem and sense of community involvement. Recognizing the benefits of student created art cars, the Foundation published *Start-Up Advice: The How Tos of Art Cars*, given to over 300 Houston area schools and libraries.⁵⁵ Due in part to the popularity of the parade, Houston has evolved an entire art car subculture including an Art Car Klub, Art Car Museum, and numerous events and parties.⁵⁶

The art car phenomenon has spread throughout the United States and the world. The success of the Houston parade prompted Minneapolis, San Francisco, Atlanta, Portland, St. Louis, Chicago, Tallahassee, and other cities to institute their own art

car parades. In 1992, two art cars created by Louis Perrin, whose *Quetzalcoatl* later won first prize in the 1993 Houston parade, intrigued audiences during a parade in Mulhouse, France. Four art cars from the 2000 parade were displayed at the world's second largest motor show, the Essen Motor Show in Germany.⁵⁷ While the media usually emphasizes the fun of Art Car Weekend, ignoring the importance of self-expression and artistic achievement, the excitement generated by the mobile wonders is a tribute to the artists and a testament to the success of the event.

The second major program begun in 1986, the aptly named Eyeopeners Tour, initially was an effort to inform the public about visionary environments. Because visionary environments do not fit into the standard art classifications, board members, staff, and volunteers had collected information on similar sites to provide a context for the Show and to establish its importance. They discovered that Houston has an unusually large number of visionary environments. Since these environments are fragile constructions and families often cannot maintain them after their creators die, the foundation began to document the sites it discovered. This documentation in many cases outlives the creation itself. Once a site is identified, both the environment and the artist are documented. Photographs, video tapes, interviews, and secondary source material, including newspaper and magazine articles, are collected.



Detail of the Frog Mobile hood, by Liz Hornick and the High School for Law Enforcement, winner of the 1999 First Place Youth category.

Tom laFaver 1999

Documentation of folk art sites has continued and increased in professionalism. A library was established to house the books and other literature collected during the years of research. Part of the library was a database of local visionary environments that eventually expanded to a world-wide list. The documents in the library have been used by educators as well as researchers from the *New York Times*, *Time-Life Books*, and *USA Today*, by museums such as The San Francisco Craft and Folk Art Museum, the Institute for Texas Cultures, and by students from local universities and high schools. When planning its display of self-taught artists, Texas Children's Hospital researched the artists using material in the library.⁵⁸

The Eyeopeners Committee continues the search for visionary environments, to bring the public to the environments,


and to foster appreciation and understanding of the art inherent in each environment. The brochures supplied with the tours describe Eyeopeners as "places that make you stop and look, and look again!" While not everyone may appreciate all the sites visited, participant responses make it clear that few people walk away without learning something new, or rethinking how they view the world. The Beer Can house is one of the most popular stops. John Milkovich, tired of mowing the grass, covered his front yard in cement into which he set thousands of marbles. 50,000 flat beer cans cover the house sides. Third World was a popular environment created by the late "Fan Man," Bob Harper, so named because he incorporated numerous box fans in his creations. With little money, but enormous ingenuity, Harper created sculptures from the debris tossed out by his neighbors. Part of the charm of Harper's environment was that each person could see different things in the various assemblages. Unfortunately, upon his death, his environment was dismantled. While most environments are created outdoors, Grace Greene converted the entire interior of her 15-room house into a spectacular memorial to her daughter. The quintessential pack rat, Greene mixed everyday objects such as food bottles, buttons and shoes, with items purchased at antique sales, and fashioned shadow boxes, mannequins covered in buttons and jewelry, and a wreath from old toys. One of the most memorable items was a shawl created by sewing together hundreds of pieces of antique lace.⁵⁹

Occasionally, the foundation has been asked to help save a site. When D. D. Smalley's Hyde Park Miniature Museum had to be removed from its original home, volunteers documented and moved all of the 1,620 items which had each been meticulously labeled and catalogued by Smalley. Another emergency rescue saved the work of Pasadena, Texas artist, Ida Kingsbury, whose yard sculptures were subsequently shown at an exhibit at the Houston Children's Museum and the Webb Folk Art Gallery in Waxahachie, Texas.⁶⁰ The foundation has assisted artists on numerous occasions. When the house of Cleveland Turner, the "Flower Man", was set afire by vandals, the discouraged artist tore the colorful façade from the front of his house and uprooted his garden. The foundation held a fund raiser, requesting donations of plants, bulbs, and seeds to help him start a garden at a new home. When a 1992 fire destroyed Bob Harper's house and killed his mother, the foundation set up a fund to help him acquire new lodgings, and rebuild his sculpture garden.⁶¹

Eventually, the committee decided to use the tours to

encourage an appreciation of Houston's history and ethnic diversity. Participants have gone to places of worship, cemeteries, the houses of extreme collectors, ethnic grocery stores, and blues clubs. The popularity of the tours prompted the committee to look for sites outside Houston, such as Galveston, Beaumont, and the churches of Fayette County, Texas. The first out-of-state trip, in May 1995, went to many well-known sites in various parts of the South, including St. EOM's Land of Pasaquan in Georgia, the Ave Maria Grotto in Alabama, and the Folk Art Center of the High Museum in Atlanta. Since then, a yearly tour has been given to sites outside Texas. On New Years, 1999, the Eyeopeners tours became international when a group traveled to Xilitla, Mexico, to visit the environment created by Edward James. When organizations began to request individual Eyeopener tours, the Foundation responded with Private Eyes Tours, tailored to meet the interests of each group.⁶²

Initially, the staff worked from Oshman's property. In the mid-1980s, the increased workload and the need to house the library prompted the foundation to search for new headquarters, finally settling on a dilapidated frame house at 2402 Munger, across the street from the Orange Show. To celebrate both the 10th anniversary of the original opening and the renovation of the new offices, a party at the Show featured entertainment originally planned by McKissack: ballroom dance music was played while the steamboat circled the pond carrying bales of cotton upon which sat battery-powered clacking monkeys, and a beautiful woman played an organ.⁶³ By late 1999, when the small office had become too cramped for the number of staff, the library, and workshops, the foundation rented the property immediately behind the office as an Annex.⁶⁴ In 2003, the foundation changed its name to the Orange Show Center for Visionary Arts to better reflect its increasing scope. One of the expansions was the purchase of the Beer Can House to save it from potential demolition by developers constructing town homes in the neighborhood.⁶⁵

The foundation continues to ensure the continuity of the Show while maintaining the unique perspective that the Show inspires. As the first organization of its type, the foundation has served as a model for an increasing number of similar groups.⁶⁶ From its inception, the foundation planned to make the Show a community resource. It has become not only an important part of the Houston art culture, but also a strong force for art education in the city. Its many programs have increased public understanding and appreciation of visionary art. Its chief outreach program, the yearly Art Car Parade, has been a catalyst for the phenomenal growth of art cars throughout the United States and the world. One can argue that building the Orange Show helped McKissack work through the pain and humiliation that he felt when he left Fort Gaines and that the resulting structure is one man's triumph over adversity. As such, the Orange Show is not just a physical object, but is also a symbol of dedication, self-belief, creative effort, and healing. 



Third World, a visionary environment created by "Fan Man" Bob Harper.

David Beasley 1992

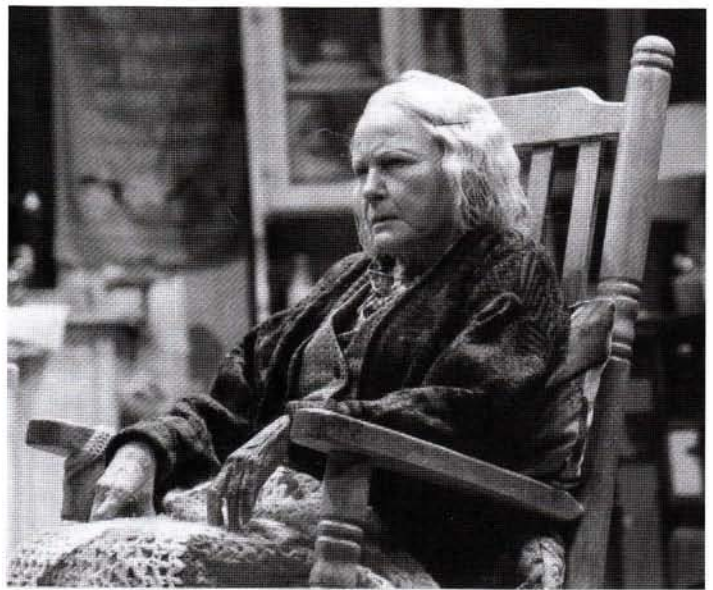
exit but one egress and exit." He said, "You can't stay here." So fortunately, Ms. Vance had encountered some wonderful people like Vivian and Bob Alford and Joe Marks and just a lot of people in the early days, and they found the little fan factory – 709 Berry Avenue. And they renovated it completely and built an arena theater there that seated 214 people. Ms. Vance had studied with Margot Jones. Margot was very interested in theater in the round. And so, when Ms. Vance built her theater, she, of course, built a theater in the round. And that is why we have a theater downstairs.

PJ: When did the Alley move from Berry Avenue?

BF: We were scheduled to close in 1965 but I think we did one more season, maybe until 1966. We actually had an eight month rehearsal period, if you can believe that, for *Galileo*, which was the opening show here in this building. And we opened in November of 1968 here. And ever since. The rest is history. But I'll tell you, I've always said, in a person's lifetime, you should only open one theater. Don't make a practice of it. It is just horrendous. I have moved my personal belongings enough that that doesn't . . . well, it would terrify me now because I have lived in that same house since 1965. That is 41 years. You could collect a lot of stuff in that length of time. So, I would hate to move now. But to move into a new theater, that was rough.

About the second year that we were in this building, Ms. Vance came to me and she said, "I need one voice that I can talk to. I need a production manager." I said, "Ms. Vance, there are so many things I do not know about technical theater." She said, "It doesn't matter. You can learn and I've got to have somebody I can trust," because she knew that I was not intimidated. We had a wonderful technical director – he stood over six-feet-two in his stocking feet and he always wore cowboy boots. So, here he was, six-feet-four, and I would come down there and I was supposed to be giving him a lecture on why did you build something, so and so, and I am talking to his belly button because he is towering up over there and looking down on me. But I wasn't afraid of them. I didn't mind. And most of the time, they were patient with the "little corporal," because they knew that if I was down there, I was there in place of Ms. Vance. And she was wonderful because I knew she was behind me. In fact, she told me that, she said, "Whatever decision you make, I will back you on that decision, but I may have to talk to you in private about it later on if I don't agree with it. But in front of the cast and everybody else, I will back you on it." And it is a wonderful thing to be that young thrown into . . . and to have that kind of support. It made me feel secure. But it always made you stop and think what would Nina do if she were standing here? It is like when we first moved into this building in 1968, the Stage Hands Union wanted to get a foot in the door, and they came to several of the technicians here and said, 'If you will go out on strike, we will force the Alley Theater to become a union house.' So, they did. This was during the production of *Galileo*.

That is the first year, the first production. So, I was having



Bettye Fitzpatrick as Mag Folan in *The Beauty Queen in Leenane*.

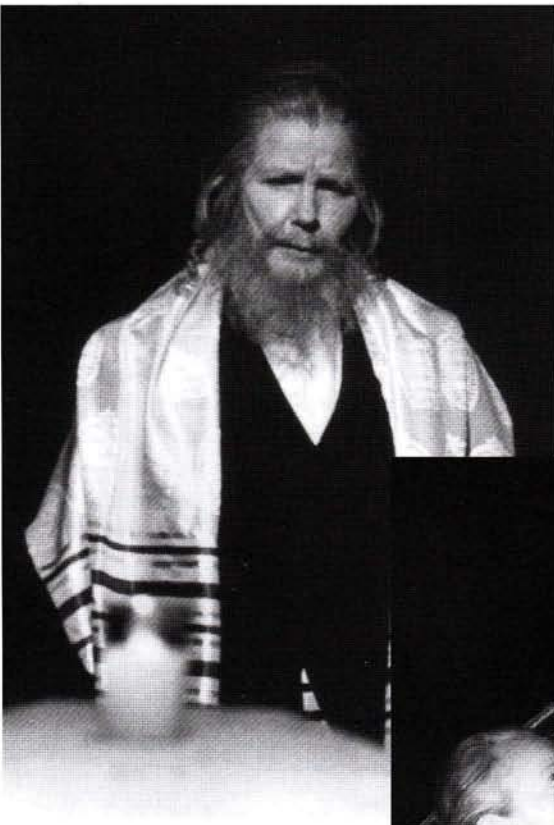
Photo by Bruce Bennett

dinner across the way, fixing to come back and run the show and one of the kids came in from the prop department and said, "Bettye, you'd better get to the theater because they are going out on strike." I said, "What on earth are you talking about?" They said, "The union has lured some of our technicians out and they're going to picket the building." Now, number one, can actors cross their picket line? If we can't cross the picket line, there will be no show tonight. And so, I got back over here and I called our business manager and said, "I am going to call our union representative and find out if the actors can cross that picket line because we are going to be picketed," but the people on that picket line were not members yet. So, they were only promised membership if they would walk off the job. Well, so, I called Ms. Vance and I said, "Ms. Vance, you've got to come down here and explain to the audience that we are going to be playing *Galileo* in work lights because none of us know how to run that light board. There wasn't a soul around here that could do anything with it." And she said, "Does it have to be me?" And I said, "Yes, you are the only one in the whole city of Houston that has earned the privilege to stand there on that stage and say forgive us but we cannot turn the light board on." So, she came down, and oh, they were so delighted to have her there on stage. They would have watched it in total blackout! They were just thrilled to death. And by the next night, well, we had a little bit more than work lights but it took us some time to overcome that.

We didn't negotiate. The show went down at 11 o'clock that night and we had a lawyer in who was up on rules and regulations. He told us, he said, "The only thing that you can do is to replace everyone that went out, replacing them by the next work day. Then you say to the powers that be that we had to replace them in order for the theater to keep running, to function. We cannot close down. We have tickets sold." So, we did. We stayed up all night calling people, finding them. And by 10 o'clock the next morning, we had them all replaced.

PJ: Did it ever unionize?

BF: Never. We have union members from Actors Equity, from



Bettye Fitzpatrick as Rabbi Isidor Chemelwitz (above) and as Hannah Pitt (right) with Shelley Williams as an angel in *Angels in America*.



Stage Directors and Choreographers, and we have designers that are union members. In New York, you would have all of your seamstresses, your carpenters, your box office people – there is a union for everybody. I was at a cocktail party in Washington, D.C. and this old boy was over there holding court and he is laughing, he said, “Ha, ha, ha, we have made it to where a theater can’t rehearse in New York anymore, we’ve made it so expensive.” And I said, “What are you doing?” He said, “I’m a union member. I’m a stage hand.” I said, “Did you ever think that you might be killing the goose that laid the golden egg? If they can’t rehearse in New York, who says they are going to come into New York after they rehearse in Philadelphia?” He said, “Oh, they’ll come in. New York is where it is at. If they want any recognition, they’ll come in eventually and we’ll be there waiting for them.” Well, I didn’t appreciate him.

The union has been wonderful. I worked with union people here in the city of Houston and other theaters. They are wonderful people. Hard-working and dedicated to their craft. In fact, we got many telegrams back when the vice-presidential debates [1976] were held in Houston and they contacted the Alley Theater and they wanted to use our stage.

We had to tear down the set for *Stye of the Blind Pig* – now, I can remember that – and put it back up. I know when we got those telegrams from people saying to the politi-

cians, especially to the Women’s League of Voters, ‘how dare you take the vice-presidential debates into a notorious anti-union house.’ And we very carefully sent telegrams back to all of the people concerned saying, ‘we are not anti-union, we are simply nonunion.’ We didn’t fight the union except by filling the positions of the people that went out on strike. So that we could continue. But it cost a lot of money to join the union. And since we are a repertory, we have a company of actors. We hire people to come down here and stay – that is where we want the money to go instead of hiring technicians to run our shows. But anyway, it has worked out very nicely for the Alley Theater. And if we need to go over to Theater Under The Stars and borrow some expertise or some technician, they would

come over and we would be more than happy to pay their salary to help us out if we needed their knowledge.

PJ: Are there still repertory members who help out with the stage production or has it become much more . . .

BF: Well, sometimes when you are doing a show, I think there was a little bit of this going on during *Pillow Man*; that if the production is so heavy that you don’t have enough technicians on the staff, or enough production assistants to move the set, you might have to ask an actor to move a chair, move a prop or do something like that.

PJ: It is not the way it was in the old days when you were . . .

BF: No. You wear one hat, one-and-a-half at most! It has to be. People ask, could I come down and volunteer, maybe to work in the costume. Well, that is all very well but the trouble of it is we are working with deadlines. And so, if you have somebody that is volunteering, you have got to volunteer for 40 hours a week and do that for five weeks while they build a show. You can’t say, ‘Oh, well, I’ve got to go to my daughter’s graduation,’ or ‘I’m going to my sister’s wedding.’ No, you’ve got to be here, just like the people that are paid.

PJ: I am jumping here because I do want you to be able to get out on time . . . If you were naming your mentors . . .

BF: They are there. [Points to wall of framed pictures.] The one on top is Ms. Vance, and this is Myrtle Hardy standing to her right up there. And that is Ed Begley. Ed Begley, he was down here to do a show called *Middle of the Night*, and he was so wonderful. He reminded me, in person, probably what Spencer Tracy would have been in person because he was so easy. You never were aware that he was saying a line that wasn’t something he had thought of. I went to him and I said, “How do you make it so yours?” And he said, “Listen and answer.”

PJ: Listen and answer?

BF: It is that simple. He said, “If you are in a scene, first, you know who you are, you are aware of your character, you are

aware of what they are in the scene, what are the facts of the scene, but be sure and listen to whoever is speaking and answer them as the playwright has written it for you." He said, "That is all there is to it." I said, "Oh, yeah." I was working with a wonderful character man and he was fussing around out back in the dressing room one night. I said, "Bob, how come you are so happy?" And he was happy. Even when he was fussy, he was happy.

I said, "What is the secret to staying happy and dedicated to your work?" He said, "Life is so simple. The only thing you have to do is find something that you really love and like to do in life. And then you find somebody to pay you to do it. And that is all there is to it." And so, I think about that every once in a while and I thought I was lucky that I found something that I really love to do and that is theater. And fortunately, I found somebody to pay me to do it. I just never saw any reason to leave.

PJ: *You have grown with the theater.*

BF: I hope so.

PJ: *Tell me a little bit about when you first came here and you mentioned some of the people . . . I think you said the Alford, the Marks.*

BF: Yes, well, see, they had a night that you paid, I think it was Two Bits Night, and you paid entrance to come in to the theater and you voted because the Alford and some of the other people, they wanted to keep it a community theater but Ms. Vance said, "I cannot continue as a community theater with a committee deciding what plays we do." She said, "Either in this theater or somewhere else, I have got to take sole responsibility." So, they said take it, it's yours.

PJ: *And that is how it became a repertory company?*

BF: That is how it became the Alley Theater.

PJ: *You have seen the art scene in Houston grow from being a handful of people to such a flourishing community.*

BF: Yes, and I was a very good friend of Tatiana Semenova who founded the Houston Ballet – a very long story and I won't tell it but anyway, when she split with the Houston Ballet, then she opened her own studio and stayed with it until she passed away in Houston.

PJ: *Opened her own after she parted?*

BF: Opened her own. She had had no desire to build something like the Houston Ballet after that happened to her. She didn't want to do that. She was a ballerina. Very famous. Worked with the Ballet Russe for many years. There is a picture right up there of Venice. I was over visiting her one day. I was very good friends with her. I went over to visit her one day and she said, "Will you take me to my last apartment?" I said, "Well, yes. Where is it?" And she said, "Well, it's Venice. You know where it is." And sure enough, we had been to visit her in Venice visiting her and friends and there is a graveyard where all of the dead people from Venice are taken. And she showed me this little square up there and she said, "Now, this is where I will go," because her mother was on one side and her friend, Bianca Cavalleri, was on the other side. And

she said, "When I am gone and I am ashes, bring my ashes here and put them in there." And so, we left our hotel room, went out down that canal there and out into the sea and then across to San Michelle and that is where we left Tatiana. And it was a wonderful experience. I know she is there and you know, when I go back to Venice, I always take flowers over to her grave. I miss her; that's what is painful. You miss so many of the friends, of the women especially that ran the theaters. Ms. Vance. Iris, the lady that was killed here in this building. That was heartbreaking. And also Chris Wilson, who later ran Actor's Studio here in town. She used to be on the staff here. Marietta Marich. She is still with us though, thank goodness. And Joyce Randall who was associate director and on the staff here. All of these women that have come and gone. Marie Lemaistre used to be our costumier. She never called herself a designer. She said, "My talent is rebuilding old costumes," and she did. Saved us a lot of money.

PJ: *Isn't it interesting that such a male-dominated town as Houston would have all these strong women characters? Not only in the arts but in other things.*

BF: In other things, too, yes. But the transition to and from either a matriarchy to a patriarchy or the reverse. But Greg is so understanding. The current artistic director, Greg Boyd, is so aware of the city of Houston. Now, he has been here 12 years, from 1988 . . . no, it has been about 18 years, close to 20 years. But he is so aware of the city of Houston and where it is now, because the city has changed. There was a time when they wanted to see *Life With Father* and they wanted to see all of the little comedies.

But they need more than that. They need a fuller meal. And so, yes, we do things like *The Greeks* that ran seven hours. We do things like *Angels In America* and *Fantastic*.

I liked *Angels in America*. That is another one of my favorite roles. I guess I could still manage to play that Mormon mother. I have enjoyed that very much because Ms. Vance would push us to the limit. I mean she did *The Knack* which opened in London to very strange reviews and people saying, "Well, it's too risqué. You shouldn't go see that." Ms. Vance had a copy of it and was reading it and she said, "We can do that." And she opened *The Knack* and really offended some of our clientele, our patrons, but they came back.

I got this letter in the box office and we had just done the first production of *Glen Garry, Glen Ross*, which is a four letter word every other breath. And the patron had just written this scathing letter about how dare you put on the Alley stage something that is that foul of language and blah, blah blah, blah, and just really laid us to filth. And down at the bottom it said, "P.S., enclosed please find my check for four tickets for next season." See, that's what the Alley has meant. We have an endorsement. They want us here. "They," being the city of Houston, want us to be here. And we are lucky. [C]

to carry on and to try to preserve, in their homeland, the culture so threatened abroad. But by mid-season of 1914-15, the mounting emotional tensions of the war were being felt in American concert halls. Programs had to be chosen with care. The playing of German music was becoming a problem.³⁰

Gradually, visiting concert artists ceased to play German music and it disappeared entirely from concert programs. It was replaced by compositions by American musicians and for the first time, by American folk music. Negro spirituals had a sudden growth and popular favor as did the work of Native Americans. A spirit of nationalism and a pride in local accomplishment were reflected in Wille's reviews: "Patriotism is to be a dominant idea in many musical events planned for the season. The Houston Symphony Orchestra's biggest number on Thanksgiving Day program will be 'America's Festival Overture,' the 'Star-Spangled Banner' being of course, its leading theme; and Hu Huffmaster, of the Women's Choral Club, is outlining a program for his club's closing concert consisting altogether of songs celebrating our love and loyalty as Americans."³¹

Cultural events flourished in Houston during the war. Hutcheson's articles recorded varied performances by local artists and visitors. The Houston Symphony Orchestra grew in quality and popularity, with the continuation of a popular series of twilight concerts. Prominent visitors, ranging from individual violinists and singers to the Minneapolis Symphony, regularly attracted audiences of 1,000 to 4,000 people.

As the war continued, the most interesting national phenomenon was the establishment of local "community sings." Such gatherings took place in cities and towns throughout America. Hutcheson wrote: "Community sings not only teach the people to love music and to sing, but not to fear the sound of their own voices.... This gathering together under the same roof of all races and classes uplifting the voice and pouring out the heart in song, does more to sweep away all prejudices and misunderstandings, to develop a broad, tolerant spirit toward each other than any other one agency."³²

In March 1918, the headline for Hutcheson's article in the *Post* read: "Big Camp Concert Thrills Houston." A reported 20,000 people took part in a "mammoth festival" on the newly constructed grounds of Camp Logan. According to Hutcheson, "the object of the festival was primarily to provide 'Smilage Books' for the soldiers...."³³ What resulted was one of the most interesting concerts yet given by military musicians. First, the nine regimental bands of the camp were combined into one huge organization of 275 pieces... "then a motor truck was conveniently placed so as to be used as an improvised stage for soloists and for members of the Choral Club of Houston, who volunteered their services, and finally the 'pep squads,' numbering 1000, were

grouped around the truck and the monster band.... The musical numbers were for the most part soldier songs and patriotic melodies... sung by the 1000 soldiers and those who joined in, many of them involuntarily, and accompanied by the huge band, the effect was so impressive as to be almost indescribable."³⁴

More patriotic community sings followed. Hutcheson described one in May 1918 as follows: "On the anniversary of the battle of San Jacinto, April 21, the chief patriotic holiday of Texas as a State, the children of this city held a special concert in the People's Auditorium for our country's soldiers stationed at Camp Logan. A mixed chorus of 1000 children sang enthusiastically.... Of course, the children's voices lustily joined with the whole audience in 'America,' 'Old Folks at Home,' 'There's a Long, Long Trail,' and the 'Battle Hymn of the Republic.'"

Despite this outpouring of community singing, the war also had negative effects on Houston's cultural life. On the following Wednesday afternoon, the Houston Symphony Orchestra gave what Hutcheson considered one of the most artistically finished programs in its history. But at the close of the season, April 3, 1918, Houston was at war and so many men were leaving the orchestra to be trained that the symphony organizers voted not to attempt a sixth season and disbanded the orchestra.³⁵ And so it passed as an institution from the musical scene for many years.

All in all, the patriotic fervor of World War I provided a strong impetus for public concerts in Houston. In the October 1918 issue of *Musical America*, Hutcheson discussed Houston's problems, hopes and achievements in music.³⁶ The article, headlined "Houston, Texas, strikes a strong patriotic note," contained

January 4, 1919

MUSICAL AMERICA

Houston Citizens and Camp Logan Men Join in Song Demon-



A Glimpse of the Great Crowd That Gathered for Houston's "Victory Sing"

HOUSTON, TEX., Dec. 19.—Houston's "Victory Sing," which took place on Tuesday night of this week, was a wonderful outpouring of patriotic enthusiasm. One thousand trained chorus singers were massed on the second story gal-

"God Save the King." The French tricolor went up for the "Marseillaise," which was sung in French by Di Pasquale, who is known as the "Caruso of Camp Logan." The entire chorus of trained voices came out strong in the refrain of the French hymn.

standard of Italy was raised, creating quite a demonstration. The Belgian national air was played by the military bands and sung by the Italian Club. Military bands from Camp Logan contributed largely to the effect, and the voices of specially-trained quartets and "con-

"Over There." "The "Keep the Home" "Good Morning, Mr. Mrs. Katherine Houston Post staff, Sing" movement of emotions met with a

HOUSTON TEACHER CITES IMPORTANCE OF "MUSICAL AMERICA" TO STUDENTS

"It Should Be on the Library Table in Every Young Musician's Home," Declares Katherine Allan Lively, Whose Weekly Letters to Mothers, on Musical Topics, Are an Interesting Feature of the Houston "Chronicle"

HOUSTON, TEX., Dec. 16. KATHERINE ALLAN LIVELY, the prominent Houston teacher of piano, is contributing a weekly letter to mothers in the *Houston Chronicle*, the letter in the issue of Dec. 12 being devoted to "Musical Suggestions to Mothers." In this article Mrs. Lively pays a tribute to the value of *MUSICAL AMERICA* in supplementing the musical education of the young as follows:

"Now, if our daily papers are a part of our modern growth, to become specialists we must, along with study, as I stated above, do special reading. We have in New York to-day a weekly musical magazine that without doubt should be on the library table of every young musician's home who can possibly afford it—*MUSICAL AMERICA*. This paper has grown in a few years to a startling magnitude, not only in circulation, but in excellence.

"Moreover, it stands for America, our country, and is slowly changing our national mind into thinking 'Made in America'—a song, a singer, a violinist, a pianist—is a very desirable mark indeed. A few years ago it was little known, but with broad policies, a progressiveness unsurpassed, a wide heralding of America's new belief in music of

America, a reasonableness in subscription fee, an excellent staff of correspondents from every important center of Europe, Canada, South America, Australia and wherever else music is important, Texas included, which means our local interest, *MUSICAL AMERICA*, edited by John C. Freund, should be included in every student's weekly schedule of what makes up study.

"In the first place, mothers, as well as girls and boys, can read of the tremendous growth of music throughout the country in our public schools; they can become conversant on the subject of America's annual musical festivals, which might hasten the much-needed organization of music in our own city; they can soon know who the artists are who are before the world to-day. "Our Houston papers are now devoting a good deal of space to the achievements of soloists in their various engagements, and that, too, is another avenue to encourage your boy and girl to cultivate. In the weekly magazine of which I speak there are very valuable articles given by the greatest musicians in the world to-day, and each young musician of Houston should be encouraged to read them, as many ideas can be gained and ambition roused that teaching does not inspire. It is a view of the work of artistry from a different angle. The pictures of the artists form

a most important feature for the. For instance, delightful pictures, found of every artist who visits He "By keeping up with *MUSICAL AMERICA* columns, you, mothers your family, can read of artist nounced here and of their appeara other sections of the country, a hear them from that vantage which asking you to think of—the want personal reading—not what some o says, who may not be a good judge You will find yourself much more eated, much more ready to talk different musical subjects with than you were before. You will too, almost weekly, a column deve Houston and Houston interests a by our local correspondent."

PEABODY ORCHESTRA HE

Mr. Strube's Players Show Adv. Composers' Night

BALTIMORE, Dec. 17.—The first cert by the Students' Orchestra, Peabody Conservatory of Music place this afternoon. Gustave E the conductor, has brought this b players to a fine degree of skill as training was made evident in each ber performed. The Mozart G Symphony, the "William Tell" ov and pieces by MacDowell and S were included in the program. E Shaffer, soprano, and Eugene Ma baritone, were the soloists.

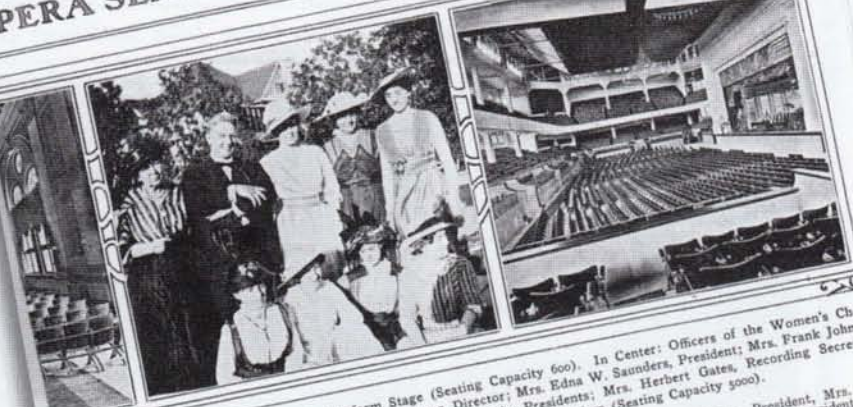
Harry Patterson Hopkins, the more composer, gave an evening o inal compositions at the Florestan Dec. 14. The program compri group of piano solos, played by the poser, four songs for baritone, su Arthur Dobson, with the composer piano, and a trio for violin, cell Hemberger, Olfred Furthmaier an Hopkins. The compositions all bei stamp of character in th... show that th...

101

CLARENCE

MUSICAL AMERICA

OPERA SEASON IN VIEW FOR HOUSTON



Oratorium of Houston, Containing Movable Platform Stage (Seating Capacity 600). In Center: Officers of the Women's Choral Society. Seated: Mrs. J. W. Massey, Mrs. E. L. Flowers, Second Vice-Presidents; Mrs. Frank Johnson, Recording Secretary. On the right: Inside View of the Large Hall of the City Auditorium (Seating Capacity 3000).

Permanent Enterprise Sponsored by City's Three Largest Musical Organizations—Boston-National Company Engaged as Initial Attraction—Famous Artists to Appear in Course of Free Municipal Entertainments—Individual Public Spirit Makes Possible Appearance of Important Ballet and Orchestral Attractions—Local Symphony Orchestra Faces Brightest Outlook of Its History—Clubs Vital Factor in Houston Musical Life

cluding symphony orchestra of forty pieces, Feb. 20. Giovanni Martinelli, famous tenor of the Metropolitan Opera Company, April 30.

Spring Season of Opera

The biggest ensemble attraction Houston is to have this year is the Boston-National Opera Company, which is to give three operas here in March. This enterprise is undertaken by the three largest local musical organizations in combination—the Houston Symphony Association, the Treble Clef Club and the Women's Choral Club. These will all work together under a Grand Opera Committee of twenty representative citi-

cert, March 29, May Peterson, soprano, is to be the assisting artist. The Choral Club's body of seventy-five active singing members is officered this



(Continued on page 102)

two oversized pages of text and about 20 photographs of "some prominent figures in Houston Musical Circles."

In another article, Hutcheson returned to the theme of patriotism: 'Win the War' is the one idea that inspires and sustains all our energies these days and in Houston's local life this is particularly evinced through our vastly multiplied musical activities, which all attune themselves to the keynote of purest patriotic ardor." She continued by discussing activities at the training centers at Camp Logan and in Ellington Field before concluding that the song leaders "in the camps located around Houston and the thousands of soldiers in training every day are qualifying to contribute a highly credible quote and providing to General Pershing what he asked for when he said, 'Give me a SINGING army and I will win the war.'"

When the war was won and officially ended on November 11, 1918, Houston celebrated with a "Victory Sing." In an article featuring a large photograph of the Rice Hotel and surrounding downtown streets filled as far as the eye can see with people of all ages, Wille wrote: "Houston's Victory Sing which took place on Tuesday night of this week was a wonderful outpouring of patriotic enthusiasm. One thousand trained chorus singers were massed on the second story gallery of the Rice Hotel...and the immense concourse of people...packed the streets below. At least 15,000 voices joined lustily in singing the national hymns of American and the Allies.... Military bands from Camp Logan contributed largely to the effect, and the voices of specially-trained quartets and 'pep squads' of soldiers were prominent in every number."³⁷

The Impact of Private Clubs on Houston's Cultural Life

If Wille Hutcheson had become the city's most visible reporter on cultural events, the city's many cultural clubs remained the solid core of support of the arts. The individuals, including Hutcheson, who voluntarily gave their time in support of music and art and the theater, provided the critical energy and interest that steadily built a richer cultural life in a rapidly growing city.

Hutcheson's reports on the activities of these clubs served as advertisements of sorts and no doubt helped them prosper. In a variety of columns during and after the war, she provided a convincing summary of their vitality and their impact on Houston.

During the war, for example, Hutcheson reported on the activities of the Woman's Choral Club, whose 100 members met every Thursday afternoon through the hottest months of summer for industrious Red Cross work instead of singing rehearsals. They are now beginning "with whole-hearted zeal their musical work. The club is planning to memorize the leading national songs of the allies as well as our own and the singers will be ready to participate in any patriotic entertainment or demonstration." She noted that the Girls Musical club with 100 members continued their study...of "Musical Form." Wille was announced as the dean of this group. Further, she wrote that the music study branch of the Heights Woman's Club was working well in all of its divisions: "the Seniors of whom there are 25, the junior division has 125 children and the violin choir which is doing extraordinarily high class work, has 15 members."

Her articles report on the efforts of The Houston Symphony Orchestra Association, which listed Ima Hogg as its president. The Italian Choral Club, with 52 members, had "a well defined plan for its quote of three concert entertainments. The fall and mid-winter affairs are to be entirely musical, and the spring entertainments is to be musico-dramatic, the incidents and songs being vividly illustrative of the present war conditions of the Italian front." In addition, the YWCA had formed its own choral club of 25 members. In October 1919, she reported that Rice Institute students had organized a new musical group. "A new local musical organization, which, it is expected, will have a wide influence, is the Students Band of the Rice Institute. It is composed of students living in the Institute's dormitories and is at present under the conductorship of ...a member of the student body."³⁸

In a column published in October 1918, Hutcheson presented an overview of the growing educational opportunities for those interested in music in Houston. She reported that the Houston public schools offered orchestra, chorus, glee club, harmony work, musical history and appreciation classes in which a student could earn two credits toward graduation. In the 1917-18 school year, 475 pupils took these classes. Two credits are also allowed by the school for outside piano study. In addition, she noted that the Houston Conservatory of Music was full and had a well-balanced faculty that stressed the practical standardization of music teaching and credits for music study. According to Hutcheson, there were 235 private teachers of piano and organ, 27 teachers of stringed instruments, and 35 voice teachers in Houston as the war came to a close.³⁹ Such statistics indicate a groundswell of interest in learning to play music as well as attending performances by others.


The various clubs continued to work to bring professional

performers to the city. Hutcheson reported that the inaugural date of Houston's 1918-1919 season is to be given by Paul Althouse, Metropolitan Opera tenor, recital artist. This affair is one of four under the management of Harry T. Warner. The design is to give good music a small cost through cooperation of other Texas cities with Houston. The biggest musical feature on the horizon was the coming of the Chicago Opera Association, which performed *The Barber of Seville*. The financial success of this grand opera venture was entirely assured by the committee of 100 leading citizens who guaranteed it before the contract was signed.

An article in the *Houston Gargoyle* reminisced that "both singing societies, The Treble Clef and the Woman's Choral Club, brought an imposing list of artists to Houston during their existence, which continued, by the way until after the war....⁴⁰ Most of the big international musical names became during this time household words in Houston. In 1918, the Treble Clef was announcing in the newspapers that it had "made every effort to secure Caruso, but he doesn't like to travel." There was also, no doubt, the small matter of \$7500 per concert that he charged.⁴¹

Encouraged by the reporting of Wille Hutcheson, these clubs provided a vital spark for Houston's cultural growth. They and Wille worked together after the turn of the twentieth century, and their efforts found a ready response in a growing city eager to build the cultural institutions that characterized more mature metropolises. This early generation of patrons of the arts, including Wille, inevitably gave way to subsequent generations that built on the foundation laid in the years through World War I.

Wille Hutcheson did not live long after the end of the war. Plagued by ill health, Wille retired in 1920 from her jobs at both the *Post* and *Musical America* but continued her teaching of languages and music to private students until her death.⁴² She died suddenly in 1924 at the age of 67 and was interred in the Hutcheson family plot at Glenwood Cemetery. Her tombstone reads very simply: "Wille L. Baker Hutcheson, daughter of William Hutcheson, 1858-1924."⁴³

To that line, the historian would add that she had led a singularly interesting life, filled with personal tragedies but also with the triumphs of her career as a purveyor of culture in Houston. She was an important part of the city's cultural life during its emergence as a major metropolis, and her writings and her work with various clubs helped lay the foundation for the emergence of the cultural institutions and attitudes so central to urban life. She left her mark on Houston, and though few remember her name 80 years after her death, her influence can still be seen in the vitality of the city's cultural life. 

ENDNOTES

EDNA SAUNDERS

- 1 Sue Dauphin, *Houston by Stages: A History of Theatre in Houston* (Burnet, Texas: Eakin Press, 1981), 431.
- 2 Sue Dauphin, "Houston's Dean of Culture Met Art at Tender Age," *Houston Chronicle*, October 25, 1950.
- 3 "Edna Saunders is THE Impresario Still in 36th Year," *The Houston Post*, February 10, 1953.
- 4 "Top Texan, Edna W. Saunders," *Preview* (Sept. 1952); Hubert Roussel, "Edna Saunders: A gambler of noble spirit, she won rewards in beauty and respect," *The Houston Post*, October 2, 1966.
- 5 "Beloved Impresario Edna Saunders Dies," *Houston Chronicle*, December 21, 1963, pp. 1, 5; *The New Encyclopedia of Texas*, 1926, s.v. "Saunders, Edna W., 1265; Mrs. Henry B. Fall, ed., *Key to the City of Houston* (Houston: State Co., 1908), 147-48. Women's musical clubs were prominent in promoting cultural offerings in the early twentieth century. They initially provided performance opportunities for their own members and then moved into visiting artists. Among the more active groups in Houston in the early twentieth century were the Philharmonic, the Treble Clef Club, the Woman's Choral Club, the Thursday Morning Musical Club, the Girls' Musical Club, and the Houston Heights Music Club. For an in-depth view of women's roles in promoting music appreciation within a community, see Ralph P. Locke and Cyrilla Barr, ed. *Cultivating Music in America: Women Patrons and Activists 1860* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997).
- 6 Dauphin, 431.
- 7 "36th year," *The Houston Post*, February 10, 1953. Concert managers in Dallas thought Caruso's guarantee of \$12,000 was too high and they passed on the opportunity to present the singer in their city.
- 8 "Impresario Dies," *Houston Chronicle*, December 21, 1963, p. 1.
- 9 "Top Texan," *Preview*. City Auditorium, while appearing to be spacious and stylish, was never an adequate performance hall. The main floor was flat without permanent seating; the cooling system—fans blowing over blocks of ice placed outside the windows—was noisy; the acoustics were considered poor by most performers; the wings were tiny; dressing rooms were shabby; the roof often leaked; and roaches and rats were frequent visitors. While it was the site of many memorable arts performances for half a century, it was better suited for the other venues it hosted: poultry shows, boxing matches, conventions, and the most famous events of all, the Friday night wrestling matches. Nevertheless, the performers brought to Houston by Saunders in the 1920s were among the most acclaimed artists in the world at that time.
- 10 Betty T. Chapman, "Early Artistic Visionaries Made Houston Center of High Culture," *Houston Business Journal*, Nov. 15-21, 1996; David Kaplan, "Legacy: City Auditorium Remembered," *Performing Arts Magazine* (May 1980), 10-11; *Texas Encyclopedia*, 1262. For a more complete history of musical theatre in Houston, see Dauphin, 273-330.
- 11 "Noble Spirit," *The Houston Post*, October 2, 1966. In 1941 Saunders married Edward William Cox, a retired insurance executive of Chicago, whom she had known during her school days in New York. Cox died in 1943.
- 12 Don Looser, "A Musical Renaissance: The Growth of Cultural Institutions in Houston 1929-1936," *The Houston Review: History and Culture of the Gulf Coast* VI, no. 3 (1984): 137; "Impresario Dies," *Houston Chronicle*, December 21, 1963, p. 5; Dauphin, 432-33, 435. Hubert Roussel, longtime music critic for *The Houston Post*, once commented that the public never knew of Saunders' losses because she, like Queen Mary of England, had one of the finest poker faces seen anywhere.
- 13 "An Impresario for Thirty-Two Years," *Houston Chronicle*, October 23, 1949; "The Green Room," *Performing Arts Magazine* (May 1980), 12; "36th Year," *The Houston Post*, February 10, 1953; Dauphin, 432.
- 14 Julia Watts, "I'm Average, Says Woman Chosen as City's Leader," clipping, Houston Biography Scrapbook, Vol. 17c, Houston Metropolitan Research, Houston Public Library; "Women Name Mrs. Saunders 'Torchbearer,'" clipping, Elizabeth Ring Scrapbook, Houston Metropolitan, Houston Public Library.
- 15 Dauphin, 432; Anne Holmes, "Arts Personalities of Houston's Past," *Houston Chronicle*, October 13, 1985, Performing Arts Section, 9. Houstonians' fascination with dance culminated in 1955 in the formation of the Houston Ballet Foundation, which ultimately organized a resident company, Houston Ballet.
- 16 Dauphin, 279; "Edna W. Saunders, City's Noted Impresario" (sic), *Houston Magazine* (March 1950).
- 17 "Impresario Dies," *Houston Chronicle*, December 21, 1963; Dauphin, 434.
- 18 Looser, 143, 147; "Impresario Dies," *Houston Chronicle*, December 21, 1963. Drusilla Huffmaster, Fredell Lack, and Jacque Abram established substantive musical careers both as performers and as educators. All were graduates of Juilliard School of Music and each had a distinguished teaching career—Huffmaster at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas; Lack at the University of Houston; and Abram at the University of South Florida.
- 19 Lynwood Abram, Review of *Marian Anderson: A Singer's Journey* by Allan Keiler, *Houston Chronicle*, March 12, 2000, Zest Section, 18. Ironically, the best seats in the auditorium were in the upper levels, or the "crow's roost."
- 20 Anne Holmes, "Edna Saunders Enters 34th Year as Impresario," *Houston Chronicle*, September 24, 1951.
- 21 Hubert Roussel, "The Sound of Broadway: An Altered Note in a Saunders Season," *The Houston Post*, September 23, 1962.
- 22 "The Green Room," *Performing Arts Magazine* (May 1980), 14.
- 23 Ibid. A green room was found in British theatres as early as the seventeenth century. It is usually defined as a room in a theatre provided for the accommodation of actors and actresses when they are not required on the stage. There is no widespread agreement, however, on how the designation of green came into being. The Green Room in Jones Hall, used by patrons rather than performers, has a portrait of Edna Saunders, which was painted after her death by Charles J. Fox.
- 24 "Mrs. Saunders, for 46 years Impresario, Dies," *The Houston Post*, December 22, 1963.
- 25 The Society for the Performing Arts was formed in 1966. Although it was not a continuation of Edna Saunders Presents, the SPA became Saunders' successor in bringing exceptional offerings to Houston audiences.

ORANGE SHOW

Much of the material in this article was originally published in *Eat Oranges and Live: Jeff McKissack, The Orange Show, and The Orange Show Foundation*, a thesis published in 2000 at the University of Houston at Clear Lake. I would like to acknowledge my thesis chairs, Dr. Bruce Palmer and Dr. Angela Howard, for their support and excellent advice. I would also like to acknowledge the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art which allowed me unrestricted access to all its records.

- 1 Barbara Brackman, "KGAA's Top US Sites," *Raw Vision* 3, Summer 1990, 47; Tom Patterson, "Live Wires and Yard Shows," *Public Art Review* 4 (Summer/Fall 1992): 19; Letter from James B. Gattson, president of The Houston Chapter, the American Institute of Architects, 8 April 1980, Orange Show Records.
- 2 Delayed Certificate of Birth, issued from Atlanta, Georgia, 22 May 1942; Advertisement in Volume 2 of a five volume set of Clay County History compiled by B. C. Brown and Brooksie Brown in the Clay County Library; J. E. Coleman, "The Bluff at Fort Gaines, Ga." (Fort Gaines, Georgia: privately printed, 1997), 57 Brooksie Brown and India Wilson, interview by the author, 14 May 2001.
- 3 Jeff McKissack, *How You Can Live 100 Years... and Still be Spry* (Houston: privately printed, 1960), 1; Beardsley, 152; Bill Marvel, "A Wacky, Wonderful Attraction," *Dallas Times Herald*, 18 April 1982, sec. Q; C. M. Wolliner, "Edison at His Desk: Seen by Job Hunter," *New York Times*, 11 February 1923, sec. XX; David McKissack, *Descendants of John McKissack*, Hp. n.d., Online, FamilyTreeMaker.com: <http://McKissackfamilytreemaker.com/users> (accessed 17 November 1999); Letter from Doris Coleman Gilbreath to Caroline Bowles, 5 March 1986, Orange Show Records.
- 4 Ken Hudson and Gary Jones, *Jeff's Tour: A tour of the Orange Show—A Personal Perspective by Jeff D. McKissack*, produced by Ken Hudson and Gary Jones, 20 min., 1987, videocassette; Winnie Coleman interview by Orange Show staff [1986]; James Coleman, interview by the author, 14 May 2001.
- 5 Clay County, Georgia, Deed Record Book O, Page 263, 3 November 1939; Clay County Mortgage Record Book 42, Page 391, 3 November 1939; Clay County Deed Record Book Q, Page 108, 7 March 1949; Winnie Coleman interview; Letter from Gilbreath to Bowles; Brooksie Brown and India Wilson, interview by the author, 14 May 2001; James Coleman interview.
- 6 McKissack, *Live 100 Years*, 19; Polk and Company, *Jacksonville (Duval County, Fla.) City Directory*, 1943, 1944, 1946 to 1951 (Jacksonville, Florida: R. L. Polk and Company, 1943, 1944, 1946 to 1951); Notes from Orange Show staff conversation with military records department; Hudson and Jones videocassette; Mr. and Mrs. Harrison, interviewed by Susanne Theis and Caroline Bowles, 4 March 1986, Orange Show Records.
- 7 Duval County, Florida, Deed Book number 1095, Page 334, 13 June 1945; Polk and Company; Beatrice Tedeschi, interview by author, 16 May 2001; Brown and Wilson interview.
- 8 Brown and Wilson interview: the date of McKissack's institutionalization is not known; Duval County Deed Book number 1448, Page 371, 21 July 1950; Ty Eckley, interview by the author, 25 June 2001; Harrison interview; Harris County, Texas, Deed Records, microfilm, 145-58-0925 and 145-58-0926, Deed Record: Volume 2381, pp. 176 and 177, 7 January 1952; Hudson and Jones videocassette.

- 9 Harris County Deed Records, microfilm 031-41-0250 and 031-41-0251, Deed Record: Volume 3073, pp. 247-248, 12 December 1955; City of Houston Department of Public Works, Jeff D. McKissack, Permit for Beauty Parlor, \$14.65, 1956; Ty Eckley, interview by Orange Show Staff, 1 March 1986; Eckley interview, 25 June 2001.
- 10 Morrison and Fourmy Directory Company, *Morrison and Fourmy's Greater Houston City Directory, 1955, Fifty-sixth Edition* (Dallas, Texas: Morrison and Fourmy Directory Company, 1963 to 1968); Harrison interview; Hudson and Jones videocassette.
- 11 Martin; Kenneth Crabtree, interview by the author, 16 December 2000; Tom Sim's University of St. Thomas film class filmed McKissack in the fall of 1979. The interview was printed in *The Orange Press*, March/April 1991. The Orange Show newsletters have been published under several names and references here list the name at the time of publication. *Events*, *Newsletter*, *Calendar*, and *Orange Press*, all refer to the newsletters.
- 12 McKissack, *Live 100 Years*, passim; Hudson and Jones videocassette; Marvel; Letter from Jeff McKissack to Alex (Hurst), 13 December 1979, Orange Show Records.
- 13 Orange Show staff interview with Mr. Bristol or Paine Webber, n.d.; Interview with Mrs. R. P. (Stella) Scheffler, n.d., Orange Show Records.
- 14 Ann Holmes, "In Tribute to the Orange," *Houston Chronicle Texas Magazine*, 19 February 1978, 26.
- 15 Hudson and Jones videocassette; Orange Show Records contain rejected building permits.
- 16 Nelson Allen, "Orange Art: The Fruit of Inspiration," *Express-New Daily Star*, 2 June 1990, sec. K; Hudson and Jones videocassette; Johnny Miller, in conversation with the author, 9 May 2001; Martin.
- 17 Carol Rust, "The Orange Show: Jeff McKissack Built a Monumental Dream after a Treasure Hunt of a Lifetime," *Texas Magazine*, 26 November 1989, 8.
- 18 Nichols; Eckley, 25 June 2001.
- 19 Marvel; Letter McKissack to Hurst; Andy Mann, "Jeff McKissack's Funeral Ceremony," approximately 30 min., 1980, unpublished videocassette; Eckley, 25 June 2001.
- 20 Videotaped interview with Marilyn Oshman, by Manuel Pellicer, 26 September 1982.
- 21 Letter from Gilbreath to Bowles; Hudson and Jones videocassette; Loan Agreement between the Orange Show Foundation and the Menil for *Rolywholyover: A Circus*, n.d., Orange Show Records.
- 22 Letter from McKissack to Hurst.
- 23 Brown and Wilson interview; Eckley, 1 March 2001; Nichols; Holmes, "Tribute".
- 24 Charles G. Zug III, "Folk Art and Outsider Art: A Folklorist Perspective," in *The Artist Outsider: Creativity and the Boundaries of Culture*, eds. Michael D. Hall and Eugene W. Metcalf, Jr. with Roger Cardinal (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 156; Jana Dozier, "Orange Aid," *Houston Style*, 20.
- 25 Author's correspondence with Susanne Theis, 14 February 2000.
- 26 Form 1023, Application for Tax Exempt Status from IRS, 22 April 1982; Guild, 49; Roy Durrenberger, "Oshman's Officials Win War against Graffiti," *South/Alameda/Hobby This Week* (zone 8), 29 July 1998; Katherine Guild, "Pillars of the City: Marilyn Lubetkin," *Houston Metropolitan Magazine*, October 1989, 49. At the time she began her work on the Orange Show, Marilyn Oshman's name was Marilyn Lubetkin.
- 27 Marilyn Oshman's four early notebooks, kept from the time Hurst contacted her until early 1983; The Memorandum of Meeting on March 28, 1980 written by Alex Hurst, 31 March 1980, Orange Show Records.
- 28 Jan Short, "Big Bucks and Ball Gowns," *Houston City Magazine*, April 1985, 135.
- 29 *The Grand Opening Invitation*, Orange Show Records; Harris County Deed Records, microfilm 170-95-1457 and 170-95-1458, 15 September 1980.
- 30 Certificate of Incorporation, 3 December 1980; Oshman notebooks; Form 1023; Insurance policy from Fred Rhodes and Company; Oshman notebooks; Orange Show Records; Marvel.
- 31 Grant was announced at the 19 October 1981 Board Meeting; Christina Patoski, "Orange Aid," *Texas Monthly*, March 1989, 84; Letter from Marilyn Oshman to Peter Fetterer, Manager, Media and Civic Services for the Kohler Company, 21 February 1989.
- 32 Marvel, Q2; Oshman notebooks; Ann Holmes, "Weekend Preview: The Orange Show: Jeff McKissack's Dream Boat Is Having Her Coming-Out Party," *Houston Chronicle*, 23 September, 1982, sec. 6.
- 33 Moore's award is in the Orange Show Records; "The Orange Show" Undergoing Restoration," 64; Peter Papademetriou, "For the Love of Oranges: Environmental Design in East Houston," *Texas Architect*, 33: 1 (January-February 1983): 18; "American Folk Art Extravaganza," 22; Crabtree interview.
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- 36 Grant applications containing statistics on staff and volunteers. Several memos addressing attrition problems are in the Orange Show Records.
- 37 Board interviews collected by Mary Ann Piacentini in Fall 1992; Letters written by board members; Minutes, 21 April 1993 BOD Meeting; Minutes, 11 October BOD Meeting, Orange Show Records.
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- 39 Allen.
- 40 "The Orange Show Creative Art Series for Children," *Newsletter*, May/June 1990; "Workshops," *Newsletter*, July/August 1992; "Summer Camp," *Newsletter*, Summer 1993; Proposal to The Houston Endowment Children's Folk Art Series at the Orange Show, 1995-1996, 9, Orange Show Records.
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- 43 "Liquid Mice-They Should Have Been Blondes," *Events*, November/December 1988; "The Sukkot Experience," *Fall Events*, Fall 1993; Minutes, 11 October 1994 BOD Meeting, Orange Show Records.
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- 51 Carol Rust, "Driven to Art: Houston's Enduring Love Affair with Art Cars and Their Creators," *Texas Magazine*, 30 November 1997, 7, 8; *Art Car Parade*, KPRC Television Houston Texas, 18 April 1998, 1:00-2:00 PM.
- 52 Nonny de La Pena, "Artomobiles," *Houston Press*, 2 May 1991.
- 53 "1988 Calling All Artmobiles," Orange Show Records; Patricia C. Johnson, "Orange Show Issues Call for 'Artmobiles' Parade," *Houston Chronicle*, 4 March 1988, sec. 5; KPRC Broadcast; 1998 Art Car Weekend—Respect the Unexpected, press release, April 1998.

ENDNOTES

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 - 55 Beth Secor and the Orange Show Foundation, *Start-up Advice: The How To's of Art Cars* (Houston: Self published, 1998), vii, 2, 3, 4; Beth Secor; "Want to Made an Art Car and Need Some Advice?" *Newsletter*, Spring 1999.
 - 56 The Houston Art Car Klub lists their events at <http://www.houstonartcarclub.com>; The Art Car Museum is located at 140 Heights.
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 - 60 For Smalley see, Steven Long, "Orange Show Helping Preserve Eclectic Collection of D. D. Smalley," *Houston Chronicle*, 2 August 1994, sec. D; For Kingsbury, see "Ida Kingsbury," *Newsletter*, Spring 1999.
 - 61 For Turner, see Jerry Urban, "Flower Man" Uproots Home after Theft" *Houston Chronicle*, 12 September 1988, sec. A; Case studies prepared for grant proposals; Invitation to party in honor of Cleveland Turner, 16 October 1988, Orange Show Records; for Harper, see Susan Chadwick, "Fund Set up to Help 'Fan Man' Who Lost Home, Contents, in Fire," *The Houston Post*, 25 January 1992, sec. F.
 - 62 Tours are described in: "Eyeopeners X: Places of Worship," *Orange Press*, May/June 1991; Cynthia Thomas, "Collectormania," *Houston Chronicle*, 21 August 1995, sec. D; "Eyeopeners Tour: World Markets," *Newsletter*, Spring 2000; "Blues News: Eyeopeners Blues Tour," *Southern Exposure*, November 1994, 10; "Orange Show Tours Hidden Galveston," *The Houston Post*, 4 October 1992, sec. H; *Beaumont/Port Arthur: The Golden Triangle* brochure, 1988; "Eyeopeners, Painted Churches," *Calendar*, September/October 1990; "Going to the Chapels," *Texas Monthly*, October 1990, 24; "The American South Tour," *Newsletter*, Spring 1995; "Eyeopeners of the South," Winter *Newsletter*, 1994/1995; "New Years Adventure to Las Pozas, Mexico," *Newsletter*, Fall 1998; For example of private tour, see 24 March 1992, private Classics tour for the River Oaks Breakfast Club, Orange Show Records.
 - 63 Author's correspondence with Susanne Theis, 12 June 2000; Harris County Deed Records, microfilm 116-71-1634 and 116-71-1635, 11 May 1998; "10th Anniversary," *The Orange Show*, May/June 1989.
 - 64 "Spillover: Our New Office Annex," *Newsletter*, Spring 2000.
 - 65 Clifford Pugh, "Foundation Looks at Buying Famous Beer Can House," *Houston Chronicle*, 28 September 2001, sec. D.
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- ## MRS. WILLE'S STORY
- 1 "Houston Pioneer, Cultural Leader, Dies at Home Here, Mrs. Wille Hutcheson, Long Resident Leaves Scores of Friends," *The Houston Post*, February 9, 1924.
 - 2 "Legends," *The Houston Post*, May, 5, 1951, "Information about Houstonians, Hor-J," Houston Scrapbooks, V. 12, Texas Room, Houston Public Library.
 - 3 Joanne Hutcheson Seale Wilson, "John William Hutcheson, Pioneering Texan, 1829-1862," Montgomery County Genealogical & Historical Society, Inc., November 2005.
 - 4 "Announcing Time For Funeral of Mrs. Hutcheson," *The Houston Post*, February 11, 1924, Collection of Joanne S. Wilson.
 - 5 Charles Sterling Hutcheson was a successful planter and businessman. Mary Mitchell Hutcheson and was spoken of as a "woman of keen wit." In 1834 the Hutcheson's built a plantation house called Mt. Airy -- a six room, two-story house near Boynton, Virginia. Sterling Hutcheson, "The Man Whose Name I Bear," Collection of Joanne S. Wilson.
 - 6 www.stauntonva.org/civil_war, (accessed March 5, 2003) Wesleyan Female Institute in Staunton, Virginia, was founded by the Methodist Church in 1846. The school began with approximately thirty day students and a few boarders. By 1870, it was housed in a grand building on the main street of Staunton and was successful and going strong when Wille attended it.
 - 7 Joe was JWH's younger brother, Joseph Chappell Hutcheson (hereinafter called JCH). After the Civil War he studied law at the University of Virginia and then moved to Texas in 1866 and lived first in Anderson and then later in Houston with law practices in both communities. He became a prominent Texan. Hutcheson Family Bible, Hutcheson Family Collection, Woodson Research Center, Rice University; "Joseph C. Hutcheson," *The Handbook of Texas Online* (accessed Sept. 10, 2002); Edward C. Hutcheson, *The Freedom Tree: A Chapter from the Saga of Texas* (Waco, Texas: Texian Press, 1970), p. 71.
 - 8 Cemetery records and tombstones, Wilson Family Plot, Glenwood Cemetery, Houston, Texas.
 - 9 Houston City Directory.
 - 10 His obituary reads: "R. E. C. Wilson died Tuesday morning. Was native of Houston and prominently connected with city's growth and development. Robert Ellis Cone Wilson, prominent in Houston real estate circles and intimately connected with the development and growth of the city, died shortly after 6 o'clock Tuesday morning at his residence, at the age of 56 years and 10 months."
 - 11 William A. Young, Jr., *History of the Houston Public Schools, 1836-1965* (Houston: Gulf School Research Development Association, 1968), p. 11. The Academy, later the Clopper Institute, was built in 1855 or 1856. The Houston High School was opened in October 1878 in the Academy building. The building itself was razed in 1894 to make place for a new high school building for the Houston Public Schools.
 - 12 Houston City Directory, 1905.
 - 13 "Tête-à-Tête with The Musicians, Some Points About Music In Houston and Elsewhere," *Houston Daily Post*, 1901.
 - 14 *Musical America* website. (accessed Apr 11, 2006); *Musical America* was founded by John C. Freund in 1898 as a weekly newspaper covering drama, music and the arts.
 - 15 Conversation with Ann Holmes, long-time *Houston Chronicle* Music Editor. March 18, 2006.
 - 16 Kate Kirkland,, "Envisioning a Progressive City: Hogg Family Philanthropy and the Urban Ideal in Houston, Texas, 1910-1975," unpublished M.A. thesis, Department of History, Rice University, 2004, p. 319. See Kirkland's chapter on Ima Hogg for a full understanding of the foundation of the symphony orchestra.
 - 17 On one of Hutcheson's trips abroad before World War I, she sailed on the SS Frankfurt from Galveston to Bremen, Germany, on July 24, 1910, when she was 54 years old.
 - 18 Marguerite Johnston, *Houston, the Unknown City, 1836-1946* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1991), pp. 106 -108.
 - 19 The population of Houston grew from 44,633 in 1900, to 78,800 in 1910, and to 138,276 in 1920.
 - 20 Wille Hutcheson, *Synchronized Musico-Historical Charts* (Houston: Rein & Sons Company, 1914). Drawn by Wm Hyle Boggs.
 - 21 In her own words, "The book is composed of two parts: A geographical map showing the ancestral and ultra-ancestral homes from which modern Europe's musical systems descended: designating the directions along with music traveled down to us, while marking conspicuously the most important stages of the art's development on its historic route. On this map Music's historic course starts with the date 7000 B. C. and comes down to the Classic period in modern times: closing with the Belgian School in 1600 A. D....The second engraving is a chart which as supplementary to the first shows the shorter steps in music's historic progress as mothered by the Mediaeval Catholic Church; along with the leading elements in the contemporaneous growth of secular musical composition."
 - 22 Johnston, *Houston, the Unknown City*, p. 185. Hubert Roussel, *The Houston Symphony Orchestra, 1913-1971* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), p. 18.
 - 23 Roussel, *The Houston Symphony Orchestra*, p. 22.
 - 24 Kirkland, *Envisioning a Progressive City*, p. 337. Theatres of this period included the Majestic, seating 600 people, on Texas Avenue between Travis and Milam Street, which was the city's principal vaudeville house. The City Auditorium was built in 1910 to accommodate 4000 people and an ever increasing number of municipal entertainments.
 - 25 Edgar A. Schuler, "The Houston Race Riot, 1917," *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (July 1944), pp. 300-338. The entertainments had been organized by various civic groups under the leadership of Dr. W. S. Lockhart.

- 26 "Municipal Entertainments. No reason for the Ministers to interfere with them," *Houston Daily Post*, May 12, 1913.
- 27 *Houston Daily Post*, May, 12, 1913, no page number, Collection of Joanne S. Wilson.
- 28 The Houston concert raised \$500 for relief of poor. See, *Houston Daily Post*, 1913, Collection of Mrs. Bedford Sharp, Woodson Research Center, Rice University.
- 29 *Musical America*, June 7, 1908, no page number, Collection of Joanne S. Wilson. One of her articles in *Musical America* discusses the origin of music in Houston, attributing a great deal of its original popularity to the presence of numerous Germans among early Houston settlers.
- 30 Roussel, *The Houston Symphony Orchestra*, p. 25.
- 31 "Cadman Day," *Musical America*, November 20, 1915.
- 32 *Musical America*, Oct. 14, 1916, pp. 101-102. In October 1907 Freund published the first edition of the annual issue which included predictions from various managers on the coming season and upcoming musical activities in cities such as Boston, Chicago, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, features that still exist in the Directory today.
- 33 Smilage Books were books of 5 cent coupons to be used by servicemen for admission to lectures, Chautauqua's and picture shows. They were a World War I phenomenon.
- 34 *Musical America*, March 28, 1918.
- 35 Roussel, *The Houston Symphony Orchestra*, p. 26.
- 36 *Musical America*, Oct. 19, 1918, p. 94.
- 37 *Musical America*, Jan. 4, 1919, p. 9.
- 38 *Musical America*, Oct. 25, 1919.
- 39 *Musical America*, Oct. 19, 1918.
- 40 The next week brings a "hearty congratulations to the Ladies Treble Clef Club on account of the supreme pleasures afforded by them by Houstonians who properly appreciate superbly splendid expositions of real art. In spite of numerous strong counter attractions of Friday night, a big audience attended the Treble Clef's concert, and this writer never knew a Houston concert crowd to seem to be absolutely beside itself with the wildness of enthusiasm and pleasurable excitation. The Ladies Treble Clef has always been a club of earnest, ambitious and close students of the best music."
- 41 *The Houston Gargoyle*, May 25, 1930, p. 15.
- 42 She was a formidable looking woman. In a 1917 letter to his cousin Alice Young, JCH, Sr., says "Wille is doing fairly well, weights about three hundred pounds, and gets around with great activity. She has a great many warm friends here, but confessed to me several times however, that she has been so poor a correspondent that she has not kept up with you at all. Her son Jim is in California, and doing well." *Musical America* noted her death: "Mrs. Wille Hutcheson, teacher of music, critic, and newspaper writer, died here recently after a brief illness. Mrs. Hutcheson was at one time correspondent for *Musical America*."
- 43 "Wille Hutcheson Obituary," *The Houston Post*, Feb. 11, 1924.
- ELDORADO
- 1 Howard Beeth and Cary D. Wintz, eds., *Black Dixie: Afro-Texan History and Culture in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), 98.
- 2 "Savoy Ballroom," *Jazz: A Film by Ken Burns*, www.pbs.org/jazz/places/spaces_savoy_ballroom.html (accessed November 11, 2005).
- 3 Roger Wood, "'Howling on Dowling': The Legacy of Houston's Eldorado Ballroom" (paper, Texas State Historical Association Annual Meeting, Austin, Texas, March 4-6, 2004).
- 4 Jackie Beckham, interview by author, November 9, 2005.
- 5 "Noted Sax Player to Eldorado," *The Informer*, January 15, 1949.
- 6 Roger Wood, *Down in Houston: Bayou City Blues* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 75.
- 7 "Midnighters to Eldorado Sunday Nite," *The Informer*, June 23, 1956.
- 8 Carla R. Lesh, "Round 18. Project Row Houses," *The Public Historian* 25, No. 4 (Fall 2003): 116-18.
- 9 Tiffany Balkaran, Shawn Brown, Rosa Bryant, Thomasine Johnson, Courtney Johnson Rose, Traci Murray, Parveen Mustafa, Gwen Owens, and Tiffany Tarver, "The El Dorado Ballroom History" (historic preservation project by students in the Prairie View A&M University Community Development Program, 2005).
- 10 Beckham, interview.
- 11 Allan Turner, "'Home of Happy Feet,' Rebirth of Eldorado to showcase music of past, present," *Houston Chronicle*, February 25, 2001.
- 12 Yvette Jones, "Seeds of Compassion," *Texas Historian* (November 1976): 18.
- 13 George McElroy, "Anna Dupree looks with pride on her life," *The Houston Post*, December 3, 1972, p. 7/B.
- 14 Patricia Prather Smith, ed., "C.A. Dupree (c.1892-1956), Anna Dupree (1891-1977)," in *Texas Trailblazer Series*, Third Edition (Houston: Texas Trailblazer Preservation Association: 2000).
- 15 Wood, *Down in Houston*, 75-76.
- 16 Carroll Parrott Blue, *The Dawn at My Back: Memoir of a Black Texas Upbringing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 58.
- 17 Garna L. Christian, "Texas Beginnings: Houston in the World of Jazz," *The Houston Review: History and Culture of the Gulf Coast* XII, No. 3 (1990).
- 18 Betty L. Martin, "Spirit of Jazz, Event to help fund Eldorado renovation," *Houston Chronicle*, May 1, 2003.
- 19 Christian, "Texas Beginnings: Houston in the World of Jazz."
- 20 Skipper Lee Frazier, interview by author, November 11, 2005; Turner, "'Home of Happy Feet'."
- 21 "'Yes, I Am Black,'" article in "Anna Dupree Collection," MSS 110, Box 1, Folder 5, Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC), Houston Public Library.
- 22 Advertisement in *The Informer*, January 15, 1949.
- 23 Bernadette Pruitt, "In Search of Freedom: Black Migration to Houston, 1914-1945," *The Houston Review of History and Culture* 3, No. 1 (Fall 2005): 56.
- 24 Louis J. Marchiafava, "A Feeling for Jazz: An Interview with Arnett Cobb," *The Houston Review: History and Culture of the Gulf Coast* XII, No. 3 (1990): 127.
- 25 Turner, "'Home of Happy Feet'."
- 26 Frazier, interview.
- 27 Beckham, interview.
- 28 "Friendship Ties Renewed At El Dorado's Formal," *The Informer*, January 29, 1949, p. 6.
- 29 "Franklin Style Show Winners," *The Informer*, January 22, 1949, p. 4.
- 30 Beckham, interview.
- 31 Pitre, *In Struggle Against Jim Crow*, 5.
- 32 Beckham, interview.
- 33 Blue, *The Dawn at My Back*, 56.
- 34 Carol E. Vaughn, "Preservation Hall; Project Row Houses will revive Houston's first home of black music," *Houston Press*, December 16-22, 1999, p. 12.
- 35 Beeth and Wintz, *Black Dixie*, 164-65.
- 36 Wood, *Down in Houston*, 31.
- 37 Marty Racine, "The original 'golden oldie' / The Eldorado Ballroom has been renovated and again celebrates African-American history and culture," *Houston Chronicle*, May 21, 2003.
- 38 Wood, *Down in Houston*, 31, 76-79.
- 39 Ibid, 79.
- 40 Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 298.
- 41 Dwight Watson, *Race and the Houston Police Department, 1930-1990: A Change Did Come* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 5, 87.
- 42 Wood, "Howling on Dowling'."
- 43 Watson, *Race and the Houston Police Department*, 6.
- 44 "Warning to Houston Black Leaders," *The Informer*, August 15, 1970.
- 45 Vaughn, "Preservation Hall," *Houston Press*.
- 46 Project Row Houses, "Welcome," <http://www.projectrowhouses.org> (accessed December 2005).
- 47 Project Row Houses, "El Dorado Ballroom History," <http://www.projectrowhouses.org> (accessed December 2005); Wood, *Down in Houston*, 80.
- 48 Martin, "Spirit of Jazz," *Houston Chronicle*.
- 49 "The music behind the legendary El Dorado," KHOU Channel 11 News, June 2003, <http://www.khou.com/deborahduncan/page2.html> (accessed November 2005).

HOUSTON HISTORY CORNER

Recent books of interest:

Patsy Craven,
*Leavin' a Testimony:
Portraits from Rural Texas*
(Austin: University of
Texas Press, 2006).

This beautiful book
uses photographs and
interviews to recount
the history of Colorado
County (west of Houston)
since the 1930s. The
author, a Houston-based
photographer, artist, and
writer, presents a memo-
rable portrait of life in a
rural Texas community,
reminding many of us of
our roots.

Michael R. Botson, Jr.,
*Labor, Civil Rights, and
the Hughes Tool Company*
(College Station: Texas
A&M University Press:
2005).

This is an excellent
account of labor unions
and race relations in the
factory of a company that
was one of Houston's
largest industrial
employers. It won the
2006 T.R.Fehrenbach
Award as one of the best
books on Texas history
for its author, who teaches
at Houston Community
College.

Dwight Watson,
*Race and the Houston
Police Department,
1930-1960: A Change
Did Come*
(College Station: Texas
A&M University Press,
2005).

In the lifetime of many
of us, the Houston Police
Department has been
transformed from a depart-
ment notorious for its
racial attitudes into one
much more accepting of
the diversity of its officers
and its city. The author,
who teaches at Texas State
University, presents a lively
account of this change.

Roger Wood,
Texas Zydeco
(Austin: University of
Texas Press, 2006).

A great book for lovers of
Texas/ Louisiana music
and the Houston music
scene. (Photographs
by James Fraher). The
author teaches at Houston
Community College.

Ben F. Love,
*Ben Love: My Life in Texas
Commerce*
(College Station: Texas
A&M University Press,
2005).

This inspiring memoir of
an influential Houston
banker/civic leader was
published just before his
death. What a life he led.

NEW HISTORY ASSOCIATION FORMS IN HOUSTON

A new organization, the Houston History Association (HHA), has formed to promote Houston area history. William H. Kellar, Ph.D., of the Center for Public History at the University of Houston has been named Executive Director. The HHA will promote Houston area history in several ways including educational outreach to area school children through Social Studies coordinators, teachers, and Junior Historian chapters. HHA will encourage area teachers and students to research and create history projects related to local history and to participate in a Houston Area History Fair. The HHA will reach out to adults through neighborhood and community organizations to encourage, facilitate, and provide training for people to "find their history" through research and oral history interviews.

The Houston History Association also will serve as a resource and network for area historical, archival, and preservation organizations. Plans are underway to sponsor a "history summit" of these groups to coordinate and plan the first Houston Area History Fair. In addition, the HHA plans to support the creation of a Houston History Center, which will function as a resource center for local historical and preservation institutions, and as a visitor center to provide information and directions to Houston area historical sites, museums, institutions and activities. For more information contact William H. Kellar at 713-743-2342.

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