

the beat magazine

A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a white lace headband, a white t-shirt, a green military-style jacket, and a long beaded necklace with a peace symbol pendant, holds a wooden stick high in her right hand. She is looking upwards with a serious expression. In the background, other people and a peace sign on a sign are visible.

Issue 32 May 2012

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Jenn Kee in HAIR

Laura Woermke

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On the cover: Jenn Kee in The Grand Theatre production of *HAIR* - see article on page 12. Photography by Dave Homer.

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Printing	Wonderland Printing Ltd.

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Laura Woermke: Viewer as voyeur

By Beth Stewart

Laura Woermke comfortably straddles that imaginary line often drawn between art administration and art creation.

As the executive director and curator of the St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre, she is responsible for the day-to-day operation of a first class museum facility capable of housing works of almost any shape, size or description from around the world.

As a practicing artist with an exhibition history that dates back to 1993, the year she was awarded a bachelor of fine arts from the University of Windsor, Woermke is accomplished and prolific.

"My daily schedule is quite full," she admits. "Most days I arise around 5:30 a.m., paint for a few hours, get the kids off to school, and then I am off to work."

This month, we see Woermke's creative side take a clear lead with her solo exhibit – *Sick Secrets* – at the Art Gallery of Lambeth.

Although not a feminist, Woermke is decidedly pro-female. She muses, "Whatever life a female leads, there is a label she'll have to live down or live up to."

While Woermke's work to date has explored how women are "perceived and

documented" in mass media, *Sick Secrets* presents a more personal point of view.

"I have tried to identify the ways in which my own life has been affected by stereotypes and document my feelings towards them," she says.

Not surprisingly, the artist says her work has been influenced by two contemporary female painters: Marlene Dumas and Jenny Saville. Both deal with the physicality of the human figure as a means to explore social identity.

Like Dumas and Saville, Woermke works in a painterly fashion, emphasizing bold colour and texture, rather than line.

She describes her approach to image making as bridging the gap between what she sees and what she feels saying, "It is more than painting an image; it's about making the viewer feel the emotion in the figure."

Each piece in the *Sick Secrets* series depicts a close-up cameo of a woman's face contorted by emotion and captured with an exaggerated palette and energetic brush work.

All of the paintings are based on reference material culled from surveillance camera stills, as well as video clips from YouTube and television of people captured in vulnerable moments.



Laura Woermke's "Sick Secrets 6," "Sick Secrets 9," and "Sick Secrets 10," oil on canvas, 2012.

"Through the use of the recorded still images and close-ups, I enable the viewer to see beyond what the individual is intending to communicate and glimpse into secrets and private truths," Woermke says.

She describes the resulting paintings as playing with the subtle nuances of the face during the act of communication. Printed text is featured in some, forming both backdrop and an overlay; others present nothing but the face.

Some of the women depicted have their eyes closed to the world, intent on some private moment. Others have eyes that are open but unseeing. A few gaze boldly outward.

Woermke's method of working directly on the canvas with little preparation allows for considerable play and experimentation. Her bold brush strokes work to both amass and dissolve form. As a result, her portraits capture a fleeting moment that lies between motion and emotion.

Her strongly pigmented faces are reflective of society's "labels" as well as each subject's secret self, but they draw true meaning from their audience. "*Sick Secrets* relies heavily on the viewer's way of viewing the world," Woermke says.

Thus the viewer becomes the *voyeur*.

"I would like the viewer to take a moment and question their immediate reaction to the painting. It is my hope that they will learn a little more about themselves," Woermke explains. "Everyone has a secret."

Beth Stewart is a secondary school teacher, visual artist and writer.

What: Laura Woermke: Sick Secrets
Where: Art Gallery of Lambeth (2454 Main Street, Unit # 6)
When: To May 19
Contact: www.artgalleryoflambeth.ca

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The cast of *The Twiddle Plays* feels life is too short for tragedies.

Funny feels good

By Jeff Vandusen

Actress and director Heather May's theatre company, Maybles' Productions, is a rare breed among other groups in London in that it produces only comedies.

"We feel life is too short for tragedies," May says. "We want to give audiences an escape from bills, work and daily obligations. The plays we produce are easy to watch and understand, making them enjoyable for all ages."

A long-time participant in the alternative theatre scenes, May is a big believer in theatre's therapeutic properties. She founded Maybles' Productions in 2009 to share that philosophy with both actors and audiences. The reason the company only produces comedies is perhaps best-expressed in its tagline: "Because Funny Feels Good."

By holding auditions and rehearsals at her house, May creates a warm and familial atmosphere the actors can get comfortable in, building both lasting relationships and a strong level of trust among them.

The company is driven, May says, to give new actors the opportunity to learn and experience different aspects of theatre in a supportive and non-judgmental environment, and have a little fun in the process.

Maurice Hill's *The Twiddle Plays* is the company's second production, following their

Brickenden award-winning performance of Norm Foster's *The Love List* in 2010.

Premiering in mid-May at The Arts Project, *The Twiddle Plays* consists of two one-act comedies, *Miss Twiddle and the Devil* and *Miss Twiddle Meets an Angel*, about a woman so evil, the devil himself tries to save her soul to avoid spending an eternity with her in hell. The plays take place over a period of three weeks inside a boarding house where several people – save, of course, for the crabby Miss Twiddle – live happily under one roof.

Though *The Twiddle Plays* deal with angels and demons, it should be stressed that the production is a light, family-friendly comedy and should not at all be perceived as a religious play.

To keep with the fun atmosphere Maybles' Productions wants to create, May says *The Twiddle Plays* will "literally premiere in 3D" and the identity of the actress playing Miss Twiddle is being kept a secret.

"Miss Twiddle is definitely as the play describes her," May says with a smile. "When she's finally revealed to the public on opening night, it will really make people chuckle."

Jeff Vandusen is a local writer, film buff and jazz enthusiast.

What: The Twiddle Plays

Where: The Arts Project (203 Dundas St.)

When: May 16-18

Contact: www.artsproject.ca

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Eyewords

By Jay Menard

London teacher, Jen Orr, developed eyewords to help children learn how to read.

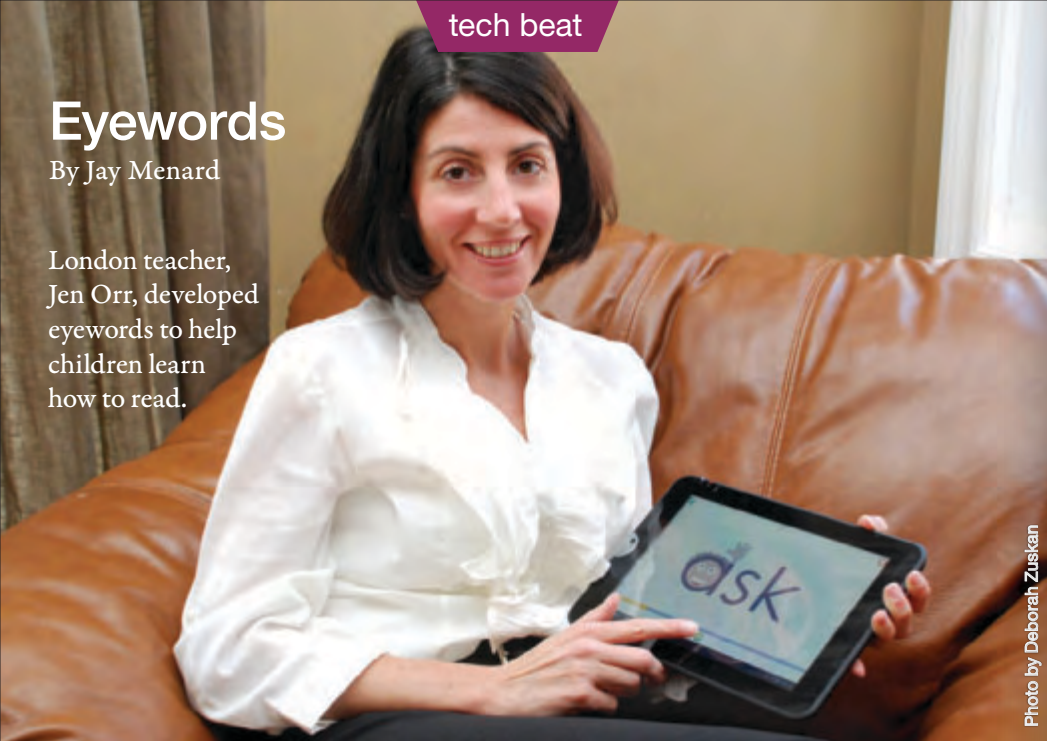


Photo by Deborah Zuskan

The future of our country lies in realizing the talents of our students. And one local teacher has developed a program that may help all students get a head start by improving their basic literacy.

Jen Orr, a teacher at London's Tecumseh Public School, has developed a program called eyewords – a teaching strategy designed to complement existing phonics studies by incorporating a visual dynamic into the recognition of key, high-frequency words.

“This isn't a program that's to be used against phonics; it's a complement to phonics,” she said.

The program includes three essential components: flash cards, whiteboard and wall applications, and the soon-to-be launched mobile/ tablet application, all of which are designed to teach reading fundamentals, while playing to the strengths of a generation that learns visually and is comfortable with electronic learning.

For example, a word like “look” would appear on the screen. A pair of eyeballs would be

embedded into the o's and then the images would disappear. That visual cue is important to helping children identify the meaning of the word, Orr said, without overwhelming the letters.

“There's a lot of research on word pairing, where a picture would be on the left and the word on the right,” she explained. “The challenge is that children get distracted by the pictures. I made all the images myself and used those that would appeal to kids and be meaningful.”

In many cases, she went right to the source to help select the best images. “It was a lot of trial and error. I'd talk to my class and my own kids.”

Currently, the program focuses on 50 high-frequency words (there are 80 in the mobile app.) Orr plans to add up to 100 more words, but believes that any more devalues the program. “If you can read the first 100 words, then you can read 60 per cent of text.”

She also believes this learning style can apply to all fields, including math, social sciences, and even adult second-language learning.

Orr has invested approximately \$15,000 into development of the program. She's combined her experience teaching with the technical expertise of her husband, a software developer. A graphics designer and programmer also helped develop the application.

Orr explained that she's seen a marked improvement in the students who have been exposed to eyewords. And while all the current research has been anecdotal in nature, the program is being studied by California's Stanford University.

“I have parents come to me and say, ‘I don't know what you're doing, but my five-year old is reading at a much better level than his or her older siblings,’” she said. “And grade one and two teachers have said they've been amazed at the reading abilities of the students.”

Orr also sent out the flash cards and whiteboard applications to about 50 colleagues

who have tested it. “For each I send out, I get four or five requests for more,” she said.

Currently, people can buy eyewords on-line. The mobile applications will launch soon, and research is ongoing. Eventually, Orr would like to be able to focus more time on developing and refining the program. However, she doesn't anticipate getting rich off eyewords (the app may be free or sold for only 99 cents) – her focus is to help students “for the greater good.”

“The goal is to have this program licensed to school systems,” she said. “This is a labour of love. Nobody gets into educational technology to get rich.”

Jay Menard is a corporate communications writer with a focus on social media by day; and multi-media by night. See more at: www.jaymenard.com

Contact: www.eyewords.com

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Artistic eats EOA

By Sarah Needles

With the proliferation of franchised cafes around London, it can be difficult to find something that stands out from the crowd. Enter Rob-E's Studio Café, a new, independent eatery tucked away at the corner of Dundas and Lyle St.

With a home-cooked menu that changes daily and whimsical artwork on every surface, the café is a cosy getaway from the bustle of the city.

What sets Rob-E's apart from other cafés is its upbeat, artistic culture. "I want people to think 'unique,' 'charming' and 'delicious,'" says owner and Chef Robbie Esseltine. "It reminds people of places in Berlin, Montreal, and Queen St. West in Toronto."

Since opening in July 2011, the café has established itself within the local community.

"People from the neighbourhood are trickling in, and local businesses continue to be very supportive," says Esseltine. Though the Old East neighbourhood may seem like a tough location, Esseltine saw the possibilities of the property from the beginning: "It seemed like a great little place. I saw the potential and I thought it would lend itself well to a coffee place."

Offering hot sandwiches, soups, and daily lunch plates that include salmon, vegetarian dishes, and homemade perogies, Rob-E's gives customers an opportunity to taste some top-notch cuisine at very reasonable prices. "It's amazing how you can really tell when something is cooked from scratch," says Esseltine.

Esseltine started hosting dinner parties in his early 20s while working at a hospital. After studying culinary arts in London, he lived



Rob-E's Studio Café has whimsical artwork on every surface, created by owner Robbie Esseltine.

and worked all over the United States before coming back to the city.

"This was my 50th birthday present to myself," he laughs.

But food isn't the only thing on the menu. The café is full of eye-catching artwork, from colourful glasswork to funky bowls made from recycled LPs (labels intact!). "It's all mine," says Esseltine. "I enjoy art and cooking is my profession, so the two work out really well together." And if you see a piece you can't live without, don't despair – all the glasswork and art is for sale.

"I'm always thinking of ways to keep customers happy," says Esseltine. "They are the people who help me bring in new ideas, and keep it interesting."

Sarah Needles is a playwright, poet and educator.

What: Rob-E's Studio Café
Where: 680 Dundas St. East
Contact: 519 858-4430

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Jenn Kee: Following her voice

By Dawn Lyons

She wasn't expecting to be involved in musical theatre. It was all about the voice; she just wanted to sing. But now Jenn Kee, a classically trained opera singer, has found her footing on the musical theatre stage.

After receiving a bachelor's degree in music at the University of Ottawa, Kee exercised her vocal chords by singing in bands, entering contests and performing as an active solo artist, travelling to gigs across southwestern Ontario. Since then, she has earned a master's degree from Western University's vocal performance program.

"I did a little musical theatre there," explained Kee, who was involved in the school's production of *Into the Woods*. "But the rest [of what I performed] was all opera."

A performance in the Grand Theatre's production of *The Hobbit* last year presented an opportunity for Kee to audition for a role in *Hair*. Because of her vocal range, she went into the audition focused on the lead role of Sheila.

"I'm a fairly low mezzo-soprano, but I can get up there, too," Kee explained. "Sheila is a belter and spends a lot of time in the lower range, so I knew I wanted this role going in."

She is thrilled with the overall experience of being involved in the production, which runs at the Grand until May 13. The rock musical portrays the culture of the 1960s, including its hippie counter-culture and sexual revolution. This and the fact that there is a nude scene meant the cast had to bond quickly.

"The cast is so talented ... everyone is very open and friendly and we were eager to make everyone feel comfortable," Kee said, adding that she doesn't have any worries about how the



Jenn Kee, a classically trained opera singer, has found her footing in *Hair*.

nude scene will be performed by the actors or perceived by the public.

"Tim French and Susan Ferley have staged the nude scene in a way that is very tasteful and no one feels exposed. I expect it will be a beautiful moment in the show."

Once the run for *Hair* ends, Kee will perform in *Country Sunshine*, a country music revue that also stars J.D. Bixby, of Canadian Idol fame.

Kee is also recording her first solo album, which she describes as "country-flavoured soul." She hopes to have the album ready in time for the revue, which runs from July 18-29 at the Petrolia Playhouse.

Dawn Lyons is a London-based writer and editor. Visit her online at: www.linesbylyons.com

What: *Hair*

Where: The Grand Theatre (471 Richmond St.)

When: To May 13

Contact: www.grandtheatre.com

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OIART - a temple of sound

By Chris Loblaw

OIART students Dane Kelly & Jon Paul Theirault in the studio.

Photo by Deborah Zuskan

Sitting in an industrial park in the south end of London, an unassuming one story building holds a temple of sound. The Ontario Institute of Audio Recording Technology (OIART) is a private college dedicated to faithfully capturing the art of audio in all its manifestations.

OIART was founded almost 30 years ago by Paul Steenhuis, an English audio engineer who learned his craft in the Landsdowne Recording Studio. After immigrating to Canada, Steenhuis created the recording engineering program at Fanshawe College, as well as teaching recording technology at Western University.

It was during these experiences with traditional post-secondary institutions that Steenhuis identified the need for a school focused exclusively on increasing the technical literacy of the next generation of engineers.

The result is a 1300 hour intensive program that focuses on all the technical aspects of sound recording. The program covers recording music, audio for film, sound for video games, and voice recordings, as well as career management, music theory, acoustics, and audio mathematics. This depth of knowledge

gives graduates a competitive edge when entering the job market.

The OIART program also covers the entire range of modern recording hardware and techniques, from magnetic tape machines to state-of-the-art digital technology. The curriculum is flexible enough to bring new techniques and technologies into the classroom quickly, responding to industry changes as they happen.

The technical education extends to hands-on configuration and repair of the equipment; an audio engineer needs to be able to both splice magnetic tape and reinstall the operating system on a computer.

Just as important as current technology and focused methodology, OIART builds a strong relationship between the instructors and students.

It starts with a student to teacher ratio of 5:1, which gives each student the opportunity to have their specific educational needs met. And if a student enters the program to study one aspect of sound recording but discovers they have a greater interest in a different focus, the

instructors will take the time to adjust the student's schedule and allow them to pursue the new interest.

The goal is to take a student with a passion for sound and give them the tools to work in the field that they love.

Lynne Dubec is OIART's admissions coordinator, as well as an audio technician and musician. She makes it clear to every prospective student that it's all about securing a job.

"Our program is extremely career-focused. Every choice we make on what to teach, what topics get emphasized, and what guest speakers to bring in, we make with the goal of getting our graduates hired," she says. "The students we accept are dedicated to doing this as a career. We want everyone here on the same page, going towards the same end goal of being an audio professional."

It's that focus and flexibility as well as OIART's international reputation for producing world-class audio engineers that attracts prospective students from around the world.

Building relationships with the local community is also important. Students are encouraged to volunteer at local festivals like Sunfest and venues like Aeolian Hall to gain practice in their field and an appreciation for their host city.

After graduation, students and instructors maintain their connection, actively communicating about the graduates' employment and experiences putting their education into practice. Alumni frequently make a return visit after years away, to join the faculty and become mentors to a new generation of students.

Bob Breen first came to OIART after finishing an English degree but still feeling the pull from his life-long passion for music and sound. After spending seven years working as an engineer, he came back to join the faculty as the head of Career Development and Industry Relations.

Like the rest of the faculty, Breen keeps his office door open whenever he's not teaching. "Our offices are mini-studios, so the students always have a chance to bring their work in to the teacher and work together to improve it in a one-on-one tutorial," he says. "It can be a mentoring session, a feedback session, or just a simple collaborative chat. It really gives the students a chance to interact and learn from

experienced industry professionals."

That knowledge transfer has paid off for the more than 90 per cent of graduates who find work in the audio recording industry.

OIART graduate Danielle McBride is now a supervising sound editor, managing a team of

sound editors working on the television show "The L.A. Complex." She credits her time at OIART as a contributing factor to her career success.

"OIART gave me the technical skills and the confidence to pursue my dreams of working in film," she says. "My starting knowledge was much more advanced than the other people I worked with, and as a result I advanced quickly. Four years of university taught me how to use a library; one year at OIART taught me how to have a career."

Chris Loblaw is a freelance journalist and author. He's currently working on the sequel to his novel WitchKids, which is available online and at Oxford Books.



OIART instructor Mark McDonald with students.

Contact: www.oart.org

A treasure trove of London history

By Phil McLeod



Downtown London still retains many heritage buildings of note.

You won't find it on the best sellers list, or even in the public library, but there's a new book in London that is sure to get a lot of attention from anyone who cares about this city's heritage.

Its title: "Downtown London Heritage Conservation District Plan." And perhaps book is a bit of a stretch; it's more a bound copy of a very important report, one that is likely to have a profound impact on how the city's core develops over the next half century.

Approved by city council last month, the plan establishes a heritage conservation district for an area roughly west of the Thames River and north of the Canadian National Railway tracks, south of Dufferin and Fullerton, and east of Wellington with a one block jog to Waterloo.

"This is very exciting," says city councillor Judy Bryant, whose downtown Ward 13 takes in the entire conservation area.

Creating a heritage conservation area is the principal way to preserve "critical functional and visual attributes that convey or have a historical relationship to the area," says the report, prepared by Stantec Consulting with the assistance of London historian Michael Baker and landscape consultant Sylvia Behr.

With designation, such things as buildings, natural and cultural landscapes and streetscapes "are protected while allowing for natural evolution, redevelopment and transformation over time."

And while Londoners don't always recognize the fact, the city does still have a lot of physical heritage to preserve downtown.

"In this area are buildings from which the city was governed, goods were manufactured for world-wide distribution, temperance was fought for and against," says Mr. Baker. "It's remarkable for a city to have three districts almost contiguous that represent the history of the city."

Among key historic buildings are City Hall from the 1920s and Kingsmills on Dundas Street; the London District Court House, now the home of Middlesex County administrative offices, on Ridout; the Grand Theatre, Dominion Public Buildings, and St. Paul's Cathedral on Richmond.

But there are dozens and dozens more. And what makes this report unique is that all of them are listed with a brief description of character-defining elements in an appendix. This is a real treasure trove for anyone who wants to walk the downtown streets in search of our history.

For example, take the two storey building at 357 Talbot Street, today the home of Heritage Antiques. Erected in 1865, it has significant status as the only wood-clad building in downtown London.

Or the yellow brick commercial buildings at 430 and 432 Richmond Street, now the homes of Moda Di Giuliana women's wear and David's Bistro. Built in 1860 these two buildings housed the London Free Press between 1866 and 1931. They feature replicated windows in original openings, cast iron lintels on the second and third storeys and large wood and metal cornice.

Or 122 Dundas Street, former home of J. Goose Family Clothing. This two-storey commercial building that dates to 1850 features painted brick with replacement windows in original openings, dentil line at the eaves and recessed arched window openings on the second floor.

As Ms. Bryant puts it: "You just cannot imagine how important these cornerstones are on our streets. It adds that element of dialogue and colour to our city."

Creating a heritage conservation district brings a level of protection to London's history, but it does not stop development. That's made clear by Gregg Barrett, the city's manager of planning and research.

"One of the things this plan doesn't do is freeze development," he says. "It sets out guidelines for what we'd like to see protected and what we'd like to see happen, how to consider change within the downtown and how development could occur that is sympathetic to the heritage character."

Phil McLeod writes regularly on civic affairs at www.themcleodreport.ca. You can email him at phil@philipmcleod.ca

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Scott Szeryk

By Bob Klanac

At an age when many musicians have their best years behind them, Scott Szeryk is just warming up.

When Scott Szeryk was a young lad he, like many of his peers, picked up a guitar to help navigate his way through the awkward teen years. But while most fell in love with the rock star dream, Szeryk fell in love with the guitar.

After high school, Szeryk studied at Los Angeles' famed Guitar Institute of Technology and then came back to London, hoping to earn some spare income by picking up a few music students.

As it turned out, he walked right into the guitar boom of the 90s. Almost 20 years later, he shakes his head at what happened next.

"All I ever wanted was to have 20 or 30 students to help me make a living under the umbrella of music," he explains. He soon had 150 students a week and five employees.

The upside is that the money helped to build his studio, Guitarkan Productions, and hire some session musicians to start his recording career.

A few notable albums resulted. And while guitar instrumental music has a sizeable fan base, most of those fans don't live in Southwestern Ontario. But Szeryk quickly realized that they do live on the internet, and those far-flung fans took to his music with passion.

And so at an age when some musicians are starting to put their biggest successes behind them, 42 year-old Szeryk is emerging as a "new artist" of sorts.

"What's happened now with the internet and iTunes, you can get worldwide distribution and still own your stuff," he says. "The model of the record company has changed."

The next challenge is touring and marketing his music. He knows people like his sounds. Going where they live and getting them to come out and see him live is the goal of his forthcoming tour.

"I'm trying to book a tour for the central south [US]," he explains. "We're all set and ready to go but the thing is that we have to give people a great reason to come out and see the show. That's the big challenge."

And while Szeryk would love to find some success on the concert circuit, he's also well aware that other opportunities may be more lucrative. He's currently trying to get his song "Celtic Rainbow" picked up by ESPN for Sportscentre updates.

He laughs, and then adds: "You don't grow up saying 'Hey I'd like to get my music on ESPN, but then you think of the exposure.'"

Bob Klanac has been scribbling about music since he was young enough to know better. For more, go to klanac.blogspot.com

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The Met, Mahler and more

By Nicole Laidler

Organist David Briggs is particularly well-known for his improvisational skills.

Gregg Redner has big plans for Music@Met. "Our goal is to bring in the greatest organists from around the globe to play as part of our series," says Metropolitan United Church's director of music. That dream begins when world-renowned organist, David Briggs, performs at the venue early this month.

Briggs is organist emeritus of England's Gloucester Cathedral and was recently appointed artist in residence at St. James Cathedral in Toronto. He plays more than 60 concerts a year, and is particularly well-known for his improvisational skills and orchestral transcriptions.

"Before there were recordings it was part of the organist's job to play symphonic works for people who didn't have access to them," explains Redner, who expects Briggs to pull out part of a Mahler symphony during his London recital.

The afternoon will also include works by Bach and French composers Louis Vierne and Charles-Marie Widor. "He'll close the concert with some spontaneous improvisation on tunes picked by the audience," says Redner. "It'll be exciting, because you never know what people are going to come up with."

Londoners have a rare opportunity to hear Mahler's *4th Symphony* when the London Community Orchestra and London Youth

Symphony team up for a joint season finale, May 13. The concert will bring almost 100 musicians together on stage along with guest soprano, Lesley Bouza.

"I realised that the only way either orchestra could mount something as large as a Mahler symphony would be if they joined forces," says Len Ingrao, who conducts both ensembles.

Composed between 1899 and 1901, the Fourth is short by Mahler's standards; a typical performance lasts about an hour. The only work on the program, it will be presented without an intermission.



Soprano Lesley Bouza performs Mahler's *4th Symphony*.

"The entire symphony is about heavenly life, with each movement being a different aspect of it," Ingrao explains. "The second movement is death playing a solo violin and leading the souls into heaven. In the

third movement, you're in heaven so it doesn't make much sense to chop it in half."

Both ensembles are enjoying the opportunity to play together, he adds..

The Amabile Boys & Men's Choirs also join forces for their season finale, which features a program full of musical adventure.

Vikings, Vagrants & Vagabonds "showcases the real spirit of men's and boy's singing," says conductor Carol Beynon. "It brings us together as a family, which is an important part of what we do. Our whole program is about building character through singing."

The concert features a set of songs about a ghost pirate ship performed by the youngest boys, a medley from the musical *Oliver*, Ralph Vaughan Williams' "The Vagabond" from *Songs of Travel*, and music from Iceland – chosen in preparation for a concert tour of the Nordic country next July.

"Iceland has a huge cultural tradition of male choral singing," notes Beynon, who traveled there last fall to begin the arrangements. "The people are very friendly, and it has amazing countryside."

Nicole Laidler is the editor of *The Beat* and a freelance writer. Visit her at: www.spilledink.ca

What: What: Music@Met
Where: Metropolitan United Church (468 Wellington St.)
When: May 6 @ 3pm
Contact: www.metropolitanchurch.com

What: What: London Youth Symphony & London Community Orchestra
Where: Dundas St. Centre United Church (482 Dundas @ Maitland)
When: May 13 @ 3pm
Contact: www.lco-on.ca

What: Vikings, Vagrants & Vagabonds
Where: Wolf Performance Hall (251 Dundas St.)
When: May 15 @ 7:30pm
Contact: www.amabile.com

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Springing in to cooperation

By Art Fidler

Stephen Sondheim said:
“Award shows may be good
for the ego, but they don’t
sell tickets.”

To paraphrase Oscar Hammerstein, spring is busting out all over, and theatre, film and art are set to bust out too.

But back in our winter, Bricking and Dishing, we had those usual competitive award discontents, among them questions about the qualifications of the adjudicators, and puzzling omissions from, and inclusions to, the nomination lists.

For me, the spring thing to remember is that these ceremonies, although masquerading under the guise of a competitive slam-down, are most significant for uniting and publicizing our entire theatre community.

Let’s mull over some comments on competition by Stephen Sondheim from his book, *Look, I Made a Hat*: “Competitive awards boost the egos of the winners (until they lose) and damage the egos of the losers (until they win) ... Just as there are people who claim to be immune to public criticism, so there are those who claim to be unaffected by being passed over for an award from their supposed peers, but ... I’ve not met any who convinced me ... No matter who the voters are and whether you accept them as worthy of judging you or not, winning means they like you more than your competitors; for that moment you are the favorite child of the family ... Awards shows ... may be good for the ego, but they don’t sell tickets.”

Interesting that Sondheim calls the isolated companies of a theatre community a family, since there seems to be a movement to bring the children of our local family together in a more formal sense, named something like “London Theatre Alliance” or “London Stages.”

I’m happy to see the possibility of this family sprouting. Even so, there are many things that groups can do to sow seeds of collaboration on their own initiative. Last year, there was a mid-summer event in which local companies presented a playbill together. Bring that back. The 24-Hour Rush for the Arts Project: keep that happening.

There are other ideas in the ether too: another benefit with representation by various local companies; special uniting events outside of competition; creation of a repertory bill by cooperating groups with inventive advertising and mutual ticket deals. All of it is fun stuff that might sell more tickets.

Change, cooperation, and more ticket revenue could be in the spring air. It’s up to us to make it happen.

Art Fidler is a retired but passionate drama instructor/ actor/ director, currently Director of Marketing for Original Kids Theatre Company, and a grandfather of six.

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Dark Shadows' London connection

By Robert Pegg



Hamilton's Jonathan Frid played the original Barnabas Collins in *Dark Shadows*.

Last summer during the filming of the new *Dark Shadows*, director Tim Burton flew a few of the original actors from the late 1960s gothic soap opera over to England to film cameo appearances for the new incarnation.

Reportedly, Johnny Depp, who plays "Barnabas Collins" went out of his way to visit with the original Barnabas, Jonathan Frid, to tell him, "None of this would be possible had it not been for you." He was referring to the impact Frid's work had upon the original series – and on impressionable youngsters like Depp who ran home to watch it after school.

The show was on the verge of cancellation when the writers added a vampire character. Frid's sympathetic portrayal of the tragic blood sucker saved the series, and made a middle-aged self-confessed bore from Hamilton, Ontario into

the most unlikely teen idol to ever grace the pages of *16* and *Tiger Beat*. Sure, Barnabas was a vampire – but at least he felt guilty about it.

It wouldn't be much of a stretch to suggest that the new *Dark Shadows* would also not have been possible without Frid's early training in the "Little Theatre" movement, some of which happened right here in London.

In the mid-1940s, Frid became involved in his hometown's Hamilton Players Guild. That led to a summer acting course in London at the Grand Theatre sponsored by the London Little Theatre and the University of Western Ontario in 1947.

"I distinctly remember that summer in London," recalled Frid when I interviewed him back in 1984. "Of course I love London, I think it's a charming town. And I got to know quite a few nice people down there with the Grand. There was artistic director Ken Baskette – he was a legend.

This was when the Grand was amateur and London was the centre of the entire Canadian Little Theatre movement," he continued. "It was largely the London Little Theatre that was the backbone of the whole Dominion Drama Festival after the war."

Johnny Depp bought the rights to *Dark Shadows* specifically so he could play the role that had affected him as a kid. Jonathan Frid was *Dark Shadows*. No Frid, no *Dark Shadows*. No summer internship at the Grand Theatre and Frid might not have gone into professional acting, eventually moving to New York and one day auditioning for what was to have been a 13-week job on a soap-opera.

Robert Pegg is a published author, currently working on his autobiography, "Living in the Past." Visit sonnydrysdalepresents.blogspot.com for more of his musings.

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Art and editorial photographer Melissa Upfold recently moved to London. While exploring the area she shot this photo of the moon through trees lining the Thames River in Springbank Park. To view more of her work visit www.calculatedcolour.com

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