

Close-Up

Thomas: A musical point of view

By ROBIN BARKSDALE
Chronicle Staff Writer

Russell Thomas set his life's course at the tender age of 8, and today he is making his dreams come true.

Thomas is a local classical guitarist, and music is his life. He has been influenced by some of the great guitarists of all time but says he still creates his own style in his music.

"When I was 13, I played in a rock 'n' roll

"The most important quality a musician can have, in my opinion, is sensitivity. ... Sometimes before a show my nerves do a little jostling, but when I get up on the stage I can sometimes really feel like a master. After the first note I'm on my way."

-- Russell Thomas

band," says Thomas, noting that he informed his cousin when he was only 8 years old that he would one day record a song. "They played songs by Jimi Hendrix, and I was captivated by that and I identified with what they were doing."

As an impressionable 18-year-old in Detroit, Thomas came into contact with the music of guitarist Earl Klugh and says he was "even more astounded and impressed." From that point he devoted his own time and energy to mastering the

craft that he had fallen in love with.

Thomas has found that music, in addition to offering him a career, also serves several functions in people's lives.

"I've found that music is a sedative," says Thomas, who provides musical therapy sessions for the Mental Health Association. "I work with helping people overcome their handicaps with music. It (music) can help diminish anger, and it often generates new interests for people who don't have many other interests."

His own interest in music has paid huge personal dividends. The return in "good feeling" he has received from what he does has been a source of pride for Thomas and given him a sense of accomplishment.

"When I'm sitting on stage, I feel like I'm on top of the world," says Thomas, with a broad smile. "It's something you work hard on all your life, and to get the opportunity to let people hear you is just a beautiful feeling."

His music, Thomas says, is a cross between classical music and jazz, frequently referred to today as fusion music.

Thomas wants to make one thing perfectly clear, however -- he is not to be confused with a pop musician. His idols include Spanish guitarist Andres Segovia and Klugh as opposed to the more well-known pop musicians.

Although he often plays with rock bands, Thomas says he feels most at home with classical sounds.



Guitarist Russell Thomas strums out one of his favorite ballads during a recent practice session (photo by James Parker).

"My music is very, very different from pop music," he says, speaking softly. "The music I play has a role in society. It's a very cultural experience. Classical music is extremely high-culture, and it serves many functions. Pop music is a different level of music. I like pop music, but I just don't love it like I do classical. And it's important to love what you do."

Thomas has preserved his love of classical music on paper. He is the author of a book, "Contemporary Composing for the Exceptional Student," and says, "The idea of the book is to enhance a particular student and allow him to study Earl Klugh-style music."

In addition to writing books on classical music, Please see page A10

COMMUNITY CALENDAR

SATURDAY, SEPT. 6

• The Winston-Salem chapter of the National Association of Black Social Workers will hold its "Fall Round-Up" at 10 a.m. at University Place Apartments in the ESR Building, 1625 E. Third St. The agenda will include plans to attend the association's state conference, to be held at Shaw University from Sept. 26 to 27. Pat Minter of the local chapter will present a workshop on "The New Poor" at the conference. For more information call 788-3923 or 767-3238.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 9

• The YWCA "Tuesday Night Out" will present "Let's Get Motivated," a look at re-entry into the job market, at 7:30 p.m. at 1201 Glade St. Linda Burgess will speak. For those interested in fitness as well as fun, the evening will begin at 5:30 with a fitness class, whirlpool and sauna session, followed by a light dinner. The fee is \$7 for members and \$10 for non-members. The fee for the program only is \$3 for members and \$4 for non-members. Reservations must be made by 5 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 8. For more information call 722-5138.

• Dr. Ron Lean, a Winston-Salem child and family therapist, will present a short course in parenting in conjunction with the YWCA beginning Sept. 9. The six-week course will be held at 9 a.m. on Tuesdays through Oct. 14 for parents of children 6 years old or younger. It will focus on communication, self-esteem, positive discipline, stress, and sexual interest and behavior of younger children. The cost is \$30 for members and \$45 for non-members. For more information call 722-5138.

• "Baby Arrives: The Family and the Breastfed Baby" will be the topic of the September meeting of the La Leche League of Winston-Salem at 7:30 p.m. The meeting will be held at 1428 Chelsea St. For more information call 768-1447.

WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 10

• The YWCA is offering a course called "Introduction to Bridge" beginning at 1 p.m. The eight-week course, taught by Jean Ribisl, an experienced teacher and player, will emphasize the basics of playing, including bidding and scoring. The cost is \$30 for members and \$45 for non-members. For more information call 722-5138.

• Family Services will begin a four-week training course for volunteers interested in working with its Battered Women's Shelter and Rape Response program at 7:30 p.m. at 610 Coliseum Drive. For more information call 722-4457.

SATURDAY, SEPT. 13

• The YWCA is offering, in cooperation with Wake Forest University, tickets to the WFU-Boston University football game. The tickets cost \$13, with half of the price donated to the YWCA. Other United Way agencies also have the tickets for sale, with part of the proceeds going to their agencies. To enhance the evening, the YWCA is providing bus transportation and a box supper for a total of \$18. The bus boards at the YWCA parking lot at 5 p.m. and will be in time to see the Wake Forest pregame show. The game begins at 7 p.m. For more information call 722-5138.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

• The 29th Annual Ebony Fashion Fair will present "Fashion Please see page A9

Social Notes

International children's entertainer to make local appearance

World-famous children's entertainer Ella Jenkins will appear in concert at Reynolds Auditorium Saturday, Sept. 13, at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

The program is being sponsored by the Tarheel Association of Storytellers with assistance from local arts organizations.

Ms. Jenkins was born in St. Louis but has spent most of her years in Chicago. She is a graduate of San Francisco State College, where she majored in sociology.

Before going to the West Coast, she worked at a children's camp in Palatine, Ill., where she had her first musical experience with children. It was there that "Tah-Boo" was composed and remains a favorite camp song today.

While living in San Francisco, Ms. Jenkins stayed in a Jewish dormitory, where she learned

many Hebrew songs from fellow residents. In exchange she taught them some of her "made-up" songs.

Since she did not play the guitar, a friend gave her a Chinese tom-tom to tap out rhythms, and thereafter she used drums and other percussion instruments for accompaniment.

After graduating from San Francisco State College, Ms. Jenkins returned to Chicago and worked as a teen-age program director for the YWCA. In July 1956 she began to devote her time almost exclusively to music.

She has appeared for interviews and demonstrations on television, on radio and at camps, conferences, schools and club organizations.

Ms. Jenkins has experimented with various techniques of music to stimulate more children and



Children's entertainer Ella Jenkins will present two performances of her "rainbow" music at Reynolds Auditorium Sept. 13.

adults to sing for pure enjoyment in groups. Though she does much solo singing, her primary interest is in having people sing along with her in audience participation songs and chants.

About Town

Fargas, co-stars turn in powerful 'Contract' performance

By ROBIN BARKSDALE
Chronicle Staff Writer

The current production at the North Carolina Black Repertory Company opened last weekend and featured skillful performances by its cast members.

"The Contract," written by resident playwright Nathan Ross Freeman, opened Friday, Aug. 29.

The production stars stage and TV actor Antonio Fargas in the role of a minister who is struggling to live up to his religious vows. The story, which also stars Nadine Cassandra Spratt and Larry Leon Hamlin, is an intense religious drama, and the actors turn in powerful performances in bringing Freeman's work to life.

"The Contract" is directed by Paul Davis and is being produced by Hamlin.

Additional performances will be presented Sept. 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 at the Arts Council Theatre.

Advance tickets are \$10 for adults and \$6 for senior citizens and children. ...

The Forsyth Investment Partners Club recently made a donation to the East Winston Branch Library.

The organization, which consists of professionals learning about the various stock markets and other investments, made the \$50 donation to help purchase



Stage, screen and television star Antonio Fargas and co-star Nadine Cassandra Spratt rehearse a scene from "The Contract." Fargas plays the part of a minister who faces dilemmas in trying to remain true to his ministerial vows. Ms. Spratt plays an angel sent to guide him through his crisis. The North Carolina Black Repertory Company is producing the play, and additional performances are scheduled this weekend (photo by James Parker).

computer software for use by children in the East Winston community.

Members of the club are Artie Amos, Adnee Bradford, Callie Coaxum, Alex Johnson, Maurice Johnson, Brenda McLaurin, Ward Miller, Helen Nichols, Sandra Amos, Paul Cloud, Carol

Henry, Daphne Johnson, James McLaughlin, Carl McLaurin, Vicki Miller, Elaine Pitt and Pete Richardson.

In accepting the donation on behalf of the library, Tim Jackson, the head librarian, encouraged other organizations in the community to invest in the

East Winston Branch Library as well. ...

The Spease Family Reunion was held Sunday, Aug. 24, at the Spease home place in East Bend.

The reunion, now in its 36th year, was attended by family Please see page A9