

## CLIPPING FILE

Imagine painting an area the length and breadth of two football fields. Then imagine painting all the trim—the boundary lines, yard markers and end zones, all by hand: no paint sprayers, no compressors, just plain elbow grease. Picture doing it on a ladder with most of the work above your head. Now imagine painting it twice—two coats! That's what Paul Edwards has done to the venerable Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium.

Would a sane man take on such a project? Probably not. And although Paul Edwards may be as normal as the rest of us—granted, that leaves considerable room for interpretation—he's definitely not your average person. This guy is a piece of work.

"I took on this job," says Edwards, "to prove to myself and whoever else cares that the individual is still the most potent unit of civilization."

One might guess that Paul's employers (the City of Santa Cruz) would've been ecstatic when he presented his idea for beautifying the building. After all, Edwards is a member of the Civic maintenance staff and he'd had extensive painting experience. But bureaucratic inertia was hard to overcome. In the end, Edwards took the matter into his own hands: "I just started doing it one day, and no one asked me to stop."

In defense of the City, the whole concept is implausible. No one has hand-painted a building this size in forty years. And it's certainly not something an employee could be directed to do. Most would seek the help of their union representative, claiming they had been singled out for cruel and unusual punishment.

But from Paul's perspective, there was more to this job than just toil. "Painting the Civic on a warm summer's day with vintage Chicago rhythm and blues playing on my tape deck," he declares, "is as close to a Zen state as my temperament will allow."

Though this statement provides one glimpse of his psyche, Edwards' temperament is not easy to pin down. If you consider his history, that's not surprising.

In his youth, growing up in Scotts Valley, he attended John Birch Society meetings with his dad in a barn near Santa's Village. At fourteen, along with the Hell's Angels and Merry Pranksters, he also attended Ken Kesey's first acid tests, held in the very same building.

To this day, Edwards is still a registered Republican. He's also a former member of the notorious Santa Cruz punk rock band The Prisoners, a group that was permanently banned from performing at the Civic because of the unruly crowds it attracted. Now, ironically, the man has painted the building—preserving and beautifying its exterior in an effort that will last decades.

The Civic's appearance—it probably hadn't been painted since it was built—was one of the reasons Edwards took on the job. "Once I started," he says, "it felt great to be painting. The building accepted the paint as if it wanted it. The surface was like a sponge."

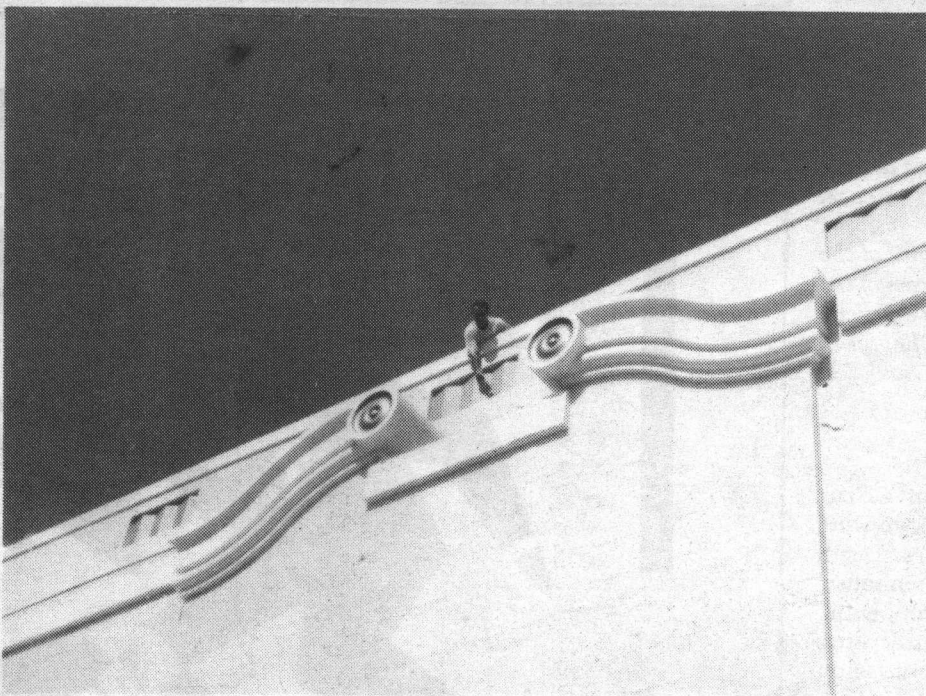
Edwards' sense of craftsmanship was immediately apparent—he was stroking the Civic with a brush. Many times passersby asked why he wasn't using sprayers—why he chose to make the project such a herculean task. "I used a brush at the street level," he explains, "because it was the best Cadillac job I could

# MICHEL-ANGELO OF THE CIVIC

BY LARRY PEARSON

do on the building. Basically I had adequate time, and I was going to make painting the Civic as much a work of art as I could."

Avoiding hard work, discomfort—or danger for that matter—has never been part of Paul Edwards' modus operandi. For example, to celebrate the nation's bicentennial in 1976, he bought a three-month Greyhound bus pass and set off to tour America. "It was an Easy



Rider experience to see where we were after 200 years," says Edwards. Why the bus? Because, he explains, "It was the way to get closest to the grit."

The trip took him to all 48 states and he never paid for a room. "I'd just ride the bus until someone made an offer," he says. "I slept in boats and barns. I met everyone from broken-down cowboys and winos to Good Samaritans."

"In Jackson, Mississippi," he remembers, "I stayed with an older black woman. I had carried her luggage at the bus station and was confronted by some local rednecks. She invited me home and then I was confronted by her family. I probably learned more about the black experience in America that evening than in all the race relations classes colleges have to offer."

His odyssey ended in Los Angeles where Paul got a job as a security guard. Actually, he ended up as a shift supervisor for the Entertainment Division of California Plant Protection. His beat was the old RKO and

Columbia movie studios.

"I studied Hollywood history," he says. "Many great movies had been filmed on these sets. I immersed myself in the culture, past and present. East Hollywood was a fascinating mix of elegant architecture from the 1920s and current-day sleaze."

After a time, Paul decided to up the ante. "I said to myself, 'What's the ultimate job I could have in LA?' The answer I came up with was a cab driver in Beverly Hills."

During this time, Paul was living in an apartment in East Hollywood—on Normal Avenue—amid the drug dealing and prostitution. There were other fascinating attractions as well. "I met several aging character actors," says Edwards, "and a really wonderful woman who was the sexiest dwarf you've ever seen."

But the siren song of Santa Cruz was calling. He returned in 1983 and soon after began his association with the Civic.

"It was ironic that I ended up at the Civic," says Paul. "It had been in my life since I was a kid. In 1960, I was in a summer reading program. If you read enough books, you got to go see *Old Yeller* at the Civic. Through the years I've been to Boy Scout functions there and rock concerts."

Prior to the bicentennial trip and his Los Angeles period, Edwards attended Cabrillo College and UC Santa Cruz. In typical fashion, he was at UCSC during its most hip period, 1972–75. In retrospect, Paul isn't

too sure why he enrolled. "I suppose I just did it because it was there," he recalls. "Everybody had to go to college if they had any brains—it was a law."

The Republican from Scotts Valley didn't find the climate on campus terribly compelling. "It was like Disneyland," he says. Not only was politically liberal UCSC an improbable choice for Edwards—yet quintessentially part of the Santa Cruz experience—perhaps college itself was equally out of character. "I'm not an academician," says Paul, "it bores me. I don't like to read books about life, I like to lead a life that can be written about."

His philosophy is reflected in painting the Civic. For Paul Edwards, it has been the romantic gesture of a man no longer at home in his home town. Edwards owns some property on Puget Sound in Washington State, and says at some point in the future he may move there—or to some other spot he hasn't found yet.

"I'm not an urban person," says Paul. "When I was raised in Scotts Valley it was country. I wish Santa Cruz the best, but the area has passed a point where it doesn't feel like home any more." And so, after almost two years, his work is finished. You probably couldn't describe the building's previous appearance (the whole auditorium was cement gray), but take a look at it now. The Civic stands regally, smiling down on the intersection of Church and Center Streets—bathed in a coat of rosy beige, crowned with gold balls and gilt trim. The windows are set off in five colors. Gold and blue epaulets adorn the upper reaches of the building.

Most people paid little attention to the old auditorium—the Civic was just always there. Now it reflects the work of a rustic Michelangelo. Painting the Civic was a project from another era. It was done by a man from another time. ■

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