

An annual exhibit in  
New Hope advances the  
aesthetic standing of wood.

# Getting to the art of things



By GWEN SHRIFT  
STAFF WRITER

The New Hope Arts Center's "Works in Wood," once mostly a fine-furniture show, takes a welcome trip to the frontiers of pure art this year.

Many pieces cross the line, including works by Janice Smith, John Marley, Birdie Miller and Ken Burton.

Yet past tradition is not forgotten, with many finely crafted boxes, bowls, shelves, tables, cabinets, frames, plaques, trays, chairs and other useful and decorative furnishings.

Burton and Miller offer museum-worthy cabinets, one freestanding and the other wall-mounted.

"Harlequin Cabinet" reflects Burton's exploration of art deco visual forms in quartersawn sycamore and wenge, some of it dyed. The style informs the structure, an inverted comma in dark wood at the lower-third of the cabinet serving as a drawer pull.

Miller's freestanding "4-Drawer Cabinet w/ Cantilevered Stand" turns book-matched rosewood, red oak and maple to the service of architecture in miniature, reflecting

a complex and focused use of space between the two levels of the piece.

Smith exhibits a side table and chair likely not meant for sitting. The larger piece, "Juliet," employs highly figured sapele pomele veneer along its sides and undulating backrest; its companion, "Romeo," weds exotic woods such as African cherry with solid-surface material used in kitchen counters.

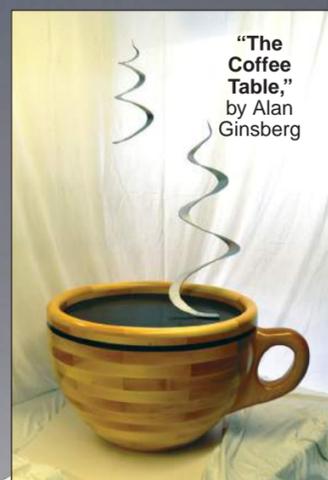
See **WOOD**, Page **D3**



"Juliet," birch plywood, sapele pomele veneer, cherry, by Janice Smith



"Life," driftwood, brass ring, acrylic, by Bernie Houston



"The Coffee Table," by Alan Ginsberg



"Harlequin Cabinet," quartersawn sycamore, wenge, ash and dye, by Ken Burton



"4-Drawer Cabinet w/ Cantilevered Stand," book-matched rosewood, red oak, maple, by Birdie Miller

## Area vet calls 'Fortunate Son' flap a lot of hot air

Not that you asked



Andy Vineberg

215-949-4135  
Email: avineberg@calkins.com

"Fortunate Son" is 45 years old, but thanks to people who think they know better than everyone else, the Creedence Clearwater Revival gem was back in the news last week.

Bruce Springsteen, Dave Grohl and the Zac Brown Band shared the stage for a searing version of the Vietnam-era classic during HBO's Concert for Valor benefiting veterans on the National Mall in Washington last Tuesday. For me, anyway, it was the highlight of the three-hour, star-studded show.

Others apparently weren't as enamored. Conservative magazine *The Weekly Standard* immediately posted a rant on its blog, calling the song an "anti-military anthem" and an "anti-war screed" and accusing Springsteen, Grohl and Brown of being "tone-deaf" for choosing to perform it at a Veterans Day event.

The criticism continued on social media throughout the week, mostly targeting Springsteen, who later in the show performed a stark, solo acoustic version of his oft-misunderstood 1984 hit "Born in the U.S.A." That choice of song, whose lyrics lament the shoddy treatment of Vietnam vets after their return home from the war, also inexplicably received a fair share of heat online, primarily for being "unpatriotic."

Al Morganti of SportsRadio 94WIP even named Springsteen the Morning Show's "weasel

of the week" on Friday. (The fact the Boss generated far more venom than either Grohl or Brown wouldn't have anything to do with his well-documented political views, would it? I wonder if any of his detractors know or care that he once played an entire concert to benefit Vietnam veterans. But I digress.)

Never mind that John Fogerty, the guy who wrote "Fortunate Son," is a Vietnam vet himself, and that he performed the song (without controversy) during PBS' "A Salute to the Troops" on the White House lawn a week before the Concert for Valor.

Or that the lyrics criticize not the men and women who fight our wars but the rich people who orchestrate them, all the while sending the poor into battle and keeping their own sons and daughters safe at home.

The negative buzz over Springsteen (and, oh, yeah, Grohl and Brown) choosing to play "Fortunate Son" grew loud enough last week that Fogerty chose to address it, releasing a statement that said, in part, "As an American and a songwriter, I am proud that the song still has resonance. I do believe that its meaning gets misinterpreted and even usurped by various factions wishing to make their own case."

See **VINEBERG**, Page **D3**



ASSOCIATED PRESS  
Bruce Springsteen (left), Dave Grohl and Zac Brown perform "Fortunate Son" at the Concert for Valor.

# Between boundary and limitation

It's the space Ben Sollee likes to explore in his own music, his many collaborations and his touring.

By NAILA FRANCIS  
Staff Writer

Ben Sollee has plenty of new material in the works. He promises.

Yes, it's been two years since the release of "Half-Made Man," his last studio album. But the singing cellist — as he likes to refer to himself — hasn't exactly been idle since then. He's issued two other full-lengths: a 2013 album of covers, "The Hollow Sessions," and the original score to the documentary "Maidentrip," about Dutch teen Laura Dekker's solo sail around the world, which he released earlier this year.

The Kentucky native has also kept busy with multiple projects, from appearances with the Louisville Orchestra and at a Carnegie Hall tribute to Paul Simon to scoring and performing music for the Charlotte Ballet's production of "Dangerous Liaisons" to contributing the song "Letting Go" to the soundtrack for the film "Killing Season," starring Robert De Niro and John Travolta — at director Mark Steven Johnson's request.

"Generally, I'm attracted to collaborative projects," says Sollee, who is at the moment working on a documentary about animal rights and husbandry. "Doing a film score is the most collaborative situation you could get yourself into. You have the film, the moving image, and you have the pace and scale of the narrative. And then you have the vision of the director and then you have your own musical intuition. Then if anything in particular needs to be incorporated into the film, whether it's a certain sonority of the instrument or something, you need to fit that in, as well.

"I really thrive in that environment, and it's partly by exploring the boundaries and partly by accepting the limitations of time and instrumentation."



"actually writing songs and performing songs on the cello is still a terribly difficult thing to describe to people," says Ben Sollee. "it's still exceptionally unusual in the music industry."

But even with so many projects to juggle, the Lexington resident has been writing new songs. He'll experiment with some of those, as well as share music from his full catalog, when he performs Wednesday at the Sellersville Theater 1894 with Jordan Ellis, his percussionist.

"Between the couple film scores that I've done and different ballets and theater productions, there's lots of new material. It's just putting it out there in a manageable way that's really a challenge," says

Sollee. "I'm also a father and a husband, and I take those jobs as seriously as being a musician."

Since the release of his 2008 debut "Learning to Bend" — following a stint with banjo great Abigail Washburn and The Sparrow Quartet — he has garnered increasing acclaim for an adventurous versatility that showcases his classical training alongside folk, country, jazz and R&B. He acknowledges he's still something of an anomaly as a singing cellist but even with a degree in cello performance from the University of

Louisville, the orchestral narrative has never appealed to him.

"The cello is really like the Swiss army knife of the orchestra. You can do so much with it. From a composing standpoint and a songwriter's, that's what keeps me in love with it," says Sollee.

He was in the third grade when a teacher in his public school carted a collection of instruments around to all the kids.

"When she played the cello for our little class, I was hooked. It was all the unusual sounds that she made, I think by accident, the scratches and the scrapes and the gastrointestinal sounds. At the time, I just thought that was attractive," says Sollee, who began playing the following year. "I was the only cellist in a group of eight string players and we met twice a week in the utility closet of our school gymnasium. It was a really small but excited group of kids.

"I think I was always attracted to the things you could do with the instrument rather than what you should do."

As a songwriter, his tales of relationships and personal growth have been shaped by the likes of the aforementioned Simon, Ani DiFranco and Pete Seeger.

"Michael Jackson was also a huge hero of mine growing up. I spent a lot of time jamming and playing to his music so I think there's a sensibility there," says Sollee. "From the classical world, I've drawn a lot of inspiration from the Turtle Island String Quartet and now from (string quartet) Brooklyn Ryder. There's a lot of exciting stuff happening in the new folk string world."

If his political advocacy, and in particular a passion for issues like ending poverty and the practice of mountaintop removal mining in Central Appalachia, seeps into his songs, it's only natural — a result, he says, of being exposed to the hardships and injustices of others

while touring.

"For me, I felt in this day and age, with social media and all the things going on in the world, if I was going to have a career in music and create a platform, it was important to put on that platform things that I care about," says Sollee.

Such conviction also informs his embracing of music as a social art form. So does his penchant for touring by bicycle, which he first began doing in 2009, carrying his cello with him. Percussionist Ellis pedals alongside him with his own gear. In the last few years, Sollee estimates they've cycled at least 5,000 miles to gigs.

"The farthest we've gone was about 80 miles, but we usually go a burrito's worth of distance, like 40 or 50 miles," he says. "We really, really like to explore the boundaries of just having the gear on the bikes and accepting that limitation of being able to tour only so far and so fast."

He decided on that mode to counter the isolation of traveling by planes, trains and automobiles as his career gained momentum.

"Everything was moving so fast that I would lose track of where I was. I felt that essentially that wasn't why I got into the game," says Sollee. "The bicycle tours slowed me down and helped me move and create at a pace that was a little more humanistic. It allows me to experience and remember the places I'm going to, and I hope it allows the audience to get involved in the show in a more intimate way."

Ben Sollee performs Wednesday at the Sellersville theater 1894, Main Street and West temple avenue, Sellersville. Harmonious Wail opens. Show time: 8 p.m. tickets: \$15 and \$25. information: 215-257-5808; www.st94.com.

Naila Francis is a feature writer at Calkins Media. Phone: 215-345-3149. email: nfrancis@calkins.com. twitter: @NailaFrancis.

## Vineberg

Continued from Page D1

"Years ago, an ultraconservative administration tried to paint anyone who questioned its policies as 'un-American.' That same administration shamefully ignored and mistreated soldiers returning from Vietnam. As a man who was drafted and served his country during those times, I have ultimate respect for the men and women who protect us today and demand that they receive the respect that they deserve."

Maybe it's me, but I always thought "anti-war" and "anti-soldier" were two entirely different concepts, which is part of Fogerty's point. Certainly, "Fortunate Son" doesn't seem to be deserving of veterans' anger — especially at an event played in their honor. (For what it's worth, the performance on the Mall was greeted enthusiastically by the crowd.)

But I know I can't speak for members of the military, so I called one of the area's most outspoken vets, Jesse Hill of Middletown, treasurer of the Delaware Valley Vietnam Veterans, and asked if he was at all bothered by "Fortunate Son" being played at the Concert for Valor.

Hill, who spent 18 months in Vietnam in the late 1960s, immediately dismissed the controversy as people getting worked up for no reason.

"I love that song myself," he said. "It says a lot about (Fogerty) and Creedence, man. They've got a lot of other pro-veteran songs.

"I went (to Vietnam) and I'm proud. I wasn't no draft dodger. I didn't have no rich daddy in politics to get me out."

Hill was also surprised to hear some people were upset about Springsteen playing "Born in the U.S.A." at the concert.

"I can't believe they got on him about that one," says Hill, who turned 67 on Friday. "Geez, (the character in the song) goes out to see his V.A. man ... Come on, that's another great song. As a matter of fact, those two songs, we always used to play them at our Flag Memorial (concert), a couple of bands play them. I wouldn't take anything away from those songs."

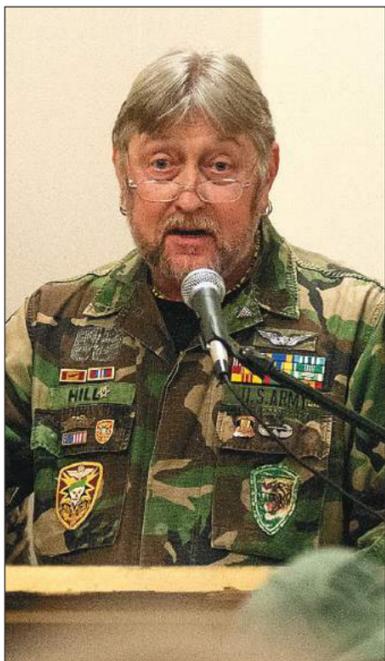
Hill admits he was never bothered by protest songs during the Vietnam War.

"I really think we were more pissed at the protesters than the music," he says. "A lot of the music was pretty good, like Country Joe and the Fish. If that didn't tell somebody the story. We used to laugh about it — one day, we were all going to die."

Hill was referring to the song "I-Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-To-Die Rag" and the line "Whoopie! We're all gonna die!," which was famously performed at Woodstock.

"Music was everything," he says. "That helped us get through a lot of hard times, a lot of ugly-looking situations. I grew up in the streets of Philly, so I was really into soul music, the Four Tops, the Temptations."

Of course, you can't talk to Hill about music without also bringing up Bob



"I went (to Vietnam) and I'm proud. I wasn't no draft dodger. I didn't have no rich daddy in politics to get me out," says Jesse Hill, treasurer of the Delaware Valley Vietnam Veterans.

Dylan. Hill might be the area's No. 1 Dylan fan; he's seen him live well over 50 times since 1974 and is going again this Saturday with his daughter Jocelyn to the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. (A little tidbit for Dylan historians: The three-night stand will be Dylan's first appearances at the Academy of Music since Feb. 24 and 25, 1966.)

Dylan's music is a family affair for Hill, whose wife, two children and three young grandchildren are also fans.

"It's really weird — he usually comes around my birthday, which makes it easy for the kids to buy me a gift," Hill says. "Whatever he does is great. I love everything he does. I even found some old tapes and was listening to some obscurities and, oh, man, they're really great."

Dylan, of course, first gained notoriety for writing and performing protest and anti-war songs — "Masters of War," anybody? — material that expressed sentiments not unlike what Fogerty later wrote about in "Fortunate Son."

Material that in no way dishonors the men and women who have sacrificed so much for our freedom. Just the opposite, actually.

"'Fortunate Son' is not an attack on troops," political and foreign affairs writer Susan Milligan blogged last week for *U.S. News & World Report*. "It is a tribute."

If you don't like Springsteen (or Groh or Brown — remember them?), fine. But if you think any one of them was out of line, or a weasel, or "tone-deaf" for performing "Fortunate Son" at a concert for veterans, you're flat-out wrong.



"Veni, vidi Volpes Dormiens," cherry burl, by David Washington

## Wood

Continued from Page D1

As with much art furniture, these are not pieces to plop down or plop objects upon.

Marley's "River Table" offers a similar conundrum, joining live-edge planks of elm with a stream of gleaming resin dyed blue. This is a novel and intriguing piece in which the materials simultaneously fight and support each other.

Among the most accomplished pieces crossing the boundary of art and utility is, unsurprisingly, from the hand of Robert Whitley.

The veteran woodworker's "Mountain Table" shows his range, in more ways than one, lofting peaks at top and bottom; in a masterly touch, the gleaming grain of the wood stands in for rock strata.

This is a piece to make you ponder the organic relationships in nature, the way the proportions in tree growth and geologic processes seem to correspond.

A pure art piece by Alan Ginsberg, "The Coffee Table," comes disguised as furniture, though if one had a big enough living room, it might serve the titular purpose, provided you took care not to snag your fingers on the aluminum spirals standing in for curls of steam.

This is a quirky, barrel-sized piece, in the exact shape of diner-style crockery, the artist making great play of contrasting woods.

Somewhere between found art and sculpture lies Robert Lash's "Sally's Nestbox," a composition that uses a piece of an old suitcase, which is not terribly unusual, and wood shreds that bedevil any wood shop, which is.

Given the ubiquity and abundance of the latter, I would not be surprised to see more use of glued wood shreds in the future.

Bernie Houston offers a mesmerizing driftwood sculpture, "Life," drawing character out of the remnants of an ordinary tree to make an extraordinary human form.

The piece depicts a sad clown juggling brightly colored balls through a soaring brass ring. The grotesque figure sways in time to the driftwood, but sculptor calls the

tune, breathing life into the expression.

It's often said life or spirit is in the material already, waiting to be drawn out. This is the starting point for the work of David Washington, who showed me a piece of cherrywood two years ago with the comment that there was a sleeping animal inside.

Since then, he let that animal free, vividly, in "Veni, Vidi, Volpes Dormiens," which depicts a fox curled up for a nap. The polished grain evokes the living texture of the animal's coat, the curve of the wood allowing an appreciation of vulpine personality from several angles.

Other pure-art pieces demand attention, such as Paul Rigby's hefty "Golden Violin" in black walnut, onyx and steel; John Mathews' "Vortex," an enlargement of his glass-and-steel vocabulary to include burlwood; and Sandra Eliot's "Carnavale," an energetic, upward-piercing form that shocks the eye with cobalt blue paint against natural wood.

Numerous small, useful works go in fine-art directions — among them, Bryan Richardson's "Maple Platter w/Walnut Shells."

The artist, known for bordering his plates with unusual assemblages, here embeds thin horizontal slices of nutshells around a wooden center. This takes some kind of prize for visual interest — the cross section of a walnut is gloriously sightly — and for use of a most unusual material.

Another small marvel emerged from the workshop of Andrew Shrift (full disclosure: the artist is a first cousin once removed, though not personally acquainted with this reporter). He frames his work "Bio-Mirror" in walnut so elegantly carved as to make the hard wood seem plastic.

He also restrains the vegetative motif with a square, defined border, a mature decision in a genre often overstocked with surreal, overly invasive edge work.

"Works in Wood" is on view through Dec. 14 at the venue at 2 Stockton Ave. Hours are noon to 5 p.m. Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Information: 215-862-9606 or www.newhopearts.org.

Gwen Shrift is a feature writer at Calkins Media. Phone: 215-949-4204. email: gshrift@calkins.com.