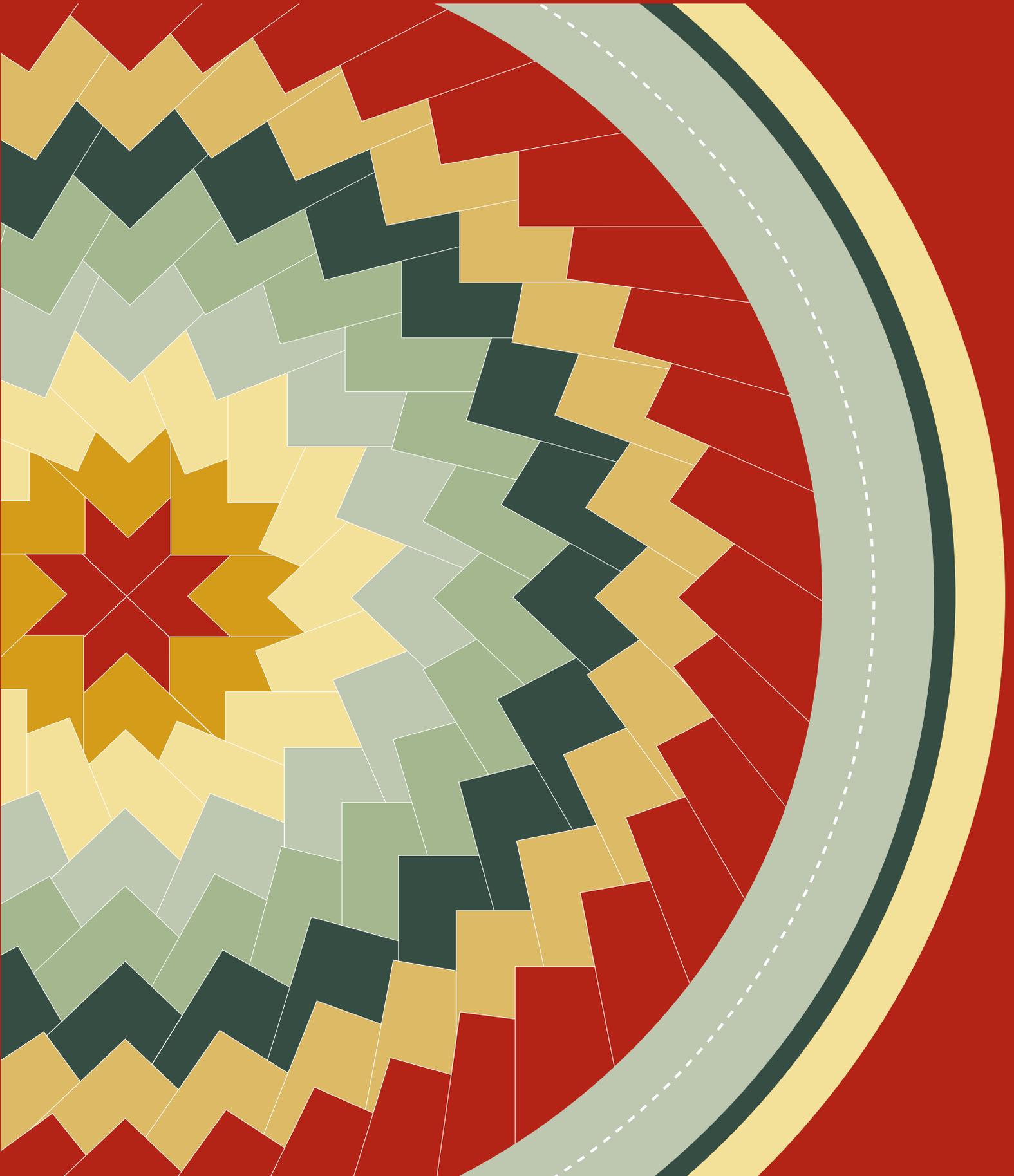


ALABAMA ARTS

Volume XXIII, Number 1

State Arts Awards Issue 2009



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ALABAMAARTS

Volume XXIII

Number 1

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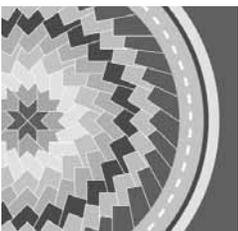
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On the Cover: The cover graphic uses the logo created for recent nationally award-winning campaign "Year of Alabama Arts." The Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel along with the Alabama State Council on the Arts used this format to expand awareness of the arts statewide. This promotional event brought increased tourism and revenue to Alabama.

The logo was designed by Luckie & Company (Birmingham) and was inspired by the Pine Burr Quilt, designated the official quilt of Alabama by the Legislature in 1997. The quilt represents the traditions and history of Alabama. It also honors the Freedom Quilting Bee, a women's cooperative organized as an outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement. The logo is based on a version of the Pine Burr quilt by Quinnie Pettway and her daughter Loretta Pettway Bennett.

The Alabama State
Council on the Arts



*Celebration
of the
Arts*



2009

ARTS AWARDS 2009

by Al Head

There are indeed many heroes in Alabama who make our cultural landscape one of the richest in all the country. Alabama is blessed to have an abundance of all these elements contributing to an environment that is a vibrant “coat of many colors.”

Every other year the State Council on the Arts, as a celebration of our unique cultural landscape, recognizes outstanding individuals who have made significant contributions to the state they call home. More often than not, awards tend to be unnecessary for those put in the spotlight, since praise and recognition is seldom their motivation. But, showcasing cultural heroes is important for those of us who appreciate and admire their work and know our lives would not be as rich without these special people. It seems only fitting that we give them due credit for making our quality of life better and our state a far more interesting and enjoyable place.

This year we celebrate the artistic work and teaching of two university art professors, one from Auburn, one from Tuscaloosa who have inspired thousands of students and acquired admirers of their own substantial work. We recognize a tireless volunteer and patron of the arts from Huntsville who achieves greatness through giving to her community and to individuals, young and old alike, who love the arts. We pay tribute to a man originally from Mobile who revolutionized the art of vocal harmonizing where disciples of this style continue to entertain audiences worldwide. The Council honors a legendary bluesman famous far beyond his small, rural community in West Alabama whose music transcended race, age, social status and geography with a language that only traditional blues speaks. The State through the Council pays tribute to the “living legacy” of a writer, photographer and storyteller from Selma who has captured most of the great qualities of Alabama in her work and has shared them

with the world. In 2009 we recognize a renowned composer and gifted performer from Montgomery who delivers a unique message about the human spirit that resonates not only with southerners but, with diverse cultures across the globe. Finally, the Council spotlights a “lifetime of achievement” by a true community artist from Guntersville where one individual has made theatre come alive through direction, performance, set design and costuming and in the process touched the lives of many generations of Alabamians.

We have much to celebrate and many to thank relative to the arts in Alabama. We hope our arts and artists will be appreciated more tangibly in the future through direct contributions, attendance at a wide range of activities, purchase of work, maximizing educational opportunities and volunteering our time and talents. We certainly have the “heroes” who have paved the way and provided the role model for those who want to participate in and support the arts. We will always be appreciative of their leadership and inspiration.



*Al Head is the
Executive Director
of the Alabama State
Council on the Arts*

THE JONNIE DEE RILEY LITTLE LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD



Dot Moore

The Whole Backstage

by Johnny Brewer

Dot Moore...when her name is mentioned in Marshall County and North Alabama, the response is very often, "Ah yes, The Whole Backstage."

It is quite difficult to separate the two. The folks close to her know that both names represent an idea of family, working together, dealing with adversity, doing the best you can and nurturing friendships.

Those who know her only by name recognize that she has been instrumental in the beginnings of an amazing community theatre group known as "The Whole Backstage."

I have been with "The Whole Backstage" for 34 years. I consider Dot my mentor, my friend, and for all practical purposes, my second mother. Through the years, she has been a second mother to many Whole Backstage participants. And to this day, she continues to be a special influence to young people born decades since the creation of "The Whole Backstage."

One of my favorite movies is Frank Capra's, *It's a Wonderful Life*. The premise of the movie is basical-



Dot Moore by Portrait Designer, Ty Smith.

Photo by Ty Smith

ly what the world would be like without the lead character's determination, kindness, creativity and generosity. In spite of the personal sacrifices, George Bailey made a difference in the lives of others and in his community as a whole.

Dot Moore is George Bailey. She is caring, determined, creative and generous. Dot has made many personal sacrifices so that others and

her community would grow more in themselves and in a power that has enriched the lives of many.

What would our community be without Dot? I don't think that it would be the "Pottersville" we see in the movie. I would venture to guess that our community would have a cultural void and those missed opportunities would change the course, the complexion and the lives of individuals, cities and art programs throughout the state and elsewhere. As Clarence Oddbody, George Bailey's Angel in *It's a Wonderful Life* says, "One man's life touches so many others."

The Whole Backstage began out of growing concern that the young people in Guntersville, Alabama would become restless because of the limited activities available to them and that the turbulent times of the late 1960's would be a catalyst for unrest in the community. After the deaths of 3 teens in Marshall County in the summer of 1968 Dot Moore

and several businessmen in the area, held a town meeting to discuss what could be done to create a “safe haven” for the youth of the community.

Dot spearheaded the creation of what would become known as “The Teen Club.” By September of 1968, local businesses and community supporters, as well as the city government, created a youth council with adults and teens as part of a “board.” A “Teen Club” was formed with 200 teenagers joining at \$5 each to help in the cost of maintaining the donated building and to provide funding for several youth-based activities.

One idea “The Teen Club” members initiated was the presentation of plays. Dot, a humanities teacher for Marshall County High School (now Guntersville High School), taught drama as part of her classes. These first productions grew out of an effort to provide character-building activities for club members and to provide a creative outlet for everyone involved.

The club created an organization within itself called “The Dramatic Drop-Ins” and by December of 1968, presented Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* in 6 locations throughout Marshall and Jackson counties. *Our Town* and the message it delivers of faith and community will become Dot’s torch and inspiration from this point forward.

Dan Warnes, now a local attorney in Guntersville and one of the original members of “The Teen Club” wrote of his experience, “It was an education in working together,” he said. “I was an actor and a stage hand and did whatever else needed to be done. I did a little bit of everything. We all did.”

“We sold Krispy Kreme Doughnuts®, not drugs,” said Scott Copeland another original member of “The Teen Club.” Scott, the Producing Director of the Nashville Children’s Theatre for the last 24 years, credits The Whole Backstage and Dot Moore as important influences in his life and career. Scott said, “We (The

Teen Club) had a purpose and that purpose was driven by Dot Moore.”

Dot has a very unique life. Some classify her as “quirky” when they first meet her, but after talking with her for just a few moments, they soon realize that she is charming, elegant, and to the point.

Born in 1933 in Port Au Prince, Haiti, Dot was of a military family. Her father was a Marine officer, Brigadier General Robert Edward Fojt.

As a colonel, Fojt served as Commander of the U.S. Marine base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba before Castro came to power. Interestingly, his position was the same as the role played by Jack Nicholson in the movie, *A Few Good Men*.

Dot, along with her only sister Pat (Dr. Patricia Glover), and their mother, Alice Frances Hruska Fojt, traveled the United States and the world. Guam, California, Hawaii, Germany, North Carolina, Virginia, Texas, Maryland, Oregon in addition to their visits to Japan, China, the Philippine Islands, England, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Jordan, Greece, and France became a few places that etched a landscape of visual images in the mind of Dot Moore. These windows to the world would later be used to create costumes, backdrops and set pieces for the plays and musicals she would direct.

Dot, an accomplished artist and seamstress, would paint and build sets based on her experiences and travels. The sets and costumes she designed and created for *South Pacific*, *Camelot* and *A Man for all*



Photo courtesy of Dot Moore.

The production of A Man for all Seasons, set design by Dot Moore.



A production of *The Curious Savage* (Dot is sitting on the floor in front).

Seasons are several productions influenced by her life's adventures.

Dot says she moved every 18 months of the first 33 years of her life. After being married for 12 years, Dot finally settled down in 1963 in the small town of Guntersville, Alabama.

She and husband Ernie Moore, bought a house on the lake. At that time Ernie worked for the up and coming IBM Corporation and was employed in Huntsville.

Dot and Ernie have two children of whom they are most proud, Lynn and Robin (Robert Ernest Moore). Lynn is an environmentalist educator and Robin is a research chemist for NASA.

Dot and Ernie divorced in 1977 but still remain good friends. Ernie and their son Robin were the driving force behind the "technical beginnings" of The Whole Backstage. They are still involved today. Ernie was one of the primary financial contributors to the renova-

tion efforts of The Whole Backstage building in 2005. Because of his generosity, Ernie was given the privilege to name the auditorium. It could have been "The Ernie Moore Auditorium" or he could have named it after their children. But no, instead he asked that it be called "The Dot Moore Auditorium" and in a public ceremony it was so rightly named.

Dot Moore's "The Whole Backstage" as we know it, came into its own in 1973. "The Teen Club" evolved more and more with integration of adults. Dot often comments, "the grownups were now seeing how much fun we were having."

With the production of *Fiddler on the Roof* in 1973, adults were now part of the cast and crew. The group incorporated, created a Board of Directors and changed the name to "The Whole Backstage."

Why this name? Dot, as you can image, gives us the reasons in excerpts from her original purpose

written in the early 1970's:

The purpose of The Whole Backstage is really contained in a play on words of our title. We are a stage. People look at us. We are also a stage in the sense that the whole world is a stage, with each of us watching and learning from others.

We are a backstage because (1) we aren't really legitimate theatre, we do lots of other things; (2) our building looks like a backstage all over; (3) most of our real learning takes place backstage, or at least, not in view of a paying audience.

Thus, our organization is loose—it accepts and wants everyone's contribution, whether it is big or small, inept or excellent, because we know the bumbling amateur this year, the child, will be the important, highly contributing



member at some time in the future. We allow a place for failure where falling will not hurt too much. And we reward attempts to succeed almost more highly than success.

With no official home, the group practiced plays in church basements, living rooms, gyms and on the beach at the Guntersville State Park. Performing venues included the Guntersville Town Hall, the Albertville Recreation Center, Snead College Fielder Auditorium, the Fort Payne Opera House and even the Von Braun Civic Center in Huntsville.

In 1979, the late Bob Hembree Sr., Mayor of Guntersville, asked "The Whole Backstage" to occupy the auditorium and stage portion of what was the former Guntersville Elementary School. The building, built in 1922, was city property housing the Senior Center and other civic organizations. As occupants gradually moved out, the WBS obtained more and more of the building and soon after, acquired the entire facility. Dot's dream of a permanent home was finally realized.

In the 1980's, Dot, though active as a WBS Board member, spent several years as a paid full-time director of a community theatre in Gadsden, Alabama. During this time she was appointed as a Lifetime Board member of The Whole Backstage. She is one of only three Lifetime Board members of the WBS and shares this honor with her son, Robin, who continues to design and create

lighting for the productions today.

In 2002, The Whole Backstage embarked upon a major renovation plan. Dot, not knowing her upcoming battle with cancer was near, was as expected, a major creative force behind the multi-million dollar renovation.

She, along with other Whole Backstage Board members, solicited help from volunteers and patrons, to politicians and preachers...this was "Krispy Kreme" time and Dot knew how to get others involved.

In 2004, Dot was diagnosed with lung cancer. After having surgery to remove part of a lung, she has been cancer free. Since her surgery, Dot has continued to be energetic and sometimes runs circles around volunteers half her age.

As the major renovations were coming to a close, it was only fitting that Dot be asked to direct the first major musical in the newly renovated space. *The King and I* used over 120 volunteers as performers, stagehands, lighting, ushers, box office, builders and concessions. All of this cooperative effort was through the energy and enthusiasm generated by the woman who started it all 37 years prior.

Dot is often shy and genuinely humbled by the recognition she receives.

Among her honors: Dot was named one of the 100 most influential people of the 20th Century in the city of Guntersville. She was the recipient of the Alabama Governor's

Award for Volunteers in the Arts and Humanities in 1988. Lake Guntersville Chamber of Commerce selected Dot for the 2004 President's Cup for Lifetime Community Service award winner. Also in 2004 she received The Bill Bates Award. The Bates Award is given to someone who has "worked tirelessly in the arts without the thought of reward." (The award was named for Bill Bates who served as Deputy Director of the Alabama State



Dot working backstage.

Photo courtesy of Dot Moore.

Council on the Arts for 17 years. He passed away in 2002). Dot's other achievements include serving as President of The Whole Backstage Board of Directors and the Mountain Valley Arts Council. But with all the honors bestowed upon Dot, the one accomplishment and title she covets most is what long-time WBS member Andy Hunter coined, "The Founding Mother of The Whole Backstage."

What impact has Dot Moore had that would change the lives of an entire community?



Photo courtesy of Dot Moore.

Dot addressing the crowd during groundbreaking ceremonies for the renovation of The Whole Backstage.

Dot has been influential in encouraging people who might not have otherwise been inclined to get involved in music, theatre, art or literature.

She has had direct and indirect influence with our area schools and school systems to begin and maintain a performing arts program.

Dozens of young individuals have embarked on professional or semi-professional careers in the performing arts as a direct result of having worked with Dot Moore.

She has inspired thousands of young people and adults to give more of themselves than they thought possible.

She is an encourager of life-long dreams.

She **has** made an impact on our community and for that we all are eternally grateful.

Because of her tireless energy and boundless enthusiasm, the efforts and leadership of Dot Moore, backed by a love for theatre, The Whole Backstage is a proudly acknowledged part of our community.

It seems as if I've written more about "The Whole Backstage" as an organization than I have about Dot Moore, the person. As I said in the beginning, when her name is mentioned the response is very often, "Ah yes, The Whole Backstage." The two are the same.

The bricks and mortar, the new fly system and the orchestra pit, the expanded costume storage and great dressing rooms, **are not** "The Whole Backstage." Dorothy Moore's vision, her dreams of people working together to create beauty and art is "The Whole Backstage."



An exterior shot of the Whole Backstage Theatre.



Photo courtesy of Dot Moore.

Dot cutting the ribbon at her auditorium dedication ceremony, The Whole Backstage Theatre.

"One man's life touches so many others. When he's not there; it leaves an awfully big hole." says Clarence the Angel.

We acknowledge Dot for filling that "hole" with love and inspiration. Thank you for "The Whole Backstage."

Johnny Brewer

is an instructor of Speech

and the former Director of Theatre at Snead State Community College.

He is also a 34-year veteran of The Whole Backstage Theatre.

Photo courtesy of Dot Moore.

THE DISTINGUISHED ARTIST AWARD

Beth Nielsen Chapman

Giving Voice to the World

by Brenda Robertson Dennis

Beth Nielsen Chapman, a singer-songwriter with Montgomery roots, renowned for her powerful vision and her pure, clear voice will follow in the footsteps of Alabama natives Fannie Flagg, Jim Nabors and the artist Nall when she is honored with the 2009 Distinguished Alabama Artist Award in May.

If there were awards given to years that shaped our history, 1969 would be a powerful contender. While progress in technology, human rights and culture were turning our world upside down, people were also embracing the power of gathering in numbers to make their voices louder. A little concert called Woodstock was organized on a New York farm with more than 400,000 fans attending, while 250,000 people marched on Washington in protest of the Vietnam War. American

Walter Cronkite pre-empted
Disney one night

And all us kids were upset

We thought that you were a
trouble instigator

Marchin' through our T.V. set

(-“Beautiful Fool,” *Prism* (2008) written by
D. Henry and sung by Beth Nielsen Chapman)



Photo by Bob Sherman

Astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first human to set foot on the moon, uttering the immortal words “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.”

Meanwhile, on an Air Force Base outside of Munich, Germany, and nearly 5,000 miles away, a young girl named Beth

was looking up from her Barbie Dolls for the first time and seeing the world brand new. As an Air Force

on a school field trip to Dachau, one of the largest and most gruesome German concentration camps of

WWII, that Beth Nielsen Chapman says her thinking changed forever. “It just hit me that people were doing these terrible things...that things were happening in the world, and being a kind of reflective sort of person anyway, it was a hugely impactful time for me.” That’s why soon after, when Beth’s father announced to the family that they were being transferred to Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Ala., he might as well have been telling her that they were going to live in 1930s Germany. The upcoming move was terrifying to Beth who viewed Montgomery as a war



Photo courtesy of Beth Nielsen Chapman.

Beth standing in the doorway of the Abby Road Recording Studio.



Photo courtesy of Beth Nielsen Chapman.



Beth with singer/songwriter Carol King.



Photo courtesy of Beth Nielsen Chapman.

Beth with Waylon Jennings.

zone of racial unrest and violence. The eleven year old who had just begun to play the guitar and write songs was about to discover that music would become her refuge, as well as her freedom.

Beth entered the ninth grade at Cloverdale Junior High School, and while she found an environment where blacks and whites were indeed very separated, she was happily surprised to find friendships among them both. Still, by the time she entered high school at Jefferson Davis High School, with the 1970s rolling in, Beth felt increasingly nostalgic for the lives of her new friends who had a hometown that they had grown up in, instead of the transient life she had experienced. This became the point by which she measured herself as an outsider of sorts and a bit of a “weirdo.” “It put me in my room alone with my guitar a lot. That’s what I went to when I didn’t fit in,” said Beth. “I started bringing it to school...walking down the halls of JD with my wire-rimmed glasses and curly hair,” she laughed. “I used to sing in the girl’s bathroom during study hall and disrupt the typing class. We had all these girls in there



Photo courtesy of Beth Nielsen Chapman.

Beth with Chet Atkins.

singing Judy Collins’ ‘Who Knows Where the Time Goes’ at the top of our lungs.” Unfortunately, Beth’s new found confidence in her craft soon landed her in the principal’s office, ending her bathroom gigs. “He told me, ‘You know, if you bring that guitar to school again, we’re going to have to put it in a locker until the end of the school year.’ That’s probably the most trouble I ever got in.” Luckily she did find encouragement in Jeff Davis music teacher Ann Small who saw Beth’s potential and recommended that she go to college to study voice.

When Beth was about 16 years old, she started sneaking into a then popular Montgomery night spot located at Bama Lanes called “Kegler’s Cove.” Pretty soon she was sitting in to sing with band members Eddie Wolford, Tim Jackson and Tommy Shaw, who later left to join Styx. The band went through many incarnations over the next few years, adding and subtracting members, but it was the training ground for what would later launch her career. In 1977, at the age of 19, Beth suffered a loss when her good friend and band mate Sonny Royal died suddenly of a brain tumor. To get away from everything that reminded her of the sadness, she moved to Birmingham where she played happy hours and waited for her grief to pass. “One day, the phone rang and it was Eddie saying, ‘Tommy’s leaving the band to join Styx, and we want you to come back and take his place.’” “I was really surprised and happy that he asked, but I was like wow! I can’t take Tommy’s place.” As it turns out, the band was happy to bring Beth back to play her



Beth on stage.

music... "cool Joni Mitchell stuff," as she puts it. So she packed up her things and headed back to Montgomery. "It was a wonderful, healing thing" said Beth. The band drew good crowds and after a couple of years, Beth was discovered by representatives from Muscle Shoals Records and soon had her first album, "Hearing It First," recorded.

Since her formative days in Montgomery, Beth, who now lives in Nashville, has seen great success. She has released 10 albums and written for artists like Willie Nelson, Trisha Yearwood, Bonnie Raitt, Emmylou Harris, Bette Midler and Faith Hill, who won ASCAP's 1999 "Song of the Year" award and was nominated for a Grammy for the

song "This Kiss," which Beth wrote. Her personal life has seen some tragedy however, beginning with the loss in 1994 of her husband Ernest, whose death from a rare form of cancer left her a single mother of their then nine-year-old son. Six years later, she herself was diagnosed with stage-two breast cancer for which she underwent difficult but successful treatment. Throughout these challenges in her life, Beth has turned again and again to her music, using it to teach herself how to deal with her grief and helping others as well. It was her album and its title song "Sand and Water" (1997) that helped her cope with the loss of her husband. The inspirational song was even used by Elton John on his 1997

tour to honor the memory of Princess Diana.

This year, Beth released her two CD album "Prism" in the United States. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has applauded the message of the album, which is sung in many different languages and covers a multitude of faiths, as an album "that says so movingly we are all family, we share a common humanity, and we can be human only together." The project was a ten-year labor of love for Beth. It combines songs of devotion from Buddhist, Jewish, Sufi, Muslim, Shaker, Negro Spiritual, Hindu, Catholic, Protestant and other traditions, as well as new music. She often refers to the collection as the "human family songbook"

because it celebrates the deep connection and similarities shared across all of humanity. Janie Allen Alford, Resident Choreographer for Alabama Dance Theatre, was inspired enough by the collection to create new works to five of its songs and two from Beth's other albums. "There is a powerful spirituality woven through each song," Alford said, "that creates a beautiful collection, lending itself to choreography." Beth joined the dancers when she performed with them live at the new Montgomery Performing Arts Centre in downtown Montgomery in March 2009.

In spite of the successes that Beth has had that have taken her far from her Alabama home, she has

never faltered in giving back to her home state. An inspirational speaker in the areas of grief and recovery, as well as creativity, she has conducted workshops with children and adults to help them discover their own creative processes. Most recently, Beth was a speaker at the Alabama Writer's Symposium in Monroeville and the annual Bill Bates Leadership Institute at Cheaha State Park, a conference held for state arts leaders.

In her concerts, Beth often sings a song that in her mind sums up her move to Montgomery and her development as an artist and human being. Entitled "Beautiful Fool," the song is about being that tender age in 1969 when she remembers waking up to the world around her, realizing for the first time that while there



Archbishop Desmond Tutu with Beth and her fiancé Bob Sherman.

Photo courtesy of Beth Nielsen Chapman.

was plenty of trouble, there were also peacemakers making a real difference. It talks about people going against the grain to move towards peace. That message of hope has become ingrained in her work as a

singer, a songwriter and as an inspiration for those managing grief. Using her own experiences coming of age in the South, Beth Nielsen Chapman has joined, on her latest album, our world's cultures in a profoundly resonant and timely fashion. By doing so Beth has earned her place among the ranks of those peacemakers who have shaped our lives and history, giving an exacting voice loud enough for the entire world to hear.

Brenda Robertson Dennis is the Development Director of Alabama Dance Theatre and is a contributing writer for Montgomery Living Magazine.



Bonnie Raitt and the Indigo Girls sharing a moment with Beth.

Photo courtesy of Beth Nielsen Chapman.

THE GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARD

Dr. Mabry Miller

Nurturing Musical and Cultural Opportunities for All

by Barbara Sloan



“It was the biggest surprise of my life!” responded Dr. Mabry Batson Miller, remembering the moment when she was told of her selection as the 2009 winner of the Governor’s Arts Award. “I was driving to town to run errands and my cell phone rang. I was not expecting a call, but its contents really shocked me. Debbie Overcash, Awards chairman for the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra Guild, joyously said, ‘Mabry, we did it! You have won the Governor’s Arts Award!’ Then the tears started rolling down my cheeks. I had to regain my composure as I realized that I couldn’t drive and cry at the same time.”

Photo courtesy of Dr. Mabry Miller.



Dr. Mabry Miller's photo portrait.

Finishing her errands, she went home with the desire to share the good news with someone. “So I called my son who lives in Tennessee and he actually answered

the telephone (I can seldom reach him). He was delighted with the news. ‘But,’ I said, ‘there is a catch. I have to be there at the awards ceremony.’ His immediate response was,

‘I think that we can handle that.’”

According to Debbie Overcash, Dr. Mabry Batson Miller’s achievements speak for themselves and continue to set the highest of standards for the people of our state. What Miller has done is amazing in “what she has accomplished, what she continues to accomplish, and what she challenges us to accomplish. It has been my pleasure to know Mabry Batson Miller for more than twenty-five years, and although considerably her junior, I am awed and amazed at her level of enthusiasm and energy, at her unwavering support of the arts, and her legacy of commitment to the arts in our

Alabama,” Overcash says. “Mabry has given time to establish and nurture musical and cultural opportunities for all.”

Born in Birmingham to E.O. and Mabry Arnold Batson, Miller was brought up in Sylacauga. Her father was an Alabama businessman who met her mother (who was from Atlanta) on a boat coming from New York to Savannah. Her mother was a speech professor at the Atlanta Conservatory and Cox College prior to coming to Alabama as a bride. Mabry finished high school at age sixteen and got her undergraduate degree from Athens State University in three years

She met her first husband (who was field representative of Athens State at the time) when he was recruiting her best friend for the school. He suggested that she could go with her, but at age fifteen, she was unwilling to miss her senior year in high school.

In the fall after college graduation, she married Harry E. Miller. "My mother said that I was sent to

Athens to get an education—which I did—but that I married the only eligible male on the staff, which was also true." Harry and Mabry have been very proud of their two children, Harry E. Miller, Jr. (Ed) and Mabry Miller O'Donnell. Harry died in November of 1989.

She later received an MBA from the University of North Alabama and her doctorate at Ohio State. An interesting chapter in Mabry's life was her teaching experience in the graduate program at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. She enjoyed her association with both the outstanding students and faculty there. Upon her return to her home in Huntsville she resumed her volunteer activities. After a number of years living alone she met Glenn Barr, a retired engineer. After four and a half years, she agreed to marry him, and together they enjoyed nine wonderful years. Then he had a stroke and died on March 9, 2008.

For more than fifty years, Mabry Batson Miller has been a lover and promoter of the arts in her home state, and especially music. When she was a young woman, she was President of the Huntsville Music Study Club and then the Alabama Federation of Music Clubs, as well as the Dixie



Photo courtesy of Dr. Mabry Miller.

Dr. Mabry Miller with her husband Glenn Barr on New Year's Eve, 2001. Glenn passed in 2008.

District of the National Federation of Music Clubs. The national organization is the largest musical association of its kind in the world. She has served on the national board and as chairman of a number of committees, including development, ways and means, and past national presidents scholarship fund.

In 1958, she was one of a group of people who founded the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra; she

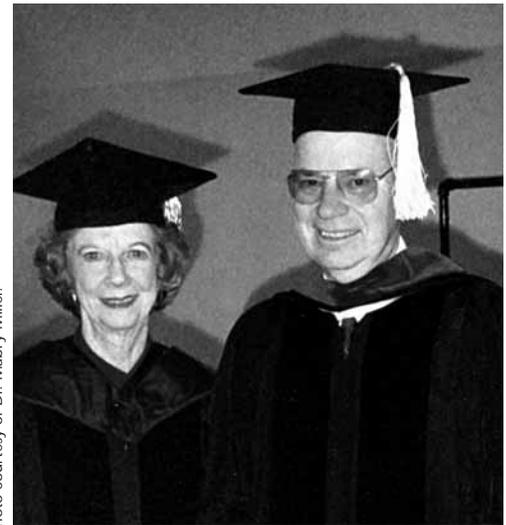


Photo courtesy of Dr. Mabry Miller.

Dr. Mabry Miller with a Drake University faculty member on graduation day.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Mabry Miller.

Dr. Mabry Miller relaxing during Huntsville Symphony Ball night.



Photo courtesy of Dr. Mabry Miller.

Mabry as a college senior (age 19) in front of her dormitory.

served on the first board and continues that service today. She serves, also on the boards of the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra Guild, Friends of the Symphony, the Huntsville Youth Orchestra, the Women's Guild of the Museum of Art, the Community Chorus (the first woman president of its association), and Redstone Village (retirement community). She served as president of the Opera Society and worked to bring Community Concerts to Huntsville.

Visual arts have also benefited from Dr. Miller's involvement. She has been a 35-year member of the Women's Guild of the Huntsville Museum of Art and served as a Team Captain for the museum's capital campaign. When involved in raising these funds, she personally donated a significant amount to furnish the membership office.

When asked what intrigues her the most, Mabry says, "I have so many activities, I find it hard to talk about all of them. I have spent most of my life in volunteer work. But the various groups add so many facets of life to our city and our state, this involvement has given me a very rich and wonderful life. I have taught, I have been on boards and committees. I like to serve." She also helped in the organization of the Huntsville Arts Council and served as an officer of that group.

Miller finds it hard to name her favorite art to experience. "It really is difficult to say. I love music, I play



Mabry with her baby daughter, Mabry, who is now Dr. Mabry Miller O'Donnell.

the piano, and I used to sing and still would, except for throat trouble. I love to read and am a friend of the library, I love travel, I love to hear the orchestra play.”

Besides her two children, she has five grandchildren and three great grandchildren. Her children have followed their mother’s path. “Both are very active in their churches and communities. We have a very busy family—with a number of outstanding accomplishments.”

Dr. Miller has been recognized in Huntsville by receiving the Virginia Hammill Simms Award for superior contributions to the arts.

The Girl Scouts of North/Central Alabama selected her for the “Scroll of Honor” for lifetime achievements. She has a certificate for patriotic civilian service from the Department of the Army, a Citation of Merit from the City of Huntsville and Madison County, A DAR Award for Excellence in Community Service, an award from the Women’s Economic Development Council, Lifetime Achievement Award from the Huntsville Youth Orchestra, Volunteer of the Year for Support from the Huntsville Museum of Art, and the Hospitality Award from the Huntsville Museum of Art Guild.

From the Guild she received its most prestigious Doris Darling award. Other recognitions, grants, medals, and honors were received with gratitude.

In addition to her contributions to Alabama’s arts community, Dr. Miller has been active in the community in the Historic Huntsville Foundation, the Huntsville Botanical Garden Society, the American Cancer Society, the Heart Association, the Girl Scouts of North Alabama, the Madison County Chapter of the American Red Cross, Athens State University Foundation and its

Alumni Association, Alabama DAR, Burritt Museum, Redstone Village, Angels of Huntsville Hospital, the Huntsville Land Trust, the Kiwanis Club, and local PTAs, including president of the Huntsville City Council of PTAs.

Miller says since her grandfather was a Methodist minister, she has continued the family tradition as a life-long Methodist. Since 1943, she has been a member of First United Methodist Church of Huntsville, and is committed to the choir, Sunday School, historical committee, and Religious Arts Festival among other activities.

Mabry Miller obtained her PhD with a major in Organizational Behavior and a minor in Human Resources. She has a number of publications to her credit and the arts community has benefited from her organizational skills and management expertise. With her experience in management development programs, she has conducted workshops and seminars on leadership, stress, communication, conflict management, and performance.

Debbie Overcash says that over the years, Dr. Miller has brought dedication and the highest of ideals to the encouragement of the arts. "She has done this

Photo courtesy of Dr. Mabry Miller.



Dr. Mabry Miller with her son H. E. Miller, Jr., JD at a ceremony where Dr. Miller is named Alumna of the year at Athens State, an honor which her first husband, Harry E. Miller received prior to his death in 1989.

tirelessly while generously supporting the arts with her time, talent, and financial resources. Dr. Miller has spent much of her life working with groups to advance the educational, spiritual, and cultural life of her community, her state, and her nation."

Mabry Batson Miller's reply to that is, "I have had cancer and open heart surgery and have lost two husbands. God has left me here to do what I can to help my community, city, state—to improve life for other people. That is what I am living for."

Photo courtesy of Dr. Mabry Miller.



Dr. Mabry Miller with a national young artist winner.

Barbara Sloan has been a published writer for 44 years, and is the author of Barefoot Among the Thorns: The Story of Dance in Birmingham. She is also Executive Director of The Seasoned Performers, Alabama's only senior adult theatre.

THE GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARD

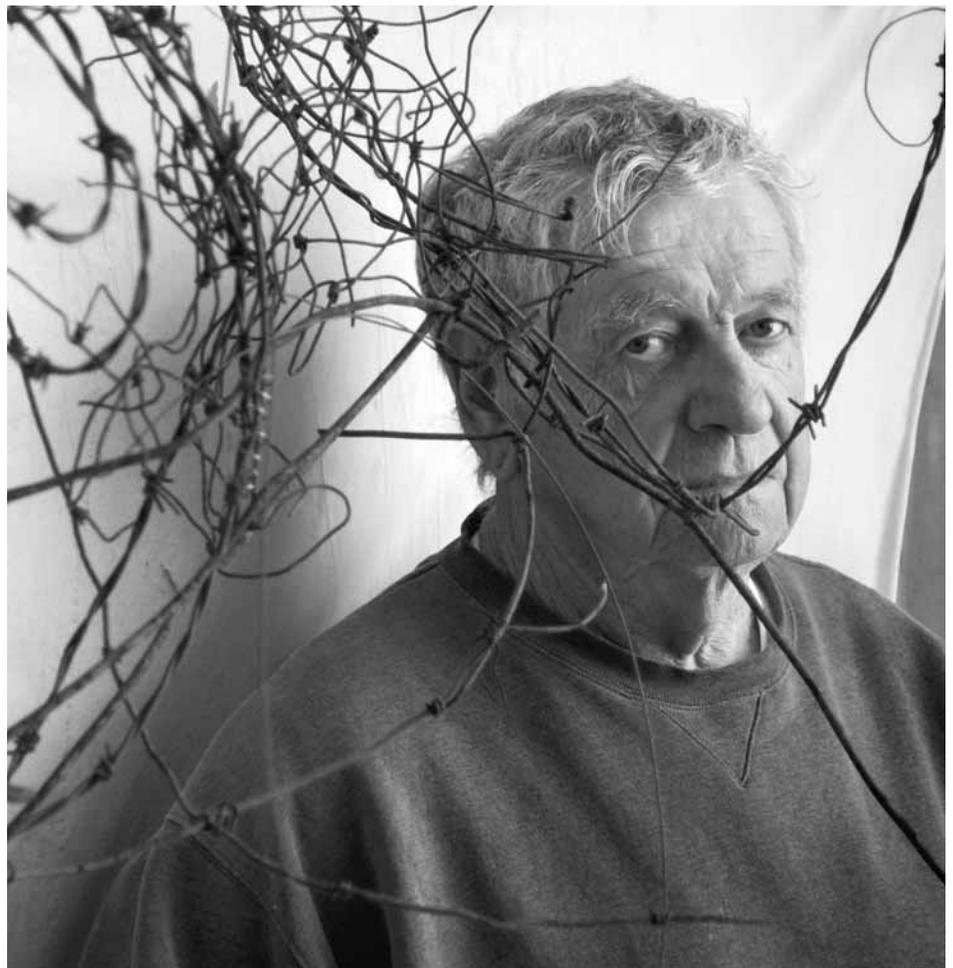
Hugh Williams

Finds Art Making an Adventure

by Marilyn Laufer, PhD.

While sharing coffee out of a well-used thermos in his studio, Hugh Williams tells me that one of the things that really irritates him is when someone sees new work and questions why it is so different than what he has done previously. Hugh shakes his head and looks at me. "They just don't get it," he reflects, "if you are not willing to take the risk, you stop learning and it is important as an artist to take on a new adventure."

Art making is an adventure. Hugh makes it abundantly clear that making art is a journey of discovery usually ending up someplace not necessarily imagined or anticipated in the beginning. Every day he walks from his early 19th century farm house across a yard filled with bottle trees, various out-buildings, a small fishing boat he bought in Ghana and an array of salvaged materials only to arrive at the doorway of a historic Columbus, Georgia house he rescued and moved to this spot to serve as his studio entrance. Once there, he works in quiet and peaceful isolation where he is free to explore new ideas and possibilities. He often works on a large scale making huge monotypes and drawings or wall constructs that



Hugh with one of his Alabama wire drawings.

will take a crew to maneuver. However, nearby is a wall of manipulated Polaroid images that would fit into the palm of his hand. For Hugh Williams, the creative process is continuous and the flow is such that one thing often leads to the other.

The luxury of such a daily rou-

tine is a special treat for Hugh. He knows all too well it has not always been this way. As a teacher, initially at the high school level and later as a faculty member of the Auburn University Art Department, he felt he had to be able to achieve and deliver a level of technical expertise

Photo courtesy of Jerry Siegel.



Photo courtesy of the Jule Collins Museum of Art.

Exploration: Discovery: Transformation: New Works by Hugh Williams on exhibit at the Jule Collins Museum of Art, Auburn University, 2007.

to his students. Although experimentation and exploration were always part of his thinking, he limited his personal inclinations so he could fulfill what he saw as his primary role as an educator. There were lessons to be taught, academic expectations to be met and proficiency benchmarks that had to be achieved for his students. If one is to base his success on the comments of those that came under his tutelage over the course of four decades, it is

worth noting that they agree Hugh Williams excelled at not only offering them his expertise, but at encouraging their development as artists.

He formally retired as an Alumni Professor Emeritus of Art in June 1992, and yet he continues teaching to this day. On that walk to his studio it is not unusual to catch a glimpse of an artist working in one of those outbuildings already mentioned. In fact, some of these structures were built to provide studio space for his steady roster of students. These students have the benefit of his life-long experience and his thoughtful deliberation, but they are always encouraged to take the time to explore their own process of creativity in much the same way he does. This approach to education continues for the students at the Sarah Carlisle Towery Art Colony on Lake Martin near Alexander City. They are so devoted to him that they took the lead in submitting

his name as a possible recipient for the 2009 Governor's Arts Award. His students' determination and energy have brought Hugh, as well as his friends, colleagues and admirers to this important point of statewide recognition.

Hugh Oliver Williams, the youngest of six children, was born on October 24, 1928 in Centre, Alabama, where his father practiced veterinary medicine. In 1939, Dr. Williams, a graduate of Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University) was invited back to Auburn to join the faculty of the school of veterinary medicine. Following this move, Hugh attended Auburn public schools and after graduation he attended Auburn University, as did most of his friends. The only twist to the anticipated progression of his higher education at the time was that he signed up for a life drawing class instead of the science courses that he and his father



Photo courtesy of Sally Gates.

Hugh in his studio, circa 1990s.

had discussed. According to Hugh, his father's only admonition upon finding this out was to tell him to make sure that he ended up with a degree that would allow him to support himself. In 1949 he graduated with a Bachelor of Applied Arts and soon after began teaching at Columbus Junior High in Columbus, Georgia. Later that same year, he was drafted and eventually sent to Ulm, Germany to serve with the U.S. Army Artillery. This was an adventure for Hugh. He was twenty-one and Europe was to become a wonderful initiation for the young artist.

Upon his return from the army, he had a second artistic awakening when he took a job in New York City. Returning south in 1951, he took a teaching job at Jordan High School in Columbus, but his brief stint in New York City had exposed him to the creative freedom of expression that contemporary art offered. The lure of that energy proved too much, and in 1955 Hugh decided to move to New York City to complete his master's degree in Art Education and Fine Arts on the GI bill at the Teachers College at Columbia University.

In the fall of 1957, Hugh was pulled back to his native Alabama when he was offered a full-time faculty position in the Auburn University Art Department, remaining on faculty until 1992. Over those thirty-five years Hugh Williams has been the recipient of many awards and recognitions including: Visiting

Professor at Louisiana State University, New Orleans campus, 1971; Resident Fellow at the Helene Wurlitzer Foundation in Taos, New Mexico, 1974; Resident Fellow at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, 1976; recipient of Auburn University Alumni Award for Distinction in the Creative Arts, 1983; Auburn University Alumni Professor Emeritus of Art, 1985;

Fulbright-Hayes Education Grant recipient through Columbus State University to study in Africa (Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire), 1991; Member of an Art /Museum Educator Project through Troy University in 1993 also in Ghana and Artist-in-Residence at the Contemporary Arts Center, North Adams, Massachusetts in 1995.

Listing even a few of his many exhibitions would be overwhelming, but recently a colleague from the Knoxville Museum of Art sent me a file he found documenting a one-person show Hugh had there in March of 1964. It appears he had been asked to have similar one-person shows every year since he had returned south and would continue to be asked to do that as well as participate in juried competitions and invitations for the



Photo by Erica Mohar, Assistant Curator of Art, The Columbus Museum, Columbus, Georgia.

Hugh Williams with his dogs, Pablo and China Rose in the doorway of his studio, 2005.



The Market of Kumasi by Hugh Williams. It consist of 12 wood panels, mixed media, dimensional and incised panels, 38 feet x 8 feet (1992-2005).

next four decades. In 1971 he was elected to the American Watercolor Society as a signature member, which led to a purchase award from the National Academy of Design in New York City. In 2007, Hugh was honored with a solo exhibition at the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Arts at Auburn University as the state began its year-long celebration of the “Year of Alabama Arts.” Most recently, his three-dimensional drawings fashioned from discarded farm wire found during his walks in the woods and across fields were featured at the Kentler International Drawing Space in Brooklyn, N.Y. These are but a small fraction of the many exhibitions and honors he has been given over an impressive and successful career. However, to uncover this information you need to research old exhibition files of museum colleagues such as I have described because Mr. Williams rigorously avoids such discussion. Instead he prefers to lead the conversation back to art in a larger context, looking and

thinking about the recent pieces that cover his studio walls and hang from the ceiling or the artworks of others he saw while he was in New York. I am more than happy to enter into that dialogue with him because it is always illuminating.

Perhaps one of the reasons that Mr. Williams focuses on the present

and has little interest in the past is because he has survived and indeed prospered despite having his past artistic production obliterated. In October of 1991, his studio and all of its contents burned leaving him little choice but to start over. As tragic as this personal loss was, I can not help but think it was also



Hugh had to rebuild his studio after a devastating fire in the early 1990s. It was a pivotal moment in his career, pushing him to create a new series of work.

Photo courtesy of Sally Gates.



Photo courtesy of S. Q. and J. E. Gates.

strangely liberating because it occurred eight months before his official retirement from teaching. Hugh now had an opportunity to reinvent himself as an artist rather than as an art teacher. This is not to make light of this tragedy, but I do know that he has never bemoaned that loss to me. Instead the conversations we have are about the ever-evolving creative process, which for him always begins with the investigation of the unknown. As Hugh recently noted, “not knowing where I am going makes the whole thing that much more challenging and exciting. Part of my very being as an artist is to find new ways to use those everyday objects that others ignore or overlook.” As the two of us have so often discussed, sometimes the results are more successful than other times, but it is the creative process, the artistic journey or



Photo courtesy of Sally Gates.

Hugh Williams standing on Florence Neal's rooftop in New York.

see.” As a life-long teacher and always vital artist, Hugh Williams continues to make us all see the world anew and for that we, all of his friends and admirers, are eternally grateful.

adventure that is fundamental for this artist.

In the solitude of his studio, Hugh Williams continues his art adventures to the delight of all of us who have the pleasure to occasionally be along for the ride. In considering this ongoing journey, I am reminded of something Georgia O’Keeffe wrote, the gist of which was something like, “art is not what you see, but what you make others

Marilyn Laufer, PhD. is Director of the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art at Auburn University.

Special thanks to Sally Q. Gates for her kind assistance in the preparation of this essay.

THE GOVERNOR'S ARTS AWARD

Alvin C. Sella

A Legend in the World of Alabama Art

by W. T. Dooley

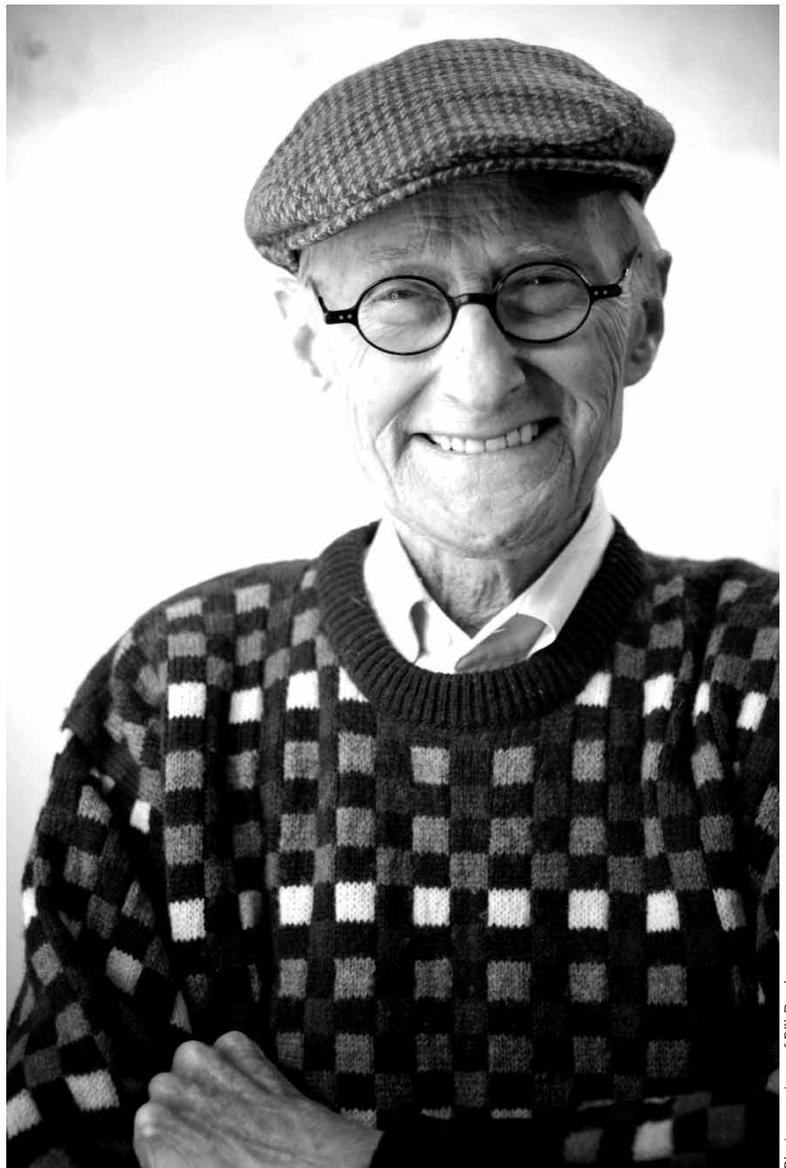
If you were to pick a beautiful spring morning to drive into Tuscaloosa and onto the University of Alabama campus, there is a good chance you might encounter a well-dressed gentleman tooling toward campus on his bicycle. Al Sella is a legend in the world of Alabama art and has made an indelible mark on the memories of many individuals engaged one way or another with visual arts in this state.

Alvin C. Sella, Professor Emeritus of Painting, has a forty-eight year history teaching in the Department of Art and Art History at The University of Alabama. Before coming to Tuscaloosa in 1961, he taught for thirteen years at Sullins College in Bristol, Virginia. Through more than 60 years of teaching, Sella has maintained the discipline of a productive artist, making paintings, constructions, and works on paper for a demanding schedule of group and solo exhibits. In the area of visual arts, Alabama could not ask for a more prolific representative, one who's passion for painting and love of teaching exude from every pore.

Has it always been this way with Sella? His answer is a resounding, "Yes it has, since I was a young boy."

His father, Joseph Sella, engaged in fine arts sculpting and was a design engineer in the steel manufacturing industry. Alvin was born in 1919 into an Italian American family and was raised in metro New Jersey. Frequent trips to New York City often included visits to museums and other cultural amenities.

At age twenty-two, Sella entered into academic education and pursued opportunities to work with renowned artists engaged in teaching. He began his studies at Yale University School of Art. He then joined the



Alvin Sella, 2007.

Art Students League of New York where he earned his Certificate studying with George Bridgeman and Morris Kantor. Perhaps his most influential teacher was Robert

Photo courtesy of Bill Dooley

Brackman, the world renowned draughtsman who defined studio drawing for the American art academy and present-day practices of studio art curricula. He continued his studies at Columbia University's School of the Arts [<http://wwwapp.cc.columbia.edu/art/app/arts/index.jsp>], and Syracuse University.

Sella's first teaching appointment was at Escuela de Bellas Artes, San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. He was attracted to the artists and culture of Mexico, and there he met and married his wife, Maria Zavala, in 1947. After he had settled into academic life in the United States, Sella would return to Mexico in the summers to create art, exhibit his work, and teach. He maintained ties with its native artists, which enriched his endeavors in painting.



Photo courtesy of Bill Dooley.

Al Sella in his studio, 1965.

His first teaching appointment stateside was at Sullins College in Bristol, Virginia, where he taught for thirteen years. In the summer of 1961 he joined the faculty of the Department of Art at The University

Alabama, a group of very dedicated artists and historians [Joseph Bolt, Richard Brough, Frank Engle, Howard Goodson, Jack Granata, Theodore Klitske, and Richard Zoellner]. His arrival at Alabama in 1961 is an interesting story. Sella booked sleeping quarters for Maria and their two children on a Pullman car to make the trip to Alabama. When they got off the train in Tuscaloosa, they could barely endure the outside air due to the incredible heat and the stench of the paper mill. Professors Granata and Engle met them at the station. The Sellas survived the night, but not without second thoughts about Tuscaloosa. When Sella arrived on campus to see the Art Department which is located on Woods Quad, he could not believe how beautiful the Victorian Gothic complex was, with its own quadrangle defined by tall brick buildings trimmed with ornamental



Photo courtesy of Bill Dooley.

Undated photo of Sella in his studio at the University of Alabama.

wrought iron, exuding a rich southern history. The beauty of the art buildings may have sealed the deal, winning the University a longstanding professor and a true original. Sella retired from Alabama in 1996 but continues to teach one course each semester and to work in his on-campus studio. He is a cherished feature of the Tuscaloosa campus.

Sella cannot imagine doing anything else other than being an artist. “I don’t know how to do anything else! This is what I have always done.” he remarked as he considered three paintings in progress in his studio. Creating art and teaching others about art dominates Sella’s life and he is happiest when engaged in both processes.

A conservative estimate based on Sella’s teaching career indicates that he taught over 3500 students in the studio disciplines of painting, drawing, and design. This impressive record of teaching doesn’t include his many workshops and ongoing classes offered through the Birmingham Museum of Art. What characteristics have made Sella an effective and inspirational art professor? Upon meeting him, you know that you are in the company a resilient, passionate, perceptive, and fashionable individual. When he turns his gaze in your direction, you can be sure he is paying attention seeking from you what you are feeling relative to your art work. His approach to teaching seems harsh to some as he confronts your thinking and working methods in his classes.

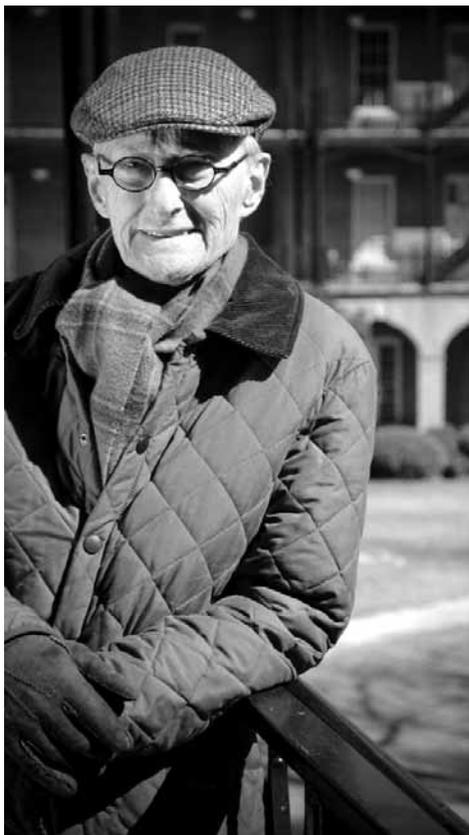


Photo courtesy of The Tuscaloosa News

A Recent photo of Al Sella in front of Woods Hall.

If you make up your mind too soon, he will encourage you to remain open-minded. If you tarry and exhibit indecision or uncertainty, he pushes you toward commitment. Sella is at home within a world of opposites and contradictions. He enjoys the notion of mixing oil and water along with the resulting mess. He is unafraid, and wants you to be brave and willing to take risks. He is intent on challenging you to stand up for your ideas. He cares about you that much. You may not survive his concern; if you do you will be much clearer about your own passion and commitment to art. Sella will introduce you to the value of seeing and capturing your observations, like a magician.

When former students recall their experiences of Sella, many express tremendous gratitude. One former student told me with great excitement that Sella taught him how to use the tools of drawing: how to hold your charcoal or pencil, “like you are holding a feather!” This approach is intended to slow down your mark making so as to keep pace with what you are observing in your subject. Another student recalls Sella referring to paintings as being “flesh and blood,” indicating that the artwork is a living thing, something that is very sincere and felt. “The principles of design instilled in Sella’s classes are still brought into play every day in what I do,” said one former student. His students learn to have a relationship with self-expression and to control materials, processes, space and color.

Throughout his teaching career, Sella was producing art and his works attracted the interests of others as indicated by a very impressive record of exhibitions. His art work began to change in the mid 1950’s as he embraced the philosophies and principles of Abstraction used together with his own sensibilities and training to create his own iteration of painting. The use of a brilliant color palette led the way toward his new relationship with a more expressive image and fluid medium.

Sella’s work has carried him through a long, exciting career as a studio artist. He remains deeply engaged with the production of

paintings, works on paper, constructions, and collages, having learned early from his former teacher, Robert Brackman, just how important it is to work on a series of pieces at the same time, like having many windows to look out at once. Most of his students and art patrons recall Sella's repeated reference to the concept of 'incompatible opposites', a driving force in his work. This term describes his desire to take unlike phenomena and find a means of creating co-existence within his work. Sella employs a paint-

ing process that courts and distorts his initial drawing, altering the planar relationship. He produces a painted environment that elicits a mostly non-verbal and emotional response from his audience.

Today, Sella's approach to painting reflects a lifetime of studio practice. He adopts a metaphysical position that evolved toward the notion that his art work was a critical and necessary part of life. He cites from Ayn Rand's *Romantic Manifesto* "an artist does not fake reality..."

Sella always begins his paintings with drawing, followed by turpentine washes that are intended to break up the space of the canvas so there is something to begin a dialogue between art and artist. It is as if he is looking for a way to bring life to his work as he lays down line, and then pigment, then perhaps removing most of it before leaving it alone so that he can contemplate its space, color and form. He cherishes this struggle and thrives on the uncertainty that he eventually brings under control so that the elements

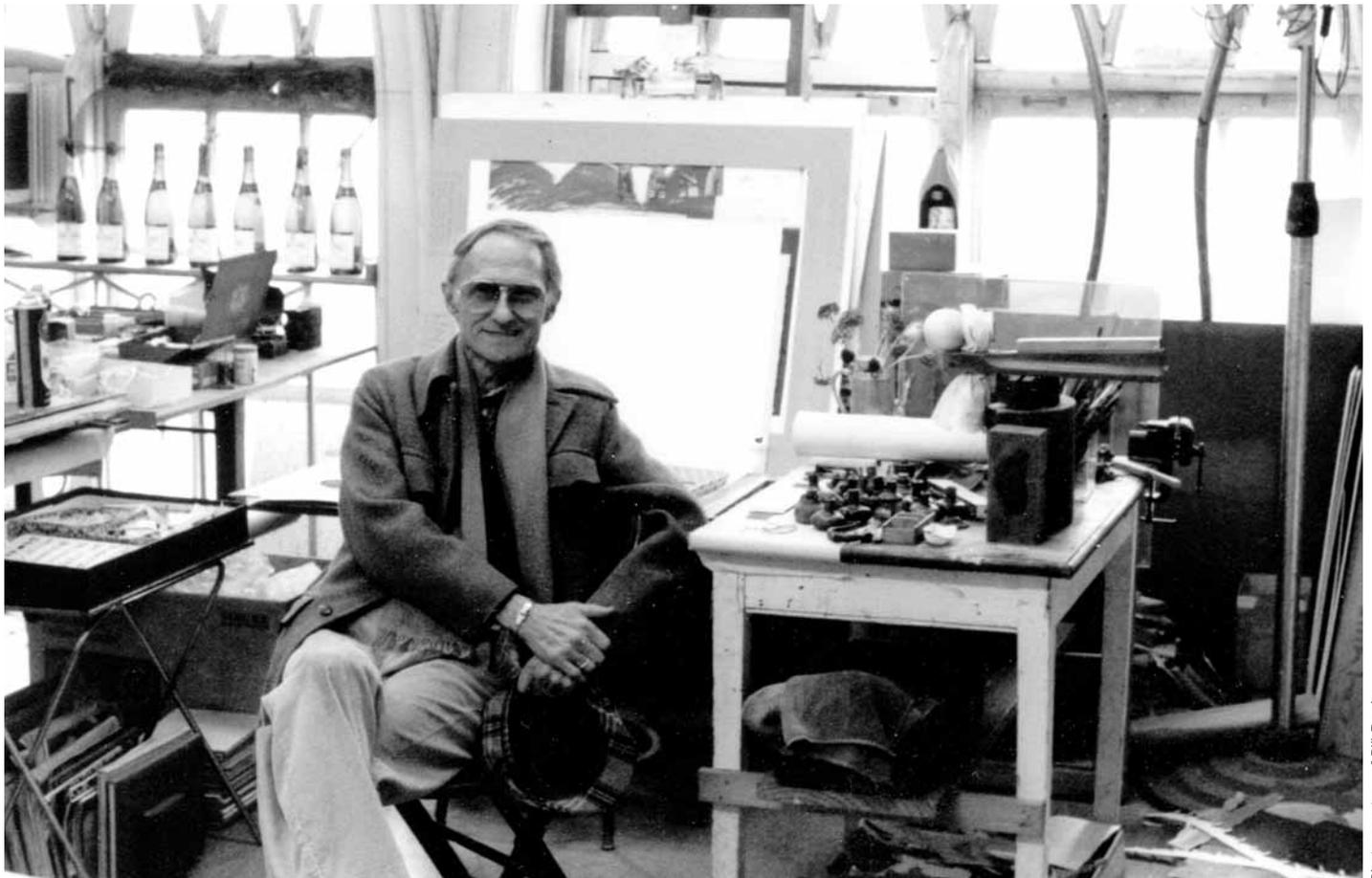


Photo courtesy of Bill Dooley.

Undated photo of Sella in his studio at the University of Alabama.

settle into a state of rightness. More often than not, Sella's paintings celebrate the relationship between the medium and, often, an emerging figurative element. These opposing forces, though perhaps incongruent, add up to a fantastic presence that is simply beautiful and intriguing.

W.T. Dooley
(William Dooley), Director
Sarah Moody Gallery of Art
Department of Art
The University of Alabama



Al Sella, Untitled, 1987.

Photo courtesy of Bill Dooley.

Throughout his teaching career at Alabama Sella's art work has been widely exhibited across the region and continues to be featured in group and solo exhibitions. He has pieces placed in many private collections across the country as well as in Madrid and San Miguel, Mexico.

His art work has been included in exhibitions in numerous museums around the country including Toledo Museum of Art, OH; Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art, Philadelphia, PA; Cincinnati Museum of Art, OH; Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, MA; Creative Gallery, NY; Frank Fedele Gallery, NY; and College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA. Solo exhibitions were produced for venues such as Contemporary Art Gallery, NY; Collectors of American Art, New York; Carol Knight Gallery, St. Louis, MO; Brooks Memorial Art Gallery, Memphis, TN; and Lauren Roger Museum of Art, Laurel, MS. Sella also exhibited his work in a one-man exhibition at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, Mexico. His work appeared in publications such as the *New York Times*, *Life Magazine*, *Arts Magazine* and *Art News*. Felipe Cossio del Pomar, founder of the Escuela Universitaria de Bellas Artes, Instituto Allende in San Miguel de Allende Guanajuato, Mexico, wrote about Sella's painting on the occasion of a solo exhibition produced for San Miguel in the late 1940's:

"After seeing what Alvin Sella painted in his early youth, I can now be sure without the need to have them face to face, that his painting continues to have a superior quality. Because Sella is an exceptional artist, endowed to bring out the poetic images of worlds little known to other artists, and to create with them the art not of yesterday or today but of all times, since it stems from the profound foundations of his perception and intellect."

Recently James R. Nelson, Birmingham based visual arts critic, wrote about Sella's paintings:

"Those who have followed Sella's career can say with certainty that he attacks sensibilities with a vigor and elan, revealing raw feelings in a poetic manner. His youthful works have a raucous vigor that often seems to border on anger, an explosive boldness that takes fury to lyrical levels."—*Birmingham News*

Ward Swingle

Swingle Singing

by Scott and Sarah Wright

In the early part of the 20th century, it was recommended that the US Patent Office be closed because every possible invention had already been invented. In the world of music, it is difficult to be truly inventive. Most innovators in music are noteworthy because they perform one style or on one instrument better than their peers. Even so, occasionally a musician comes along who is truly different. Ward Swingle is one such musician. He did not invent classical music nor jazz, but he found a way to combine two established styles in such an intriguing and entertaining way that he produced an entirely new genre for which a new name had to be invented: "Swingle Singing."

Are such innovative musicians born or raised? Did he have inspiration that was denied the other three billion people on the planet? Is Ward Swingle a brilliant musician because he was born with a gift for



Photo Courtesy of Ward Swingle.

1942 Ward Swingle press photo.

music, or because his family and the musically fertile times in which he grew up shaped his abilities? In Ward's case, it is undeniably both. His official biographical information begins "Swingle was the product of an unusually liberal musical education." But whether his style is innate or inculcated, Ward Swingle has a unique ability; something that in his

typically modest fashion, he will not admit. He possesses an enormous amount of intellectual curiosity harnessed with the ability to see music as multi-faceted; finding beauty, inspiration, truth, and fun in making music.

He was the typical little brother, according to his big brother Ira, or "Eb" as he was called. There were five siblings in the Swingle household in Toulminville, Alabama, a suburb of Mobile. Louis, Dorothy, Nina, Ira, and Ward were raised by parents who were not musicians by vocation, but who loved music and insisted upon piano lessons as part of their children's education. The Swingle siblings share childhood memories of hammering out scales before being allowed out to play and having to wait for a turn at the piano the five of them shared because all of them had to practice before going to bed. Like all good Methodists, they sang in the church choir, and the three youngest, Nina, Ira, and Ward tended to entertain the others with close harmony trios.

Photo Courtesy of Ward Swingle.



1978 Swingle Singers in London.

In the late 1930's Murphy High School was the largest and most central high school in the county, drawing students from throughout Mobile County, including the Swingle brothers, Ira and Ward, who rode the bus from Toulminville. Murphy High offered band and orchestra. Ira decided to play trumpet, leaving Ward to master the saxophone. They excelled, of course. Their classmates recall with good-natured humor that with Ira and Ward around there was no point in anyone else entering the annual school talent contest. The Swingles always won.

Photo Courtesy of Ward Swingle.



Ward Swingle while serving in the Armed Forces during World War II, 1944.

The Big Band Era had arrived and great music was pouring off the pens of Harry Warren, Ebb and Kander, Jerome Kern, George and Ira Gershwin and others. There were new releases on the radio every week from radio stars like Jo Stafford, the baby-faced Frank Sinatra and sultry-voiced Ertha Kitt. With typical teenage energy and more than typical musical ability, the Swingle brothers put together their own version of a big band with friends from school: the Swingle Swingsters! Before the ink was dry on new releases, Ira and Ward had already written arrangements for their band. And when the band needed a girl singer, sister Nina was called to duty, sharing the vocals with her brothers.

Long before "American Idol," most teenagers dreamed of being a star. Few acted on those dreams but when opportunity knocked, the Swingles had their bags packed. The Ted Fio Rito band was passing



Photo Courtesy of Ward Swingle.

1943 The Swingle Family in New York City (L to R: Ira, Mr. Swingle, Dorothy, Ward). When Kay, Ira, and Ward moved to New York with the Ted Fio Rito Band, their parents sent sister Dorothy along to “take care of them.”

through Mobile on a concert tour and posted a notice for auditions. The Swingle siblings were hired. Before graduating from high school, Ward was traveling the country and singing on national radio broadcasts.

But the good times were about to end all over the globe. World War II brought the Swingle brothers’ participation in the Big Band Era to a halt. They left the band and went their separate ways, serving their country in different branches of the armed forces.

Following the war, Ward decided to set aside the saxophone for a more classical instrument and pursued piano studies at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, from which he graduated Summa Cum Laude.



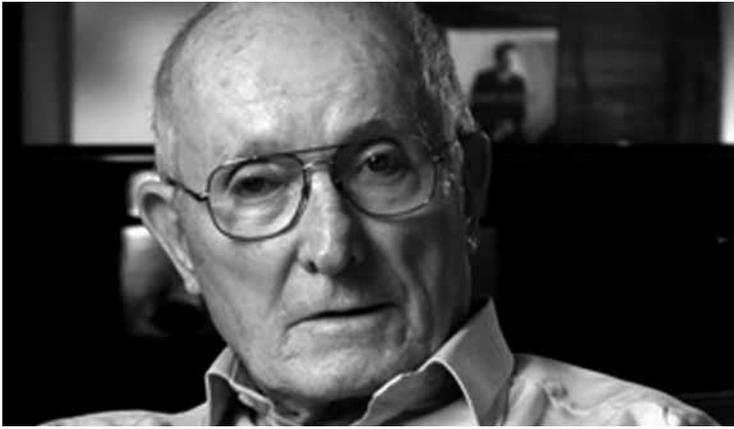
1943 Swingle Swingsters.

Photo Courtesy of Ward Swingle.

As a Fulbright Scholar he studied in France with Walter Gieseking and by the time his studies were complete, he was ready to make Paris his home.

There were many jobs in Paris for studio musicians in the early

1960’s, and it was fortuitous that Ward found himself among kindred spirits in the music world, earning a living as a vocalist and pianist. As he tells the story in his book, **Swingle Singing**, the singers soon became bored with their routine:



Ward Swingle, 2008.

“Most of our studio singing was limited to background vocals—*oo*’s and *ah*’s behind people like Charles Asnavour and Edith Piaf. Sometimes Michel Legrand, who was just beginning to make a name for himself, gave us some fine jazz vocal things to do. But Michel went off to Hollywood to compose film scores, and with the arrival of rock and pop music the vocal arrangements became boringly simple; we began looking around for meatier musical nourishment.

I got out Bach’s “Well-Tempered Clavichord” and we began reading through the preludes and fugues just to see if they were singable. We soon found, like many before us, that we were swinging Bach’s music quite naturally. Since there were no words, we improvised a kind of scat singing a la Louis Armstrong, which we later reduced to simple *doo*’s and *boo*’s, *dah*’s and *bah*’s so as not to get in the way of Bach’s counterpoint.”

The eight singers had such fun that Ward arranged more classical pieces and they rehearsed whenever they weren’t in the studio. They talked the studio executives into letting them record an album to send to their friends and family, thinking they might also sell a few copies. And they did. With no marketing plan or public relations consultants, the album got some airtime by curi-

ous D.J.’s when it was picked up by U.S. radio stations in 1963. It made a steady climb to the top 10, and remained in the top 100 albums for nearly two years.

Ward Swingle’s sound was new and old, classical and fresh, innovative and traditional at the same time. He combined the sounds of his past, jazz and scat, with the classical training that began at the fami-



The Swingle family enjoying an outdoor lunch.

ly piano, and created Swingle Singing; music that was recognized with four Grammy Awards in two years. The Swingle Singers were hired to record commercials for Betty Crocker, Alcoa and Chevrolet. They performed at the White House for President Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird Johnson's guests. Leonard Bernstein invited them to premiere Luciano Berio's new work, Sinfonia, with the New York Philharmonic. Television appearances in the U.S., London, and Paris were squeezed into their concert-touring schedule all over the world. The ladies in the group wore gowns designed for them by Yves St. Laurent. As Ward says, "these were heady times."

New artists come and go. New releases are here today and gone tomorrow. Those that climb the charts on great marketing rather than great talent have nothing to prevent them from a fast free-fall once the novelty of their initial success is past. The Swingle Singers are the rare exception, recently celebrating their 45th anniversary. The original eight have long since retired but the sound continues, its endurance a tribute to the curiosity and talent of Ward Swingle.

There is something intriguing about music. It spins and shines as a vibration in the air for merely a moment. Yet, in that brief moment, it touches a responsive chord in us



Ward and Françoise Swingle in the 1950s.

Photo Courtesy of Ward Swingle.

and makes a memory that keeps the music alive long after the song has ended. For Ward Swingle the song and the music never ends but constantly renews itself in multifaceted ways, revealing something new out of something old, putting a fresh stamp on classical values, and preserving traditions in bold innovation. The accomplishments of Ward Swingle inscribe a bright chapter in the story of music and a glowing page in the proud history of Alabama's sons and daughters.

*Scott Wright is conductor
of the Bay Area Strings
Community Orchestra*

*Sarah Wright
is the Education Director
of the Mobile Symphony*

THE ALABAMA LIVING LEGACY AWARD



Kathryn Tucker Windham

Supreme Storyteller

by Alvin Benn

Warm summer nights...lightning bugs blinking their presence...cold lemonade and the unmistakable aroma of Prince Albert pipe tobacco enveloping the porch where a little girl sat in wide-eyed anticipation as her father began to spin his yarns.

That's what Kathryn Tucker Windham remembers most about growing up in Thomasville as the Roaring Twenties took hold of America in the wake of World War I.

It's been more than 80 years since those first memorable moments on the front porch of her house, but she can still recall them in vivid detail, especially when it comes to the wonderful stories told by her banker dad—James Wilson Tucker.

She had no way of knowing it, of course, but his way with words and the perfect timing that went with them would, one day, help her carve out a career as a crime reporter, photographer, author, actress, radio commentator and, most of all, supreme storyteller.

Her selection as recipient of the Alabama State Council on the Arts' 2009 Alabama Living Legacy Award might seem a bit overdue as



Photo by Alvin Benn.

Kathryn Windham is honored on her 90th birthday at the Selma-Dallas County Public library.

far as her many fans are concerned, but it's certainly justified for a woman who celebrates her 91st birthday on June 2.

Living legends are hard to find these days, but not when it comes to Kathryn Windham and her good friend, Nelle Harper Lee, of Monroeville. They achieved legendary status years ago.

"Kathryn is a person who possesses great gifts and she uses those

gifts with wisdom and love," said Lee. "I am proud to say that she is my friend."

All the honors that have come Kathryn's way through the years are appreciated, but she is quick to give much of the credit to her father for instilling in her the love of reading and storytelling. He did it by serving as an example.

"I think I was about three or so at the time when I heard my first

stories,” she said. “We’d go outside once the sun had set and it had cooled off enough for us to catch a breeze. We’d enjoy the evening and, most of all, my father’s stories.”

During those days, radio was still in its infancy and it was long before television came along. Front porches served as a theater of the mind and James Tucker was always the chief entertainer of the evening.

Kathryn remembers how her dad would carefully pack his pipe with Prince Albert, begin to puff away and then, ever so slowly, start to spin a yarn or two—alternating between apocryphal and authentic tales spilling out of his imagination.

When she began getting paid for what her dad provided free of charge on the porch, she became known almost as much for her pauses as her storytelling abilities. What listeners don’t know is how that all came about.

“My father would stop telling his stories when his pipe went out, so he’d carefully tamp it back down to get the fire started again,” she said. “That would take a few seconds. I guess it became a part of me when I started telling my stories.”

As her storytelling fame grew and she began entertaining around the country, she found that her timing had become part of her routine.

“I didn’t realize what was happening until I started doing commentaries on the



Kathryn Tucker, left, goes for a ride with friend Ruth Williams in Thomasville.

Photo courtesy of KTW.

radio,” she said. “Some people thought that their radio was broke. One man said he even went over and started banging on it to get it going again.”

She said her storytelling pauses were part of what came naturally for her when she began to speak “because that’s what my daddy had done on the porch when he smoked his pipe.”

Telling stories for a living would have to wait because she had many other bridges to cross first, enough to fill a lot of books. As a matter of fact, that’s just where she put many of them, more than two dozen in all.

First came writing movie reviews for the Thomasville Times, which was owned by Earl Tucker, her cousin. That familial relationship gave her a lot of leeway, not to mention free admission to the movies.

At Thomasville High School, she was a cheerleader, studied hard,



Kathryn has hosted a New Year’s Day breakfast for more than 30 years.

Photo courtesy of KTW.

dated occasionally and, in general, had a super time as she prepared for her journey into higher education.

Huntingdon College in Montgomery was her destination. She majored in English, but never intended to become a teacher. No way was she going to spend most of her life in front of a blackboard. She would follow her dream of becoming a newspaper reporter, just as she had done when she reviewed movies at her cousin Earl's weekly paper.

At Huntingdon, she edited "The Huntress," the college newspaper, but her first foray into daily journalism proved to be a bummer. She may have had good credentials as a result of her college work, but "Montgomery Advertiser" City Editor Harwell Patton brought her down to earth in a hurry when she applied for a job.

"He said 'You write well and if you were a man I'd hire you, but I'm not going to have any women reporters on my staff,'" she said he told her.

World War II gave her the opportunity she sought, as it did for many women around the country when male reporters marched off to war and editors frantically searched for replacements. Kathryn and the Alabama Journal, Montgomery's afternoon newspaper at the time, suddenly found each other.

Kathryn is believed to have been Alabama's first female police reporter at a large daily newspaper and she had a ball reliving those moments in "Odd Egg Editor," about



Kathryn's "Rabbit Run" breakfast is a popular event on the first day of each month in Selma.

Photo by Alvin Benn.



Kathryn holds just a few of the many books she's written through the years.

Photo by Alvin Benn.



Kathryn Tucker Windham is always the featured performer at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee.

her days of covering crime stories around the Capital City.

She had her problems at times with crusty police officials, but stood her ground and wasn't going to put up with any denigrating conduct aimed at her because of her gender.

Take for instance, the time a desk sergeant told her she really shouldn't be reporting about crime and should focus, instead, on "society news." She responded with: "I don't know enough adjectives."

She was finally accepted by police when she covered the tragic retrieval of a child's body from a ravine. She had earned her spurs. The cops knew she only wanted to report the news and they soon began to treat her with respect.

Kathryn learned about speed, accuracy and deadlines from Chicago transplant Meriwether

Lewis Sharpley, a stern editing taskmaster at the Journal who wasn't reluctant to lean over her shoulder as she typed.

"Write, Ms. Tucker, write, Ms. Tucker," he'd bark at her before ripping copy out of the typewriter to examine it himself.

"One of the first things he told me when I went to work at the Journal was to have at least one story on the front page every day," she recalled. "He said I needn't come to work that day if I didn't. I came to work every day."

Excelling at whatever she tried has been her calling card. It might involve speaking to thousands of spectators at the National Storytelling Festival every year in Jonesborough, Tenn., doing a one-woman stage show she wrote about Julia Tutwiler, Alabama's most

famous female reformer, taking award-winning photographs, writing enough books to fill a shelf or talking about her beloved South on National Public Radio and its state version.

Her greatest accomplishment may well have been raising three young children following the death of her husband in 1956.

Kathryn fell in love with Amasa Windham not long after he walked into the Birmingham News building, resplendent in his white Navy uniform after having served in World War II.

If she tried to play hard to get, she did a good job at that, too and starts to laugh when she remembers that first meeting.



Kathryn as a cheerleader for Thomasville High School.



Kathryn shows an adoring crowd how to play music on a comb.

“I was working on a story, trying to meet a deadline when he came up to me at my desk and said ‘You must be Kathryn, I’ve heard of you’ and I told him ‘I’ve heard a great deal about you, too.’”

When he asked her to join him and friends for a homecoming celebration, she looked up from her typewriter for a second and responded tersely: “I’m not the least bit interested.” They were married three months later in Thomasville, moved to Selma and it wasn’t long before they had three children—Kitti, Ben and Dilcy.

A few years after their wedding, Amasa, a heavy smoker, began to have heart problems. Both knew time was short. He died in her arms on the sofa as they watched one of their favorite television programs. They had been married for only 10 years.

Kathryn had no time to mourn. She had three young children to raise and no job. It wasn’t long before she went to work at the Selma Times Journal, began to write syndicated columns and then branched out into storytelling, writing books and other endeavors.

The wolves may not have been at the door during those difficult days following Amasa’s death, but, as Kathryn remembers “they were just around the corner.”

Which brings us to “Jeffrey.”

One day Kathryn said she heard a “rustling” sound in the hallway at her house on Royal Street, but didn’t see anything to go with it. The sounds continued and, eventually, her children came up with “Jeffrey” as an appropriate name for whatever it was that might have taken up residence in the house.

That led to “13 Alabama Ghosts and Jeffrey,” which still delights readers young and old around the South. Several more ghost books followed, along with best sellers about cooking, history, journalism and a hodge-podge of memories that attract loyal followers.

Visitors who expect to see a cobweb-covered mansion high on a hill or someone resembling Vincent Price at the front door are surprised and a bit disappointed. Kathryn’s house looks just like all the others on the block—modest to say the least.

Asked if “Jeffrey” really exists, Ben Windham can’t resist saying: “I don’t know if he does or not, but he sure helped put me through college.”

When Kathryn celebrated her 90th birthday last year, hundreds of her closest friends showed up to cheer her as she stood on the balcony of the Selma-Dallas County Public Library where she waved and smiled. She even provided the entertainment by passing out plastic combs and wax paper to hum popular tunes.

Her promise when it ended was an invitation for everybody to come back in 10 years for her centennial birthday.

In case she doesn’t make it, she will be laid to rest in her own, hand-made casket of heart pinewood. An artisan friend spent a long time making it for her. It’s been in a storage shed behind her house since she turned 70 and decided she ought to finally think about mortality. She has made it



Photo by Barbara Reed.

Kathryn Tucker Windham by “found objects” artist, neighbor, and friend Charlie Lucas. This sculpture is on permanent display at the Kathryn Tucker Windham Museum, Alabama Southern Community College, Thomasville, Alabama.

known that she wants a simple funeral service, nothing elaborate, but with a special touch befitting of an Alabama original.

“They’ll pass out combs and wax paper to play some cheerful songs,” she said. Zippity Do Dah would be just fine because she’ll be on her way on a “wonderful day” to see Amasa after so many years of separation.

Alvin Benn is a reporter and columnist for the Montgomery Advertiser and self-appointed president of the Kathryn Tucker Windham Fan Club, Selma Chapter.

KATHRYN’S FAVORITE STORY:

James Wilson Tucker delighted his daughter every time he told the following story about one of his Thomasville friends. This is her version of what she remembers during those nights on the porch when her father was the star of the show.

“Mr. Kelley had a full white beard, not a bit scraggly. He looked just like Santa Claus and was real proud of it. He would always wash it thoroughly and trim it when needed.

“Well, one day while he was smoking his pipe, some of the ashes dropped onto his beautiful white beard and daddy went over to his house to commiserate with him.

“When he asked for some details about what had happened, Mr. Kelley said: “Jim, you know, if I hadn’t been right there, my beard would have burned up.”

THE ALABAMA FOLK HERITAGE AWARD



Willie King

Outstanding Bluesman

A Tribute to An Alabama Treasure

(March 18, 1943 – March 8, 2009)

by Rick Asherson

Ever since he first heard a blues musician play at his grandmother's juke joint, Willie King has been consumed by the blues. "It got all over me," he says, "and wouldn't let me go." He has been mining a deep groove ever since and has never stopped practicing, performing, writing, and developing the blues according to Willie King.

In recognition of a musical career that started on a plantation with a one-string, homemade diddly-bo and has led to a national and international reputation, the state of Alabama is awarding Willie King the 2009 Alabama Folk Heritage Award.

Willie King's story is about music but equally it is about his care, interest, and concern for the community he grew up in and the cultural skills, which he calls "traditional survival skills," that helped his oppressed community survive and develop despite some very hard



Willie King at his home on Freedom Creek, 2001.

Photo by Joel Beeson.

times. King credits his grandfather with instilling him with these values and giving him the desire "...to do at least half-way right!"

Willie King was born in 1943 in Prairie Point, Mississippi, living first with his parents and later with his grandparents, the sharecroppers

Fred and Sue Frazer. At age six he moved with his family to Pickens County, Alabama, to work on a plantation there, and apart from a brief sojourn in Chicago, King has lived in Alabama ever since.

Music was important to the King family—his father was an amateur blues guitar player and according to Willie his grandfather "played both sides," singing both gospel and blues, while his grandmother Sue ran a juke joint and was well known for being an entertainer, a comedian of the ilk of "Moms" Mabley.

Like many other aspiring guitarists in the poor South at that time, King's first instrument was a homemade diddly-bo made by nailing bailing wire to a tree in the yard. By age nine he had graduated to a



Photo by Tony Negri.

Willie King during the Rootsways Blues Festival, Parma, Italy, 2007.

one-string guitar that he could bring indoors so that he could play at night. Willie was thirteen before he owned his first guitar, an acoustic Gibson, which was purchased for him by Mr. W. P. Morgan, the plantation owner who owned the land on which his family lived. King paid off the \$60 price tag for the guitar by working with Morgan and helping out on the plantation. W. P. Morgan became a close friend and mentor to Willie King, an unusually close rela-

tionship at a time when segregation was the norm. Willie remembers Mr. Morgan with great affection and perhaps their friendship helped inform King's often-repeated theme of coming together and loving each other regardless of any differences.

Soon Willie began studying guitar and blues with local veteran blues musicians like Po' Andrew Harris, the Brook Brothers, Jessie Daniels and "Birmingham" George Conner. His music was influenced by contact

with these regional blues musicians and by listening to his favorite recordings, especially Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, Lightnin' Hopkins, and John Lee Hooker.

His first performance was aged eighteen at a Mississippi house party, where he played the only two songs he knew all night, for a fee of \$2. By age twenty he was regularly performing solo acoustic country blues at house parties and juke joints in West Alabama and East Mississippi. Willie



Willie King teaching rural agricultural workshops in Pickens County, 2004.

After a year Willie decided that the rough and tumble of big city life did not suit him and he returned to the beloved woods of his home in Old Memphis, Alabama, just across the border from Mississippi. Here he continued playing the blues, traveling the

rural roads, talking politics and doing a variety of different jobs. Moved by the many injustices he saw around him, King soon joined the civil rights movement and later worked with the Highlander Center, where he met and shared a stage with the legendary Pete Seeger.

Spurred by his interest in civil rights and encouraged by his friend and fellow civil rights activist David Gespass, King started writing original songs that reflected the struggles of the times, which he called “struggling blues.” His songs told a story of direct experience which many could relate to. As King explains, “through the music I could reach more people, get ‘em to listen.”

At the same time as King was gaining a local musical reputation,

put his first group together when he was twenty-three, playing electric blues with bluesman Jessie Daniels, who still performs at local events. By 1965 Willie was farming, playing the blues, and making moonshine.

In 1967, Willie King joined the migration to Chicago in an attempt to make more money than he could down South, and also to check out the thriving blues scene there. He lived with his sister on the West Side, just blocks away from Howlin’ Wolf’s home club, Silvio’s, which became King’s hangout during his stay in Chicago. He didn’t much take to city life, except for the times spent in the West and South Side blues clubs jamming and hanging out with the likes of Muddy Waters and Howlin’ Wolf, his long time musical heroes and mentors.



Willie King at age 13.



Willie King at age 15.

he was working to improve the life of his community. In 1989 he founded the Rural Members Association, a non-profit organization dedicated to passing on the traditional survival skills of his community to the next generation. That same year, he opened a community center located on Route 17 at the junction of Route 32, a focus of local interest and a place where he implemented a program of traditional skills workshops aimed at educating the younger generation in not only agricultural survival skills but more broadly the whole set of caring and supportive values that helped a struggling community in the past.

Willie and the Rural Members Association have sponsored classes in blues music, farming, woodworking, food preservation, and other

rural African American traditions. They have also provided transportation, legal assistance, and other services for the needy of Pickens County over the past two decades. Willie has also partnered with the Alabama Blues Project to provide blues education programs throughout Alabama and beyond.

Starting in 1997, Willie has organized an annual festival in Pickens County, called the Freedom Creek Festival. Willie explains, "We was targetin' at tryin' to get all walks of life, different peoples to come

down and kinda be with us in reality down there, you know. Let's get back to reality, in the woods...mix and mingle...get to know each other. Get up to have a workin' relationship, try to bring peace..." The Freedom Creek Festival showcases many unrecorded and unrecognized regional back-woods blues musicians, more recently alongside such internationally renowned artists as Birmingham native Sam Lay, T-Model Ford and David "Honeyboy" Edwards. The festival has gained an international reputation for the authenticity of the music, and the warmth of its hospitality.

King's first recording was in 1999 with local blues star "Birmingham" George Conner. It was an independently produced CD titled *Walkin' The Walk, Talkin' The Talk*. In 2000 he released the self-produced *I am the Blues* with all orig-



Willie King performing at City Stages in Birmingham, during 2005.

Photo courtesy of Willie King.



Photo by Rick Asherson.

Willie King and Debbie Bond with the Alabama Blues Project Summer School performance, Kentucky Festival of the Arts, Northport, 2005.

inal songs. In the same year, renowned bluesologist Jim O'Neal recorded *Freedom Creek* for his Rooster Blues label, capturing many of Willie's "struggling blues" songs. This CD was recorded live at Bettie's Place, a small juke joint in Noxubee County, Mississippi, just over the border from Willie's home in Alabama and won *Living Blues* magazine's best contemporary blues album award. This was followed by the 2002 studio recording *Living in a New World*. Willie was again recorded at Bettie's Place, both for Martin Scorsese's movie *Feel Like Going*

Home and for his first self-produced title, *Jukin' At Bettie's*. His most recent recording is the self-produced album *One Love*.

Willie's priority has always been split between playing the blues and working diligently to serve his deprived community in the heart of the poverty-stricken black belt of West Alabama. To him, it is two sides of the same coin and his commitment to authenticity has greatly enriched Alabama's cultural heritage to all of our betterment and great enjoyment.

As we go to press we are saddened that this great artist, ambassador of the blues and community spokesman, Willie King, passed away on the afternoon of March 8, 2009.

Rick Asherson is co-director of the Alabama Blues Project, an educational non-profit organization based in Northport, best known for their award-winning after-school and summertime blues camp.



Photo by Robert Sutton.

Willie King at Bettie's Place, 2004

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