

Arts & Entertainment

Westfield Symphony Orchestra Commissions Score from Genevieve Mannion for 2000

By MICHELLE H. LEPOIDEVIN
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times
WESTFIELD - Two thousand delicate and colorful butterflies, each representing a year in the millennium, is the mood Genevieve Mannion had in mind while conceiving a com-

posed piece, "Millennium Butterflies," for the Westfield Symphony Orchestra's (WSO) performance at First Night Westfield 2000.

missions, according to Maestro. "The constraints were formidable," he said, adding that the 14-member ensemble for First Night is "very specific." "It had to be a certain length and be complementary to Aaron Copland's 'Appalachian Spring.'" Matching the Copland piece, would be difficult, according to Wroe, but proved not to be an arduous task for Genevieve.

the melody dissipates out to nothing and pushes onto something very sweet."

With a little Y2K humor, Maestro quipped that the WSO would be using acoustic instruments in the evening's program. "So, even if the lights go



Michelle H. Lepoidevin for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WHAT'S THE SCORE?...Westfield High School graduate and Montclair University student, Genevieve Mannion was sought out by the Westfield Symphony Orchestra (WSO) to compose a special score for a WSO performance at First Night Westfield 2000. The end result was "Millennium Butterflies," which will accompany Copland's "Appalachian Spring." Funding of the commissioned score was made possible by the Westfield Foundation and PNC Bank. Pictured, left to right at PNC Bank in Westfield, are: Thomas G. Dwyer, Vice President, Business Development Officer of PNC Advisors; Joanne Santoriello, member of the Westfield Foundation's Board of Trustees and Chairwoman for the Endowment of the Westfield Foundation; Genevieve and Music Conductor and Director of the WSO, Maestro David Wroe.

missioned piece, "Millennium Butterflies," for the Westfield Symphony Orchestra's (WSO) performance at First Night Westfield 2000.

"It's a beautiful thing, but very terrifying at the same time," said Genevieve of her composition's theme. Genevieve, who is a 1998 graduate of Westfield High School and student at Montclair State University, was approached by Music Conductor and Director of the WSO, Maestro David Wroe, to pen the piece after he heard about a composition she wrote for the Colonial Symphony Orchestra.

During an interview with *The Westfield Leader* and *The Times* at PNC Bank in Westfield, Genevieve reported that "Millennium Butterflies" took her 1 1/2 months to complete. "I wasn't rushed, but I had to stay on top of it. It is a real emotional yoga, staying focused," she said.

Genevieve described the piece as "very, very light" with "lots of plucks" and "very butterfly-like."

She said she considered designing the beginning of "Millennium Butterflies" with a lot of heavy, serious notes and tones, she decided that the balance between beauty and the "creepy" nature of being immersed by tons of butterflies would be a good combination for the piece.

"It is a small, very short melody that comes in and grows more, comes in and grows more, and ends by tapering off," noted Genevieve.

"She has a reputation as a composer that preceded her," Maestro beamed when discussing the young composer. "It is a priority of the Westfield Symphony Orchestra to promote local talent."

"I was extremely impressed with her," he revealed, adding that after looking at her compositions, his "interest was piqued."

"First Night calls for excessively energetic music," noted Maestro. He added that he was "impressed by her (Genevieve's) musical style" and knew that it "would fit very well into our presentation for First Night."

Maestro told *The Leader* and *The Times* that the WSO is continuously striving to "represent the composer that is right on

out, we'll still be playing on!" he said.

Mr. Dwyer addressed the dollars and cents aspect of funding the composition. He noted that over the past two years, PNC has created the Union County Town Council, a Westfield-based committee made up of volunteers that work to support the community and its activities.

Over the past two years, he noted that \$70,000 has been given to various organizations, mostly in Westfield. In fact, \$5,000 was contributed to fund the circus act that performed at First Night 1999.

By "refocusing its support by giving to the Westfield Symphony Orchestra," Mr. Dwyer added, "We are just trying to get the message out that PNC has always been the one to reinvest in this community." He called PNC's support a "grass-roots approach."

"PNC looks at Westfield as a terrific market," noted Mr. Dwyer, pointing to the business district and cultural activities. "There is the potential to build strong relationships which will in turn help us in the future."

Maestro added that the relationship between PNC and the WSO can be described as "symbiotic."

PNC has also financially supported the WSO's marketing efforts, according to Ms. Jackson.

In total, PNC has contributed \$5,000 for the First Night performance and the Westfield Foundation has given \$5,000 and also \$2,500 more.

As for Genevieve, while Maestro will be at the baton on New Year's Eve, breathing life into her composition, the young composer intends to sit and enjoy the fruits of her labor as a proud member of the First Night audience.

Upon being asked what she hopes First Night participants gain from "Millennium Butterflies," she said, "If you love the Symphony, then you will love whatever they present."

Maestro asked Genevieve what she hoped attendees would come away with after hearing him perform her piece. "I want people to see at the end that when it ends,



Cheri Rogosky for The Westfield Leader and The Times
STRUMMING AND CROONING...New York City guitarist and soloist Billy Populus entertained crowds with his own personal compositions and well-known favorites during the family winter celebration sponsored by the Fanwood Cultural Arts Committee and its Winter Decorating Committee on December 5. Mr. Populus was raised in Fanwood and returned home for the seasonal celebration. He has performed in several musical arenas and venues, including The Crossroads in Garwood.

POPCORN™ Flawless Imperfectly Entertaining

By Michael S. Goldberger

One Popcorn, Poor • Two Popcorns, Fair • Three Popcorns, Good • Four Popcorns, Excellent

2 & 1/2 popcorns
Flawless, director-writer Joel Schumacher's atmospheric lesson in tolerance, is far more entertaining than it has any right to be. It's funny, touching and poignant, even though it's predictable, preachy and fastidiously noble.

Posturing like an avant-garde indie flick, drab cinema verite art direction and all, the only thing missing is Harvey Keitel. But the getting-to-know-you saga about a drag queen (Philip Seymour Hoffman) who helps his macho antithesis (Robert De Niro) recover from a stroke is much more Hollywood than it is Sundance.

Decrying prejudice in all forms, *Flawless* brims with commercially packaged outrage — the sort that gives audiences the self-satisfying notion that they've just contributed to world understanding. If someone asks you to donate to a liberal cause you can say you gave at the theater.

In this corner, probably hailing from Hell's Kitchen or Red Hook or someplace that sounds like that, is Robert De Niro as Walt "The Wall" Koontz, retired hero cop and homophobe extraordinaire. And in this corner, from Paramus, Philip Seymour Hoffman as Rusty, the consummate self-effacing boy-girl.

Following the film's opening bell, when Walt suffers a stroke trying to thwart a drug money vendetta in the flea bag hotel where he resides, the dipole duo's fates are tossed together.

Ashamed of his condition and frustrated by a painfully slow recovery, Walt takes the movie's first fantasy leap when he is told that voice lessons could help restore his speech: He solicits his heretofore disdained neighbor to provide said singing lessons. Tying in with one of the movie's superfluous sub-plots, Rusty has more than one reason for agreeing to provide the melodious tutorials.

Thus the battle of wits and emotions begins. And though you can't quite hear it, the tacit center-ring instruction is, "Come out bantering, and may the best man.....or whoever.....win."

Of course the singing classes are just a front for filmmaker Schumacher's greater humanitarian ambitions. That we are all brothers beneath the skin, even if that epidermis is covered in all manner of Maybelline, is the altruistic message he aims to spread. And admittedly, it is applied with a rather thick mascara brush.

But the sessions are diverting nonetheless, thanks mostly to fine acting performances by Messrs. Hoffman and De Niro as they do their highly appealing rendition of dueling libidos. Each feels the need to defend his sexual preference.

Mr. Hoffman, who previously wowed filmgoers with a much darker sexual confusion in *Happiness*, transcends the stereotype popularized in films like *The Birdcage*, breathing lively energy and wit into the lonely but effervescent homosexual who hopes to one day purchase a sex change operation.

A self-appointed philosopher for the divergent and misunderstood, the transsexual is known as Busty Rusty at the gay night club where he/she does an act in the tradition of Sophie Tucker and Belle Barth.

It's a seedy little place, a metaphor reflective of Rusty's life in general. But while director-writer Schumacher's hackneyed script certainly suffers its shortcomings, the quips and one-liners it supplies to form Rusty's persona and patter are simply delightful.

Strutting his superbly understated stuff in the contrasting role, De Niro does a snazzy balancing act, mimicking stroke symptoms and uncannily simulating the slow road to recovery. His exacted gradations of improvement impart a lesson in the despotic subtlety.

No such luck with the film's supporting performances, which are rarely little more than window dressing. A humorous exception is the gaily bedight gaggle of bromidic

pals who flit in and out of Rusty's flat. They serve as comic relief while also providing shock value for De Niro's chagrined straight man.

Most of the other secondary portrayals, aside from helping keep the nation's unemployment rate low, merely furnish bodies for *Flawless*'s perfunctorily etched side business. There are at least five mini-plots to wade through.

The extraneous sub-texts include: the murderously vile drug thugs in dire search of their ripped-off funds; Walt's oddly romantic relationship(s) with two women (Wanda De Jesus and Daphne Rubin-Vega) at a dime-a-dance joint he regularly frequented before his illness; Rusty's scheme to acquire the surgery that he feels will make him "a real woman;" the anxiously awaited drag queen pageant which shares its title with this film; and then there's the feeling of dread that surrounds Barry Miller as creepy As Leonard, the snake-in-the-grass desk clerk whose informing ways could put all those concerned in harm's way.

But all that this rigmarole really does is point out the inherent inequities of the main plot.

It becomes apparent that while the zingers fly fast and furious, there is only occasional substance in the droll repartee. Schumacher has nothing new to add to the timeworn relationship tale. Hence, with neither the big nor the homosexual sketched to three-dimensional depth, the viewer is never fully drawn into their connection.

Stories dealing in the very intimate, mind-to-mind combat that comprises this genre, must possess a searing honesty. That's just for starters. If they are to be completely absorbing, like *Educating Rita*, *The Dresser* or *My Dinner With Andre*, then they require the elegantly fine detail of a Faberge egg melded with the intellectual ebullience that only attends truly inspired character study.

But while engaging and full of goodwill, placed next to these brilliant jewels the rather tarnished *Flawless* is only a minor gem — the kind that will show best six months from now when it's available on videotape.

Flawless, rated R, is a Metro Goldwyn Mayer release directed by Joel Schumacher and stars Robert De Niro, Philip Seymour Hoffman and Daphne Rubin-Vega. Running time: 112 minutes.

Local Students Perform as Part of All State Chorus in Venues

SCOTCH PLAINS - Scotch Plains Fanwood High School (SPFHS) was well represented at the recent performance of the All State Chorus held at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) and Atlantic City Convention Hall.

Eleven students were chosen to participate in the 72nd annual performance, sponsored by the New Jersey Music Educators Association (NJMEA). The concerts were held in Atlantic City Convention Hall on November 12 in conjunction with the New Jersey Education Association's teacher's convention and at the NJPAC on November 21.

The All State Chorus was accompanied by the All State Orchestra at both shows.

Auditions were held over two weekends in the spring. Since then, the Chorus has been practicing at various sites throughout the state for the two shows. In all, over 330 students from over 80 school districts were selected for the chorus.

Laurie Wellman, SPFHS Choral Director and a member of NJMEA, stated, "The kids were wonderful

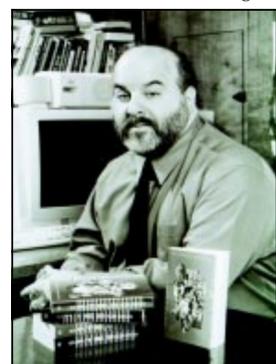
Millennium

Continued from Page 26

"I tried to give a good indication of how the century has changed," Mr. Laventhar explained. "History is a kind of dying art."

According to the author, the evolution of music and dance, as well as women's fashion, has gone from that of a constrictive nature to a more open-ended structure later in the century.

In addition, the technological



Paul Laventhar

advances since the flights of the Wright Brothers have enabled probes to be sent up to Mars for detailed exploration on other life forms.

War, Mr. Laventhar believes, is the same in the beginning of the millennium as it was at the end. Despite the difference in the weapons utilized for battle, he explained that the reasons and principles behind going to war are pretty much the same.

Another "Millennium Journal" in the series about sports provides an overview of athletic heroes from Babe Ruth to Michael Jordan.

"All of these people are cultural icons that tell how we are changing as people," reported Mr. Laventhar.

The journal entitled, "20th Century Fashion and The Changing Role of Women," reads, "Fashion holds up a mirror to our times, reflecting social and economic change. As America has evolved throughout each decade, so has its fashions."

Constricting corsets and flamboyant hats were all the rage in the 1900s and 1910s, according to Mr. Laventhar. But, at the end of the millennium, "shorter skirts," "baggy jeans" and "retro fashions" took center stage on women's clothing must-wear lists.

"American dance and music are as intertwined as two kids making out on a couch with the Victrola, record player, 8-track, cassette player, CD or MP3 player on in the background," reads the journal tagged, "Dance and Music in the 20th Century."

Mr. Laventhar cites the Turkey Trot, Grizzly Bear and One-Step as dances that made Americans enthusiastic to cut a rug. However, as the new millennium drew near, The Lambada, country line dancing and The Macarena were the crazes to crave.

"I wanted to take what people find boring and give a quick read of the history of a certain area," revealed Mr. Laventhar.

The author has also penned books on New Jersey, New York, Somerset County, Michigan and Minnesota. He has also done artwork for another series of books entitled, "The History of Us."

Each "Millennium Journal" is \$6.95 and available at local bookstores.

and everyone in town should be very proud of them."

Eleven students were the most from any school to participate in the Chorus this year, marking the best showing ever for SPFHS.

Representing Scotch Plains-Fanwood were: First Soprano Meryl Bezrutczyk and Courtney McDonald, Second Soprano Lindsey Davis, Kathleen DeLuca and Laura Kavinski, Alto I Christine Perotta, Alto II Cara Bristol and Chitra Kalyanaram, Bass I Gary Fletcher, Bass II James L'Heureux and Tim Pai.

The Chorus was directed by James O. Beil, Chorus Director at Westfield High School.

The Scotch Plains-Fanwood All Staters can be heard again as part of the high school's Annual Holiday Concert this evening at 7:30 p.m.

The concert will feature performances by the Concert Choir, Select Choirs and the Show Choir, as well as the Orchestra, Percussion Ensemble, the Moonglowers Jazz Band and others. Tickets will be on sale at the door.

