



Gautreau's
owner
weathers
his storm.
Sunday in Living

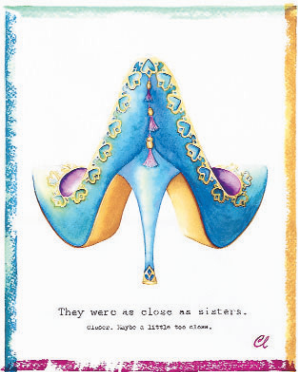
LIVING

TODAY: ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANDERSON

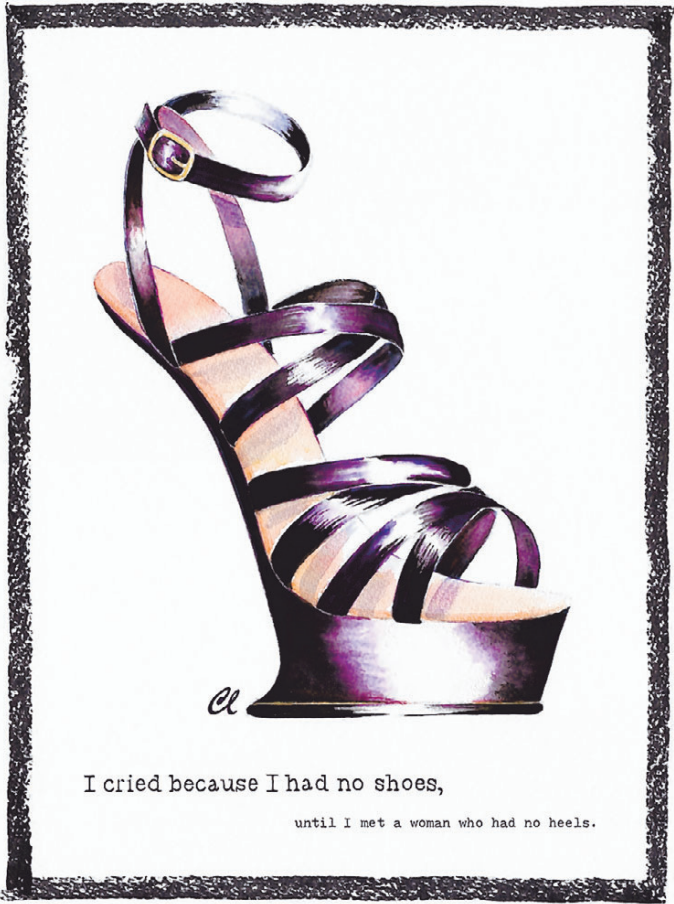
'When people see them, they love them irrationally,' Claudia Lynch says of her watercolors, on display at the George Long Gallery.



Claudia
Lynch's
striking
watercolors

of shoes elevate a fashion
accessory into art works
that are equal parts
silly and sexy.

ART & SOLE



I cried because I had no shoes,
until I met a woman who had no heels.

By Susan Langenhennig
Fashion writer

LIKE MANY WOMEN, Claudia Lynch loves shoes. And though she's not one of those Carrie Bradshaws who would seriously consider shelling out their mortgage money for the latest pair of designer pumps, Lynch's relationship with footwear goes a step further than most. To her, shoes are more than just a cherished accessory that happens to protect the feet from dirty streets. They have personalities and voices and a lovely, sculptural quality. An illustrator and costume designer, Lynch paints shoes with human attributes — a blond

ponytail tied with a pink ribbon, a lace-up red bustier with a sassy peak of cleavage — and pairs them with short stories to give the anthropomorphic adornments personality and context. ShoeStories, an exhibit of her 28 watercolor paintings, will be on view through March 31 at the George Long Gallery, 4516 Magazine St. An artist reception will be held today at the gallery from noon to 4 p.m. The shoes' exaggerated proportions make them seem fairy-tale fanciful — not so much what Snow White would wear; mind you, but what Snow White

Each watercolor is accompanied by descriptive prose written in what the artist calls a 'Sam Spade voice.'

'SHOESTORIES'

What: An exhibit of 28 watercolor paintings by Claudia Lynch
When: Monday-Saturday, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., through March 31
Where: George Long Gallery, 4516 Magazine St.
Artist reception: Today at the gallery, noon to 4 p.m.

See **EXHIBIT**, C-12



DAVID CUTHBERT
Theater Guy

'HATS' OFF AT LE CHAT

Tony-nominated
songstress
skillfully changes
hats, sensibilities
and stages



Sharon McNight sings
'Songs to Offend Almost
Everyone,' tonight at 11
and Monday at 8 p.m. at
Le Chat Noir.

Sharon McNight is one of the stars of the Harrah's New Orleans Casino musical revue "Hats," singing "My Empty Nest," a funny, touching song by "Best Little Whorehouse in Texas" songwriter Carol Hall. But there's another Sharon McNight, a brassy, bawdy, husky-voiced cabaret singer and Tony-nominated musical theater star who'll make her debut at Le Chat Noir tonight with "Songs to Offend Almost Everyone," one of several one-woman shows she has created. "I think the title speaks for itself," she said. "You can expect a couple of Tom Lehrer songs — 'The Old Dope Peddler,' and the ever-popular 'Poisoning Pigeons in the Park.' Then there's a song Chet Atkins wrote around the time of the Jim Bakker scandal, which was pulled off the radio but is still pertinent today: 'Would Jesus Wear a Rolex on his Television Show?'" Also: a parody she penned with actor friend Michael Greer of "You Are the Wind Beneath My Wings"; an informative number called "You Can't Eat Dog in Taiwan"; Stephen Sondheim's

See **THEATER**, C-x

LOCAL VOCALS

Louisiana is a
breeding ground
for musical talent
of all types
— and that
includes opera

Everybody knows that Louisiana produces great musicians. From Louis Armstrong to Lucinda Williams to Juvenile, our hometown talents have put their stamp on most every category of popular music.

CONCERT SCENE

Chris Waddington

Or that singers from Louisiana keep catching the ears of opera experts? Doubtters need to visit local concert halls. On Sunday, for example, soprano Cleona M. Torres returned to her alma mater, filling Loyola University's Roussel Hall with

See **CLASSICAL**, C-12

PBS special offers a glimpse of music videos, 1940s-style



DAVE WALKER
On the Air

That old-time MTV

Music videos that played in bars and restaurants four decades before the dawn of MTV, "soundies" captured performances on film that otherwise might've vanished forever. In the new PBS pledge special "Soundies: A Musical History," which airs at 7:30 tonight on WYES-Channel 12, host Michael Feinstein takes view-

ers back to a time when dropping a dime in a big box would summon the images and sounds of Duke Ellington, Nat King Cole, Gene Krupa and hundreds of other mid-century music stars. "I became aware of soundies when I was in my teens because of a collection of 16-millimeter films, really the

See **WALKER**, C-12



Kay Starr is among the singers featured in 'Soundies' at 7:30 tonight on WYES-Channel 12.

What's shoe with you?

EXHIBIT, from C-1

would be if she were a shoe — and ensure they're never in danger of being crafted into real footwear.

While the illustrations are clever, it's the witty narratives, filled with puns, just under-the-covers innuendo and intentional typos, that bring the shoes to life.

Typed onto the illustrations with an old manual typewriter, the stories are narrated by a disembodied male voice, plucked straight from a dime-store detective novel. You know the type, a fedora-wearing Guy Noir, who refers to his clients as "Boots" or "Dame."

And he's very enamored of these sassy shoes.

On the surface, the illustrations are PG, but an adult viewer's imagination can easily make them quite a bit more racy. Take the ponytailed, high-heeled Mary Jane, drawn as a fancy carousel horse.

The narrator is thick-voiced: *"I'd been tailing her for what seemed like hours."*

"She'd led me around in circles, and I hadn't expected that. But then, most of the girls who spent their nights wrapped around a pole weren't as brilliant as she was."

"On some level, I must have been enjoying the ride, but enough was enough. It was time to get off this merry-go-round and stop horsing around."

It's that wink-wink humor that Lynch loves most.

"The reader gets what he wants out of it, and takes it to the next level," said the 55-year-old artist, who splits her time between the suburbs of Cleveland and New Orleans, where both she and her husband work in the film industry.

The shoes are a merging of Lynch's two professional pursuits: graphic design (she did some of the Andy Warhol recreations in the movie "Factory Girl"); and costume design.

Growing up in Buffalo, N.Y., her mom taught her to sew at a young age. One of her first creations was a hat, a little bathing cap made from her grandmother's discarded vinyl shower curtain.

Not surprisingly, Lynch became

a professional costume maker. Over 25 years, she designed for ballet and theater companies across the country, got bored with that, and wrote a book about how to make bridal headpieces, a surprising successful venture for a self-published how-to tome, she said.

It was the book project that got Lynch interested in graphic design, and at 48, she enrolled in classes at an Ohio community college and discovered a hidden talent. She could draw.

"I had been a costume designer for all these years but I never thought I could draw," she said. "When I went back to school, I was totally surprised to find out I actually could. I just needed someone to teach me."

During her second semester in art school, a fellow student spotted Lynch's unconscious shoe fetish. All but one of her projects included a piece of footwear. And the one without it had a hat.

"I guess I was still thinking about clothes and didn't even realize it," she said.

Ironically, in more than two decades designing for stages, she'd never crafted an actual shoe. Because of budget constraints, costume makers rarely design footwear from scratch for their casts.

Lynch created the first of the ShoeStories for a group exhibit with the Northern Ohio Illustrators Society. The show had the theme "Games People Play."

"I didn't have an idea, so I just started doodling shoes, and I don't doodle," she said.

Toying with the theme, she drew a red strappy sandal with a dart as the heel, then a boot made from checker board and an abstract slide in the shape of a croquet mallet and ball.

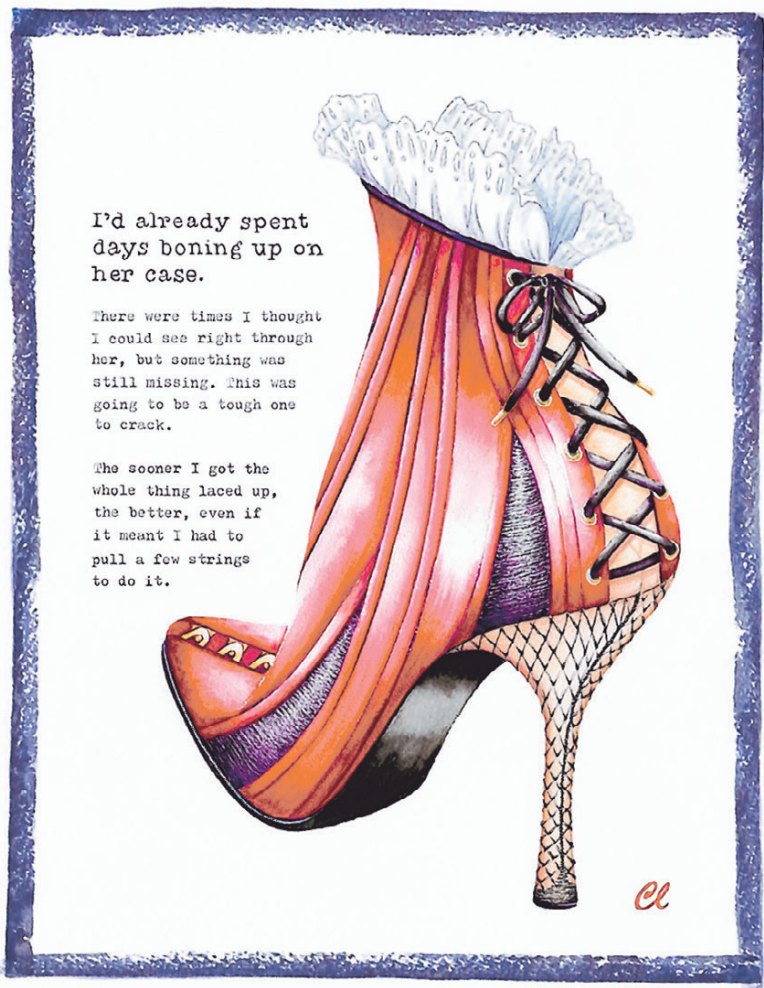
They were interesting shoes, but still just shoes.

So Lynch hopped onto her bicycle and went for a ride, trying to think. That's when the voice came to her.

"It was out of nowhere," she said. "This Sam Spade voice just started talking. It wasn't so much about the words, as the cadence."

Though she loves their architectural quality, the petite artist, with a

CONTINUED



'The reader gets what he wants out of it,' artist Claudia Lynch says of her shoe watercolors and the accompanying 'Guy Noir' text.

flapper's bob and half-moon eyes, doesn't horde real shoes. On a recent Friday, she padded around the George Long Gallery in a conservative pair of ballet flats.

"I like shoes, but I'm not a shoe collector," she said.

And she seemed amused that her illustrations are a hit, having won best of show honors at juried exhibitions in Ohio. "When people see them, they love them irrationally," she said.

Meghan Cleary, the New York author of "The Perfect Fit, What Your Shoes Say About You," chuckled when she viewed Lynch's work on her Web site. "They're hilarious," she said.

Shoes, throughout history, have had a highly-charged psychological component, often with sexual overtones.

"Shoes, more than anything else we wear, affects how you physically feel, whether you're comfortable or not comfortable. They contribute to the physical space you occupy in the world," Cleary said. "There's a visceral quality to shoes. From a young age, little girls are fascinated with their mommy's heels."

Tapping into that visceral appeal, Lynch's humorous interpretations are clever, playing with the cultural iconography of shoes as metaphor for feminine constraints, but also female power: Stilettos may be terri-

bly hard to walk in, but they certainly command attention.

Looking around the gallery, Lynch said her favorite of the shoe paintings is a high-ankle boot done up like a French poodle. "I just was really happy with the way it came out," she said with a shrug.

But locals will most relate to the one Lynch calls blue shoe. It features a battered stiletto wrapped up in a roof tarp and a sweet little conversation Lynch wrote after Katrina.

It reads: *"Let's go out and get a hurricane."*

The invitation knocked the wind out of me.

"Let's not," I said. "I still have quite a headache from that last one."

After everything that had happened, did she really think we could just pick up where we'd left off? Was she that resilient? I muddled it over for a while. If she was ready to rebuild everything we'd had before, I guessed I was, too.

"OK," I said. "But this is a little bit out of the blue. I'll need some time to get cleaned up."

"Take all the time you need," she said. "I'm not going anywhere."

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Torres turns a few ears

CLASSICAL, from C-1

no assistance from amplifiers or microphones. For a singer, that's the equivalent of a swimsuit contest. There's no way to hide your flaws — not that flaws were much in evidence as the 22-year-old Kenner singer let her limber voice soar through a couple of 19th century operatic classics.

Her performance of "Caro nome" from Verdi's "Rigoletto" and the "Gavotte" from Massenet's "Manon" put her atop a field of 11 contestants in the 2007 Gulf Coast Regional Finals of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. She won \$6,000 and a trip to New York to compete for a berth at the nation's most prestigious opera company.

In the Massenet aria, Torres stroked every syllable, drawing out the music's gentle sensuality without sacrificing vocal precision. In the Verdi piece, she showed how high she could sail and how long she could hold a note with pitch-perfect warmth.

Two baritones also drew the judges' attention: Noel Bouley and Brandon P. Hendrickson, both students at LSU, won second and third place respectively.

If Torres wins in the final round — an April 1 concert with full orchestra and a national radio audience — she'll join a host of great singers who came up through the annual audition process: Renee Fleming, Deborah Voigt, Susan Graham, Thomas Hampson and Samuel Ramey. In 2005, LSU grad Lisette Orepeza was just such a winner. She made her Met debut in September.

Want to hear Torres before she heads to New York? She'll sing tonight at 7:30 in a free recital at Loyola's Nunemaker Auditorium.

LPO DELIVERS A 'CLASSIC' CONCERT: As principal guest conductor of the LPO, Klauspeter Seibel knows the orchestra's players about as well as he knows the Austro-German tradition. And he showed his confidence in both at a Thursday concert featuring symphonies by Haydn and Beethoven, and "Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks," a tone poem by Richard Strauss.

Seibel knew he could rely on Jim Atwood, for example. The timpanist played a decisive role in Haydn's "Military" symphony, conjuring resonant thunder from a battery of four tuned drums. At times, the entire orchestra seemed to ride on Atwood's oceanic rollers. Atwood performed the same service in a rough-and-tumble account of Beethoven's "Symphony No. 7."

And what about the LPO's splendid wind section? Oboist Jane Gabka was a standout at crucial moments, filling Tulane's Dixon Hall with reedy, bucolic piping in both symphonies. In Haydn's opening movement, for example, she returned repeatedly, offering a sparkling little tune in tandem with flutist Dean Miller. At times, the two wind players sounded like children singing a ditty in counterpoint to the loping sounds of the full orchestra. Like so much else in the "Military" symphony, this byplay highlighted a witty composer's delight in musical jokes.

Wit also played a big part in the Strauss piece. Even before the LPO played, one could hear chuckles from the audience as a score of additional players entered the stage, adding trombones, tuba, bass clarinet, contrabassoon and other enrichments to the modest orchestra employed by Haydn. Strauss gave every one of those instruments a workout in his 1895 piece. It translates a prankster's comeuppance into brass fanfares, funereal drum thumps, scampering clarinet riffs — and a trove of harmonic riches that later musicians, from Gershwin to Ellington, would still be mining 40 years later.

And what about the big Beethoven symphony? Maybe this one should have been called "Military." It certainly felt that way under Seibel's baton, as he put the LPO through its paces — nowhere more so than in the rattling finale. Taken at a remarkable pace, it zoomed away from the frowning, plaster-bust version of Beethoven like a dragster burning rocket fuel. And through it all, Seibel kept his band together, bringing the violins to a swooping stop with a bow to the left, and then bowing right to do the same with the cellos. That's a heck of a way to win a race.

Seibel and the LPO will try it again tonight at 8 in a reprise at Tulane University's Dixon Hall. On Sunday, Seibel will also lead the LPO in the annual "Concerto Showcase" at Roussel Hall. That 3 p.m. concert pairs the orchestra with the three medalists from last year's New Orleans International Piano Competition in concertos by Saint-Saens, Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff.

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Before videos, there were 'soundies'

WALKER, from C-1

dregs of other collections that other people sort of gave to me out of pity," Feinstein, a stellar singer-pianist and student of American popular song, said in a recent phone interview. "And among them were these little reels with these odd musical performances that turned out to be soundies."

The 1940s technology that made them possible, even viewed from an age in which music videos play on wireless telephones, seems just as magical.

Eight clips were spliced together on a reel. The reel would be changed each week. About 1,800 clips were made from 1940 to 1946, the entire soundies era.

Given the clunky analog complexity of the Panoram projection machines, it's a wonder the boxes didn't all burst into flame.

Most of the clips were produced in a hurry — one- or two-take wonders, in many cases — but Feinstein sees that as a positive.

For example, Feinstein was unfamiliar with an Ellington-band clip that plays early in the special and "was thrilled by it" at his first screening.

"Seeing the musical performance in its unvarnished fashion is very exciting," he said. "What I mean is that this is not a Hollywoodized presentation, but a quick, one-day shoot that conspired to make this clip great. It was pure music."

Soundies weren't documents of live performances, though. Like on-screen music in most Hollywood films, soundies were lip-synched to prerecorded tracks.

"Of course, the lip-synching aspect is at times cumbersome," Feinstein said. "It's at times funny, and at other times illuminating. But it's fascinating, and part of what makes the shorts compelling."

"To know that these were done



Dorothy Dandridge, ABOVE, dances like Shakira in an old film reel featured on 'Soundies: A Musical History,' hosted by Michael Feinstein, LEFT.

quickly is interesting, even though in many cases it's apparent. Every performer I know at one point or another says, 'Well, gee, I'd like to do that again,' and that's not a luxury with soundies. They spent a good deal of their budget on paying for Duke Ellington or paying for Les Paul or any number of stars. Of course, it was amortized through the hiring of a lot of obscure people. They couldn't afford to hire Frank Sinatra or Bing Crosby, but they were able to get some great stars."

Cab Calloway, to cite another example, "jumps off the screen," Feinstein continued. "He turns it on and it is there and you see why he's a star, and that's much more interesting to me than seeing him in a Hollywood feature where there's a cut and then another cut and then another cut, where you know that it was a well-rehearsed and polished performance. In

soundies, you see more the way they did it in a club."

The soundies era ended not long after World War II, less than a decade after it began.

"The novelty wore off," Feinstein said. "People could only see the same eight selections over and over again. Only eight selections were on a reel, and they really couldn't choose what they saw. They were replaced every week, but there was an entire week of the same selections, and the technology wasn't quite there to give people more choices, which would've ex-

tended the life of the soundies. The big problem was that people tired of the novelty. 'Gee, I don't want to see that one again,' or 'Gee, I didn't like that one.'"

A DVD of the full special — onto which a few full-length soundies clips have been appended as extras — will be offered as a pledge premium.

"The restoration process is one of the aspects that makes this presentation unique, in that they've spent a great deal of time and money restoring the films to pristine conditions, so people are able to see them — even better than they looked 50, 60 years ago," Feinstein said.

Take note that not all of this time travel is entirely pleasant. Some of the clips capture buffoonish minstrel stereotypes.

But even in those troubling scenes — including a performance of "Shine" by Louis Armstrong — there's obvious humanity and heart.

In an otherwise appalling jungle-set clip, Dorothy Dandridge busts moves that may remind modern audiences of Shakira.

Commentators ranging from Wynton Marsalis to Hugh Hefner put the imagery in perspective. A key point is that many of the black performers captured in soundies would've otherwise never had any other kind of visual record made of their work.

The soundies are also valuable because they captured several performers before they broke big.

One of Feinstein's favorite clips features Kay Starr, whose soundie date came when she was on the cusp of much greater stardom.

"I've always loved Kay Starr, and to see Kay Starr early in her career — she's gorgeous, and it's evident as to why she became a star," he said. "That is very exciting."

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