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Living Today Around Town Section C

Milan Stitt: joy and pain of an 11-year birth

By MIKE HUGHES Staff Writer

For more than a third of his life, Milan Stitt has lived with a play called "The Runner Stumbles."

During most of that time, he has been reasonably confident that the play would be a hit. "I was able to keep myself busy rewriting my awards speech," he jokes.

OTHERS MIGHT not have been so sure. The show was optioned five times. It played out-of-town a couple times. It lingered in limbo for 11 years.

And then it made it. Stitt's play finally reached Broadway in 1976. It wasn't a hit at the box office, but it was big with the critics. It was the sort of play that people who read the New York Times talk about. It was also the sort of play that eventually makes its author a lot of money.

"THERE'S a common misconception that when you have a Broadway show, you automatically get rich," Stitt

said in a phone interview from New York this week. "That's not true. The money doesn't really start until your show is being done by the regional theaters."

New Stitt has reached that happy point. His show is being done by at least four theater companies in Michigan this year. In Lansing, the Boardwalk Theatre people open their version tonight and figure it will be one of their bigger shows of the year.

IN SHORT, Milan Stitt is starting to make it big. His lifestyle hasn't changed all that much, he says. He still lives in his apartment near Greenwich Village and talks about being "a simple playwright."

But now, at least, Stitt is known by some important people.

HE JUST got back from Seattle, where he was working with veteran director Stanley Kramer on a script for a proposed movie version. If Kramer's plans work out, Dick Van Dyke and Kathleen Quinlan will co-star.

All of that might not have seemed very likely a few

years ago, when Stitt was a public information man at a New York library, waiting for his big break.

Stitt grew up in Detroit, attended Albion College and then went to the Yale Drama School.

THAT'S WHERE he first wrote the script for a class project back in 1965. What emerges is a serious drama about two people.

Stitt's wife is from Traverse City and told him the real-life story of a man who was murdered in the rectory of the tiny crossroads town of Iosadore, Mich.

Stitt isn't Catholic, but he was fascinated by what the story could say about rectory life, about the comforts and pressures of a insulated existence.

some comedies have."

PEOPLE STARTED saying good things about the play right away. Then came all the options, the regional productions, the rewrites, the re-rewrites.

During this time, Stitt had various jobs, including his library job and desk work at three theater companies.

And during it all, he says, he was fairly confident it would all work out. Each of those options ran for a year and each brought renewed enthusiasm. Each fell through.

THEN a young actor-director named Austin Pendleton saw the script and put together a show that worked. Clive Barnes, one of the most important American theater critics, saw a Connecticut production and raved. "The Runner Stumbles" was finally on its way.



Eichinger with Windlord and eagle poster

Staff Photo by BRUCE COBURN

Local art goes public

Riverfront Park's stately 'Windlord' starts to take form

By MIKE HUGHES Staff Writer

Sometime this autumn, the "Windlord" will begin rising over Lansing's Riverfront Park.

He'll be 18 feet tall, with almost a ton of metal and two or three

tons of concrete. He'll be a stern, but triumphant figure: Over the next few decades or centuries, thousands of people will see him or touch him or talk about him.

But will they like him? "I certainly hope so," sculptor Marty Eichinger said with a grin.

"Lansing can't afford another unpopular sculpture." The writing of Rivers sculpture on North Washington Mall has been criticized by many. Eichinger hopes his work will make things a bit.

His \$37,500 sculpture is taking form in a makeshift studio at the edge of the downtown. It is to be in place by the end of September.

Marty Eichinger is big on bringing the art and the public closer together. The sculptor, originally

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In Meridian, you can pay taxes amid beauty

By DENICE ANDERSON

It's no longer a place to go to just pay your taxes. Now its halls are filled with things of beauty.

And it's thanks to the "Meridian Seven" artists that visitors to the Meridian Municipal Building are surrounded by exhibits of paintings, drawings, sculptures . . . and even occasional musical performances.

THE CURRENT exhibit, running through May 18, features the paintings of Marilyn Raymond, in addition to new works by the other members.

It was two years ago that Meridian Seven launched its program.

A new show is presented every two months.

with recitals during the opening receptions. There's also talk of lectures and performances.

THE ART idea was launched with the help of Pat Huxtable, formerly on Meridian's planning committee, and Virginia White, town clerk.

Ms. Raymond, whose artwork is currently on display, is an Okemos painter who specializes in watercolor and drawings.

Other Meridian Seven artists include John DeRosa, Delores Kennedy, Loretta Suetter, Lola Kippel, Dorothy Wells and Harriet Spira.

The Meridian Seven has also set aside times for other exhibitors.

Although the Meridian concept is no longer

unique, the group was the first in the area to develop a year-round program of exhibitions with the approval of government officials.

THE JUNE 2 to July 31 exhibit includes a display by Doug McNeil of his paintings and constructions, plus new works by other members. The opening reception will be held from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. with a film on art.

Painter Ronald Lucas will talk on photography during the 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. opening reception.

Paintings by Harriet Spira and new works by members will be exhibited Nov. 3 to Dec. 15, and the MSU Brass Choir is tentatively scheduled to perform during the opening reception.

Later.

LANSING'S SHOW is open to anyone who is 18, is a resident of Michigan and pays a \$5 fee. Entry fees are available at the City Hall lobby desk or by writing the Parks Department, attention Capitol City Arts '78.

This exhibit will close June 2 and Lansing's will open three days

Hooker: back where it began

By W. KIM HERON Staff Writer

Before rhythm and blues became rock and roll, before rock and roll became rock, and before the boogie turned into booging down, there was, and is, John Lee Hooker.

Hooker, who will turn 60 this year, a survivor of the generation that produced the late Howlin' Wolf and others who are now gone, will appear at Michigan State University this Friday and Saturday in a rare appearance.

THE MUSIC that Hooker has made since his career began in the late 1940s is both classic and timeless. His standards, tunes like "I'm Mad" and "Boom, Boom," have been recorded numerous times by his admirers in the rock world. (Mick Jagger even sang one of Hooker's tunes in his appearance as an actor in "Performance.")

More important, Hooker himself evokes an aura that seems to cut through the years. It's not nostalgia when Hooker performs a 30-year-old boogie; it's a thrifty anger that puts the words back into the present tense.

Born in Clarkdale, Miss., Hooker grew up in an area that was home to delta bluesmen like Robert Johnson, Son House and Muddy Waters.

BUT WHERE many of the others concentrated on the finesse of the slide guitar and the optimism of showmanship, Hooker was different. With his first recordings in Detroit in 1948 — little many blacks he migrated to the wartime jobs in the north — he showed a percussive style as he bashed out a stream of repetitive chords and slapped his foot on the floor.

The blues has always been about overcoming the menaces of life. It has been Hooker's uniqueness that he can so fully embody the menace itself.

Titles like "I'm Mad, Like Jesse James," "Nightmare Blues," "Burnin' Hell," and "I'm Gonna Kill That Woman" are more than footnotes to his frame of mind.

Hooker was primarily a singles artist, recording for about a dozen labels under about a half dozen different names, until his first Riverside album in 1949.

THAT ALBUM introduced him to the folk blues audiences turned from rhythm and blues to the more sophisticated world of the 1960s, folk and rock audiences became his bread and butter.



John Lee Hooker: embodying the menace

His tunes were recorded by bands like the Rolling Stones and the Animals while elements of his guitar style were absorbed by musicians like Johnny Winter and the band Canned Heat. Canned Heat took his style so thoroughly they sometimes seemed to wallow in it, although they did record a respectable double album with their disc.

Appearing with Hooker this weekend will be Townes Van Zandt; a generally overlooked folk singer, whose wounded reminiscences are an antidote from Hooker's shouts. After 11 years of writing songs for other performers and seven albums of his own, Van Zandt is now receiving attention that's been denied him in the past.

WHEN HE returned to New York audiences after a prolonged absence last year, Jerry Leitching of the Village Voice wrote, "Van Zandt is a giant among his peers. He's also a slightly nervous, chronically disappointed, drunk, self-destructive hobnobber, but now, thank God and Lady, Townes seems to be getting better." Later in the same review, Leitching said he sounded like "Woody Guthrie on a grip drunk with Hank Williams."

An unlikely but perhaps complementary pair, Hooker and Van Zandt will perform at 8 and 10:30 each night in the MacDonell-Kiva. Tickets are \$5 in advance at the MSU Union Building and \$3.50 at the door.

City halls will be adding a touch of (temporary) class

The city halls in Lansing and East Lansing will soon be joining the trend towards putting some bits of art in public places.

Each of them will have an art show on display for almost a month. Mini-grants from the Michigan Council For The Arts are helping foot the bill.

THE EAST Lansing exhibit will open Sunday. It was limited to people who live or work in East Lansing, but has still drawn more than 30 extras, most of them in paintings or fibers.

There are also some extra touches of class: Joseph Itakawa of the Kresge Art Gallery will be the juror. There will be a reception from 10 to 4 p.m. Sunday, with classical guitar music by David Brough and Melanie Lirane.

This exhibit will close June 2 and Lansing's will open three days

Maria Muldaur's in a 'time warp'

For Maria Muldaur, life is in a bit of a time warp.

A while back, she was a hot rock music sex symbol. But then the '60s faded in Northern California, in a scene that still seems a bit like the '60s in limbo — underground newspapers, shows opening this week (C-4) . . . Music wrap-up (C-6).

The story is on page C-7.

Also inside: "PW movie tries to show life in a rock music station (C-4) . . . Synchro launches its big season in Northern Ohio (C-4) . . . Many and Susie have backed away from their marriage plans (C-10) . . . Three new art real-life hippies, the works. And now, cautiously, she's trying a comeback.

Best Bets

Sun and wind reign

The sun and the wind will take their rightful place of honor at Riverfront Park festivities this weekend.

For the sun, Lansing's "Sun Day" celebration is being spread over an entire week. There will be an assortment of displays, talks and entertainment along the riverfront.

And for the wind, there will be the second annual "Go Fly A Kite Day" Saturday. This year it's expanded so adults can take part.

Elsewhere, there will be a home tour in Eaton Rapids, an author talk at East Lansing and a chance to see a church from Darus Mott built more than a century ago. See E-2.

Big bands are back

Remember the old days, when you could go to a gym and dance to the music of a big band? Well, now you can do that twice this weekend — at East Lansing High School on Friday and at Sexton High School on Saturday. There will also be the usual variety of local square dances. See Dances.

Musical variety

This is one week when you can find almost any sort of unusual music.

The standard types — rock and country and the like — are fairly scarce, but the others are bountiful. There's a dulcimer player and two tenor organists and two jazz performances and the Grand Lodge High School band and John Lee Hooker's soulful blues and even a group specializing in obscure early music. See page C-6 and Music.

Rummage sale time

This is the time of year when rummage and garage sales seem to be everywhere. There are a bundle of them this week, including two that are unusual: The Eastside Neighborhood Organization will have a mass neighborhood sale Saturday and the Junior League will put together four different garage sales on consecutive days.

Elsewhere, there will be a flea market in Mullen, a card party in St. Johns and a lot more. See Fundraisers.

More nature

This will be another big weekend for getting out and enjoying nature — if the weatherman cooperates.

Fenner Arboretum will have its usual assortment of birdwalks and field trips, along with a Sierra Club equipment show Sunday. Fitzgerald Park's new naturalist will give tours. And Grand River Park will have a full-scale "Spring Family Fest" on Sunday. See Nature.



Kite enthusiasts like this (shown here at last year's "Go Fly A Kite Day") will be back Saturday

Keeping Busy

To have items printed in the "Keeping Busy" calendar on Thursday, readers are asked to mail or bring the information by Monday around Town, The State Journal, 126 E. Linnwood, Lansing 48910.

Nature

Fenner — Fenner Arboretum offers a birdwalk at 8 a.m. Friday and 9 a.m. Saturday; and a wildlife field trip at 10 a.m. Sunday. All are free.

Equipment show — The Sierra Club will sponsor an outing equipment show demonstrating hiking, biking, canoeing and backpacking equipment from 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday at Fenner Arboretum. It's free.

Family fest — Exhibits on pioneer living, nature photography, bird watching and more will be featured beginning at 10:30 a.m. Sunday at the Grand River Park and Riverbend Natural Area. The Spring Family Fest will cost \$1.50 per person or \$3.50 per family.

Fitzgerald park — A car caravan will leave Fenner Arboretum at 2 p.m. Sunday and go to Fitzgerald Park, which has a new naturalist who will introduce the area. It's free.

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