

SANTA CRUZ STYLE

SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL

SUNDAY, JANUARY 2, 2005

The Gail Rich Awards 2005

Art & Artists - 2000

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The new Fertile Crescent

The Fertile Crescent, you'll remember, is the name historians have given to the region stretching around the Persian Gulf, where civilization first took hold.

These days, no one thinks of that war-torn area as particularly "fertile" and, if the name is up for grabs, might I nominate Santa Cruz County?

Of all the considerations that go into that ephemeral phrase "quality of life," one of the most overlooked is the presence of artists. A diversity of artists in a given community effects just about everything from the retail environment to nature preservation to the cost of housing.

For nine years now, the Sentinel has paid tribute to the artists who make up the uniquely eccentric culture we enjoy here in Santa Cruz County. Named for one of Santa Cruz's most tireless arts volunteers who died the year the awards were established, the "Gailies" are our way of beginning a new year with a heartfelt appreciation of those whose work makes our lives here so enriching.

So here's to all those who entail the creative life in the arts: musicians, visual artists, actors, directors, filmmakers, writers, poets, performance artists and dancers, as well as philanthropists, merchants, cultural figures, arts volunteers and all those who work to support the creative life of Santa Cruz County.

Thank you for creating the new Fertile Crescent.

Maya Barsacq

One day, a few years ago, Maya Barsacq put a list of her favorite CDs on the Internet, a list that included music from many corners of the world for which the native Parisian and classically trained pianist had developed an intense passion. Soon, record labels sent her review copies of new music and, even more astoundingly, the artists themselves contacted her with a request: Would she help them get performing gigs in the United States?

Thus was born Zook Beat, Maya's Santa Cruz-based all-volunteer booking agency that in the past few years has brought a variety of world-music artists not only to local stages but classrooms as well. Malian guitarist Habib Koité, the Senegalese group Orchestra Baobab and Cape Verde singer Maria de Barros are just a few of the acts Zook Beat has brought to the area to entertain adventurous audiences and educate local schoolchildren.

Maya grew up in a family of artists — her father was an architect, her mother a painter and a sister works in Paris as a choreographer. She indulges her love of piano and singing, is currently studying conducting and also hosts a radio show on KUSP, playing avant-garde classical music from all over the world.

Stories by
Wallace Baine

Portraits by
Shmuel Thaler

More Gail Rich Award winners can be found on B4 and B5

Um...Gee...Um

The improv-comedy Renaissance in Santa Cruz began in 1989 when a group of students from Wilma Marcus Chandler's improvisation class at Cabrillo College struck out on their own with the clever moniker Um...Gee...Um.

Since then, improv groups have popped up in Santa Cruz like flowers after a spring rain, all inspired by the example of Um...Gee...Um, which even pre-dates ABC's "Whose Line Is It Anyway?," the TV show which popularized improv comedy in the U.S.

From their home at Actors' Theatre in Santa Cruz, the six-person troupe not only stages popular performances but has led classes in improv techniques for years, teaching principles of spontaneity and emotional accessibility to both performers and non-performers.

Though none of UGU's original members are still with the group — pioneers Scott Williams, Pogi Howard and Suzy Leijten have all moved on to other endeavors — the current group has been together since '97, never doing the same show twice.

Pictured, clockwise from top: Todd Phillips, Chopsy Gutt, Sharon Lee McGraham, Suzanne Schrag, Susan Boes. Not pictured: Paul McGrath.





Janet Allinger

The art of Janet Allinger deals in the sunny, colorful, mischievous, distinctly female brand of fabulousness that radiates from West Coast culture.

The Michigan-born painter and graphic illustrator has developed a signature style she likes to call "neo-pop," inspired by the look of the Sunday comics and reminiscent of the 1960s pop-art cheekiness of Roy Lichtenstein. Her subjects, almost exclusively young women, glow with a kind of hip-chick serenity whether they're riding waves or sipping wine in nun's habits. Her



strip panels, have names that hint at their pop-culture bravado such as "Spaghetti Strap Western" and "Ray Gun Girl."

Janet's art has hung in galleries from New York to San Francisco, and she's a staple of Santa Cruz County's Open Studio tours as well. Her studio/gallery on Santa Cruz's Westside features not only her dazzling artwork but T-shirts, postcards and other accouterments for both hip chicks and those who love them.

Eric Thiermann

Videographer Eric Thiermann's career in Santa Cruz began back in 1976 when he accompanied local artist Eloise Smith to shoot a documentary about artists in California's maximum-security prisons. Since then, Eric has built a business — Impact Productions — shooting corporate and training films, as well as documentaries and other projects of interest.

In the past two years, Eric has served as cinematographer in Geoffrey Dunn and Michael Horne's "Calypso Dreams," a loving documentary on the history of calypso music in Trinidad. He also played a role in the recent presidential election by shooting a political ad featuring a mother who'd lost a son in Iraq, which was picked up by the political group MoveOn.org and broadcast widely in battleground states.

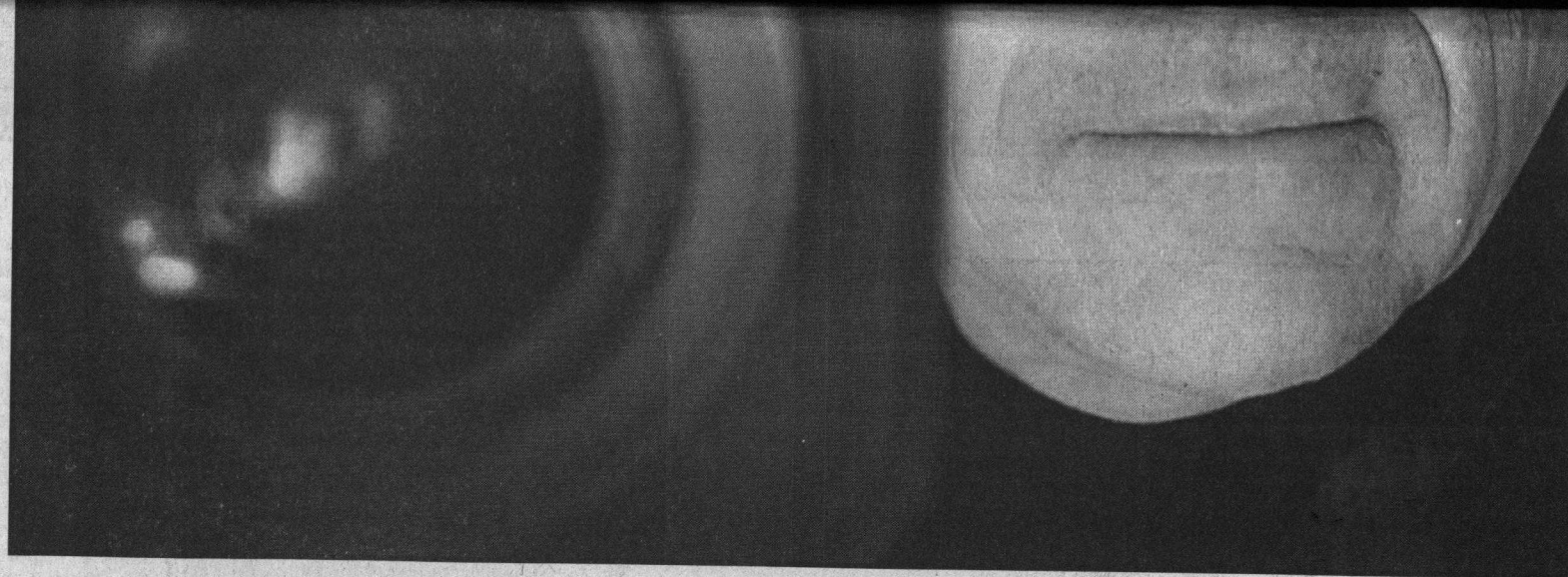
He also spends a lot of time shooting at Yosemite and is currently working with Congressman Sam Farr, as well as planning a documentary on film festivals. One of his most well-known projects, however, remains "Santa Cruz Scenics," a video postcard of the area shot with Eric's intuitive feel for the arresting image. Santa Cruz County never looked so good.

Patrick Trefz

Photographer Patrick Trefz is a true believer in the link between creativity and surfing and is making it his business to help surfers who are artists get noticed. In 2004, he put together the Surf Art Project, a gallery showing of art by surfers in what he hopes to be the first effort to bring together the Santa Cruz surfing community in an environment of artistic creativity.

Patrick is nicely positioned to play such a role. The son of a still-life photographer, he has traveled the world shooting surfers and waves in his role as a senior photographer for Surfing magazine. He's also the author of a gorgeous photo book titled "Santa Cruz: Visions of Surf City" that goes beyond postcard images to present a portrait of everyday surfers.

His photos have been published widely in the press as well as in advertisements. His work has also hung in galleries up and down the West Coast, including an exhibit of portraits of Santa Cruzans last year at the Museum of Art & History.





Lisa Jensen/James Aschbacher

They met because of "Star Wars." She was a young film critic for the local weekly. He was the proprietor of the comic-book store where she hoped to find a photo of this new sci-fi epic everyone was talking about. Lisa Jensen and James Aschbacher were married the next year, but their interests have moved well beyond Luke Skywalker.

This year, Lisa marks her 30th anniversary as film critic for the Good Times (her first review was "Monty Python and the Holy Grail") where she has also contributed widely read columns on life in Santa Cruz — she's also written a novel of historical fiction that's found unlikely popularity in Germany.

Since marrying Lisa, James has transformed himself, selling his interest in Atlantis Fantasyworld to his partner, Joe Ferrara, to embark on an improbable career as an artist, starting at the age of 40 with no formal training. Today, James works full time as an artist and has developed a distinctly whimsical style that many consider the signature look of Santa Cruz, displayed most prominently in two enormous downtown murals, both with which Lisa shares a credit and neither of which has anything to do with "Star Wars."



The Banana Slug String Band

The creature *Ariolimax columbianus*, aka the common banana slug, has a lifespan of only three to six years, but one hardy variety — of which there are only four known in the world — has already reached 20 and is still going strong.

Santa Cruz's beloved Banana Slug String Band — Doug Greenfield, Mark Nolan, Larry Graf and Steve Van Zandt — celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2005 with a vibrant new CD called "Wings of Slumber," the band's eighth recording, that continues the Slugs' mission to mix entertainment with education about the natural world.

On stage, the Slugs are famous for their kid-friendly theatricality, but the guys who call themselves Doug Dirt, Marine Mark, Airy Larry and Solar Steve are seriously regarded as educators as well. Songs such as "Dirt Made My Lunch" and "Tidepool Boogie" speak to the band's commitment to "edu-tain" children about biology and ecology. In their 20-year run, the BSSB has also won several awards, toured the world and performed for 1.5 million people, not a bad life for a few lowly gastropods.



Ginny Mitchell

Ginny Mitchell's roots in Santa Cruz run so deep that there's even a beach in town named for her family, Mitchell's Cove. Her parents, in fact, met on Seabright Beach.

But family ties or not, Ginny is one of Santa Cruz County's most familiar talents, a singer/songwriter known for her sweet and lively country-influenced sound that also shades into jazz, blues, folk and rock. Her biggest project in recent years was 2002's "Girls From Santa Cruz," a made-for-TV concert with gal pals Mary McCaslin and Lacy J. Dalton, a CD/DVD to benefit efforts to save the wild horses of Nevada.

Her career began in Canada with a quick sideline to Nashville, but most of the time, Ginny has spent her life as an artist in Santa Cruz where she's developed a close-knit "family" of fellow musicians, worked with the Young at Heart program to bring live music to area nursing homes, taught singing and performed with the Mount Madonna Choir. Now, she's recording a new album and helping her husband, businessman Marty Collins, start a special-effects movie lab just a short bike ride from Mitchell's Cove.

Past winners of the Gail Rich Award

1997

Rick Walker
The Troxell Family
Holt Murray
Bob Lowery
Laura Ellen Hopper
Sara Wilbourne
Eric Schoeck
Joe Ferrara
Philip Collins
Guillermo Aranda
Tracye Lea Lawson
Bud Kretschmer

1998

Bruce Lee
Kate Hawley
Nikki Silva & Charles Prentiss
Sean Seman
Mary McCaslin
Thom Zajac

John Orlando
Laurie R. King

1999

Linda Arnold
George & Gail Ow
Ann Morhauser
Manuel Santana
Claudia Villela
Wilma Marcus Chandler
William Coulter
Salvatore D'Aura

2000

Kathleen Bartlett Abood
Sista Monica Parker
Ralph Peduto
Larry Hosford
Patrice Vecchione
Josh Gitomer
Vern & Carol Bowie

Bill Welch & Phil Lewis

2001

The Dobson Family
Jim Phillips
John Sandidge
Sister Barbara Long
R.R. Jones
Suzanne St. John
Ikuyo Conant
Richard Hoover

2002

Helené
Geoffrey Dunn
Audrey Stanley
Suzanne Schrag
Susie Bright
Jim Urban
Dror Sinai
Albert Kent, Mary Ann Kent &

Tom Miller

2003

Tim Jackson
Rock Lerum
Janet Johns & Esperanza del Valle
B. Modern
Lile Cruse
Michael Eckerman
Keith Greeninger
Billie Harris

2004

Ken Kraft
Roger Heitzman
Lawrence Bedford
Nancy LeVan
Art & Revolution
Gerry Mandel/William Rubel
Arthur Hull
Eleazor Cortes