

WIELAND: WRITING SURFACES FROM MYSTERIOUS DEPTHS

By Justin Endow

Creative writing professor Mitch Wieland knows when he is in "the zone." His mind and body unconsciously work in concert. He strives for a kind of perfection to which some highly gifted athletes can relate but rarely summon.

Unlike those professional superstars, Wieland is not sinking clutch three-pointers or orchestrating game-winning drives. He feels the zone when he's immersed in the creation of fiction.

"It's almost like hypnosis," says Wieland, who has published a number of short stories, the novel *Willy Slater's Lane*, and currently is sending a second novel to the New York publishing houses. "I start working, and after a certain amount of time, I drop back into the fictional world, into an unconscious state."

He says that the resulting creativity doesn't just happen. "It's not necessarily a matter of the muse striking. I just have to set myself down to what I'm working on. It's odd in that it's almost workmanlike."



CHUCK SCHIEER PHOTO

For Wieland, writing becomes almost a state of hypnosis.

In fact, it's so much so that he likens writing to the repetitive practice of the martial arts. Students in both disciplines practice craft and technique until those mechanisms become involuntary components of their styles and abilities.

That's not to say that he isn't affected by inspiration. He notes that a story he recently had published came to him in paragraphs. And those story chunks would strike at any moment.

"The story almost forced itself on me,"

Wieland says. "It's in the third person, but the voice is very aggressive, and I felt it very deeply. I found myself taking down passages on whatever I had available and then punching them into the computer later."

The result was "Beware the Pale Horse Comes Riding," a story that, unlike most of his past works, largely preserves many of his first creative impulses. The story's voice, its rhythms, even many of the original sentences survived his red pen.

But inspiration doesn't often strike

Wieland like an unexpected roundhouse kick. "I'm inspired to write through reading. The perfect work of art makes me want to try the same thing."

And when he does, he doesn't rely on the muse or consciously try to drag out the words. He just writes.

"Writing is how I tap into the depth of a story," he says. "Good fiction comes from somewhere deeper and mysterious. Because of that, I think storywriting is about discovery." □



CHUCK SCHIEER PHOTO

HANSEN: POSITIVE VIBES SPARK HER CREATIVITY

By Patricia Pyke

Marla Hansen says her best choreography emerges when she lets go of her conscious plans and allows ideas to flow uninhibited.

"A lot of times, I will tell my brain, 'This needs to happen, now go do it,'" she says. "I just open the door. I let the unconscious ideas come forth and just simply say, 'Now OK, you can come on out.'"

Hansen, co-artistic director of the Idaho Dance Theatre and an associate professor who directs the dance program in Boise State's theatre arts department, says ideas often hit her unexpectedly.

Last season for Idaho Dance Theatre's "Art Attack," she choreographed a dance piece to Shakespearean sonnets with only voice accompaniment by Idaho Shakespeare Festival performers Carol Whiteleather and Richard Klautsch.

Coming up with the idea of dancing to

sonnets "was such a bizarre thing," says Hansen. "I was standing in the hall talking with Ann Klautsch and Richard. I literally don't know where the idea came from but I said, 'Why don't we do something with the sonnets?' It just popped into my brain."

Hansen nurtures her creative side by feeding her soul. Some ways she keeps her psyche inspired are through reading a huge variety of books and magazines, listening to every kind of music imaginable, communing with nature, spending time alone when she's beginning a new project, exchanging ideas with people, dreaming vividly while sleeping and embracing happiness.

When she choreographs, Hansen doesn't mind having other people in the room, particularly if they share her enthusiasm. However, she says, "When I'm actually in the creative process, in the studio for example, I can't have a lot of negative energy or distractions." If she feels people are exuding negative vibes, even unintentionally, she'll ask them to wait outside.

Focusing on preconceived notions about what a dance should be or worrying how well it will fit with the rest of the show also stifle creativity for Hansen.

"There can't be any inhibition to create in dance, at least not for me," she says. □

Dancer and choreographer Hansen's artistry emerges when she allows her plans to fall by the wayside.



CHEF: SCHEER PHOTO

DEVER: CREATIVITY IN THE KITCHEN IS HER PASSION

By Bob Evancho

From Kelli Dever's perspective, creating a gourmet meal is similar to putting on a concert.

Like the musical virtuoso who feeds off an appreciative audience, reaches down deep within his or her inner self and puts on a boffo show, the gourmet chef is, in a sense, performing, says the Boise State culinary arts instructor.

And the chef who skillfully prepares and presents an elaborate spread can derive the same kind of exhilaration in the kitchen as the musician does onstage.

"Being a chef has to do with pleasing an audience," says Dever. "There is the adrenaline rush that comes with being creative with food, welcoming guests into the restaurant, providing them with a dining experience — rather than just eating — and receiving lots of kudos for your work."

Dever knows the feeling; she has traveled worldwide thanks to her culinary skills. And it's her passion for food that begets her creativity.

Consider, for example, Dever's take on bread. Standard fare? A dietary staple of cultures worldwide? One of the most basic foods there is?

Not from Dever's viewpoint. Baking bread, she declares, is a universal art form, an intricate union between science and creativity.

"There are only four main ingredients in bread," she says. "But looking at all the varieties of bread and how you can manipulate other ingredients is a creative process."

"A lot of times during some classes, my students will say, 'Oh, chef, why are you getting excited about this? It's *just bread.*' But bread is a lifeline to so many cultures. And knowing the history of a dish, whether it's bread or an entire meal, and understanding the functions of the ingredients allows you to put more passion and heart into your cooking."

Her most creative dish? It wasn't a dish, Dever replies, but a job she took on a private yacht in South America.

"I wasn't planning on taking it, but a week later there I was, cooking 12-course dinners with local ingredients I was totally unfamiliar with," she says. "I never planned a menu until I'd get to the grocery store because I didn't know what kind of ingredients I'd be working with."

"Now *that* was creative." □

PARKINSON: MUSIC TRANSPORTS HIM TO UNEXPECTED PLACES

By Janelle Brown

There are moments on stage when concert pianist Del Parkinson surprises even himself.

"During a performance, when it's working right, the music can carry me away," says Parkinson, a Boise State music professor. "It's like time no longer exists, sitting on a piano bench no longer exists. I really get transported. That's when it's magic."

It's hard to predict when those transcendent moments will occur, says Parkinson, a prolific performer and former Fulbright Scholar who has soloed with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, the Utah Symphony and the Boise Philharmonic, released two CDs, and given countless recitals, including his debut at the Carnegie Recital Hall in New York City.

"You have to be open and confident of where you are in the creative process," Parkinson says. "If there's any rigidity,

there is no magical moment."

Parkinson frees himself for artistic expression through disciplined preparation. "I can't do anything creatively until I have learned the music absolutely correctly," he says. "I can't be thinking about which finger should play the next note."

Parkinson doesn't listen to other artist's recordings until his own performance is well-developed. But he does visit art museums and attend performing arts events, as a way to expand his vision of the creative process.

"I also play in perhaps a dozen homes with an invited audience. That's where I work out the kinks," Parkinson says.

Still, nothing prepares one for performing like performance itself. When Parkinson walks on stage, he's ready to go anywhere the music leads. Sometimes, it's to places he's never been before.



JOHN KELLY PHOTO

"When it's working right, the music can carry me away," says Parkinson.

"I was a soloist in Gershwin's Concerto in F with the Boise Philharmonic last year. The whole opening of the piece was a surprise to me," says Parkinson.

"I can't explain exactly how that happens," he adds. "But when it does, it's wonderful." □



CHUCK SCHEER PHOTO

HOLMES: POET FINDS INSPIRATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

By Janelle Brown

Janet Holmes is well aware of the mystique that surrounds poetry writing — but she doesn't buy it.

"Poetry, of all the arts, has this reputation that the muse descends and you're transported. But that's not my way of doing it," says the Boise State English professor and prize-winning poet. "If I waited for just the right moment, I'd probably write about one poem a year."

Holmes writes most days, regardless of how inspired she feels. Judging by her growing national reputation, it's an approach that works. Holmes is the recipient of a number of national poetry awards, including the 1999 Chad Walsh Poetry Prize and the 1999 Ernest Sandeen Prize from the University of Notre Dame Press for her book, *The Green Tuxedo*. Two other volumes of her poems have also been published, with another scheduled to come out next year.

Holmes finds ideas for her poetry in

everyday occurrences, in interactions with others and in teaching her students. "I write poetry to find out what I think about things," she says. "I'm not sure I could quit writing, because that would be like quitting to have an opinion about the world."

She composes at a computer. It's anything but effortless. "Poetry has this abracadabra reputation. My students are surprised to find that it is actually hard work," she says.

Holmes' latest work-in-progress is called "f2f" — Internet jargon for face-to-face. In her book-length poem, Holmes explores how "seeing" complicates relationships. It's a theme as ancient as the myth of Echo and Narcissus and as contemporary as today's growing reliance on e-mail. Holmes hopes to publish both in print and in the Hypertext format used on the Internet — a nod to the changing ways our society gets information.

"I think the premises for poetry have to change," says Holmes. "The attention span of young people is much shorter. We can't stay with old paradigms. As creative artists, we can't write something like 'The Prelude' now — we need to find ways to adapt."

Holmes relishes the challenges of striking out in new directions. "The creative struggle doesn't have words to express it," she says. "We invent our own voices." □

KLAUTSCH LOSES HIMSELF TO FIND A CHARACTER

By Julie Howard

For Richard Klautsch, the magic moment hits when he forgets everything he's ever learned, all the lines he's memorized and even his own name.

At that instant, he becomes the imaginary character whose part he plays on stage, and the imaginary world becomes his reality.

"The work becomes so extraordinary by its effortlessness," says Klautsch, chair of Boise State's department of theatre arts and a frequent principal actor in the Idaho Shakespeare Festival.

Klautsch says those moments are rare and come after hours and hours of uninspiring and rote practice. "All the practice you do — the memorizing of lines, learning the blocking, changing your mannerisms and attending rehearsals — it's all done for one purpose: so you can literally forget it all."

While it all might sound like "practice



CHUCK SCHEER PHOTO

Klautsch says the intensive rehearsing is done in order to forget it all on stage.

makes perfect," Klautsch says creating an artistic moment on stage is a much more spiritual process than that. Nothing takes the place of rehearsals, but the impact of inspiration and passion can't be measured.

His most inspired moment? "I had my

back to the audience and had no lines to deliver," he recalls, of a moment during last fall's Faculty Showcase production of *The Zoo Story*, performed with assistant theatre arts professor Gordon Reinhart. "We had rehearsed for months and explored the play so much. We knew the play and trusted each other as actors ... often I felt lost in the world of that play. One night in particular I had to listen to his character tell a story. I became so engrossed in the story, as though I had never heard it before. At that moment, I felt like an artist."

While performing Shakespeare is a favorite of Klautsch's, he often struggles to find his muse while onstage at the Idaho Shakespeare Festival.

"It's daylight the first hour or so of the performance and you can see the audience clearly," he says. "It's not so much the audience eating their picnic or talking, it's the subtle things like someone dropping their head into their hands or getting up to go to the bathroom in the middle of a speech."

At those moments, he says, it's difficult not to be totally aware that one is an actor on the stage who may or may not be succeeding in drawing the audience into the magic of the theater. □

SHURTLEFF: LIFE'S COMPLEXITIES ARE HER ARTWORK

By Patricia Pyke

For artist Cheryl Shurtleff, even the most mundane objects — a potato plant or a souvenir comb from Florida — can reveal insights about tragedy, illness and other life complexities.

“Being creative is being able to take two things that are remote or distant from one another and bring them together in such a way that you create new meaning,” says Shurtleff, an art professor who has taught at Boise State for 22 years and whose work has been exhibited in numerous galleries from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., including at the Smithsonian Institution. Some of her intricate graphite drawings are on exhibit through mid-July at the Stewart Gallery in Boise.

By juxtaposing opposite images, Shurtleff crafts a metaphorical language in her drawings to pursue understanding of personal challenges and other human experiences.

JAIN: COMPUTERS PROVIDE PLENTY OF CREATIVE CHALLENGE

By Bob Evancho

When Boise State computer science professor Amit Jain has a burst of creativity, he often needs a break to clear his head.

An expert in a process called “parallel computing,” Jain conducts research that seeks ways to use multiple computers simultaneously for a single task. It’s challenging and rewarding work that requires a creative mind, he says; it’s also a complicated undertaking that can take its toll on one’s staying power.

When you try to conjure up creative ways to apply parallel computing to a certain project “it usually means you’re going to end up with a headache,” says Jain.

To renew his focus and keep his creative juices flowing, Jain says it’s necessary to periodically distance himself from the project at hand — even if the respite is brief.

“When you’re dealing with a problem, what you need to do is walk away, go play tennis or something, and often you have an idea when you come back,” he says. “Like



Shurtleff's drawings connect disparate elements to find new meaning.

A few years ago while in Florida, she bought a souvenir plastic comb with a head and tail like an alligator. At home in Boise some months later, for no particular reason she put the comb on paper and traced it.

“The teeth on the alligator for some reason looked really vicious,” she says.

As she pondered the savagery of animals, a spark ignited and she suddenly

any other discipline, you need to take your mind off the project and do something else.”

Good advice. That’s because the inordinate amount of time Jain spends on certain projects makes it seem like they’ve taken on a life of their own. “To implement an effective parallel computing system is very complex,” he says. “The challenge is to come up with the right system software and hardware that will allow you to use these multiple computers effectively. The research that is necessary to find solutions to make the system work sometimes takes months, even years. It boils down to coming up with creative ideas to find those solutions.”

While he acknowledges that evidence of creativity is more tangible in disciplines such as music or art, Jain says computer science is no less demanding a field when it comes to tapping into one’s ingenuity and inventiveness.

While finding one’s muse often occurs in real time for those in the arts, for a man of science like Jain, a moment of inspiration doesn’t ordinarily compute into an instantaneous sense of euphoria.

“Sometimes the ideas are flying. But there is a difference in this kind of creativity as opposed to, say, a musical performance. If you come up with a creative idea,

recalled an incident where a woman was beaten and raped in the alley behind her house in 1992.

“I finished the drawing by making it about that event, by writing about her being raped around the edge of the alligator,” she says.

Shurtleff had not planned to do a drawing about the rape. She finds plan-

ning counterproductive to creativity. “The connections just come as I’m living my life,” she says. She nurtures her creativity by keeping her senses open.

“The little details about life’s common objects are full of surprises,” she says. “We tend to want to spend our life thinking about things we designate as important. I designate everything as important, everything as a possibility.” □



Jain says his work in computer science requires considerable creativity.

you still have to do the grunt work and check it out. Initially, you get excited, but these ideas often fail.”

Nothing a round of tennis can’t help. □