

Must See



Theater

It's *Curtains* for leading lady in musical mashup at Wick Theatre in Boca. **Page AT12**



Music

Cameron Carpenter to give debut performance of new organ at Kravis Center. **Page AT12**



Dance

Boca Ballet Theatre celebrates 25th anniversary. **Page AT15**



Books

Ocean Ridge resident tells how running has been her salvation through life's challenges. **Page AT17**

The Arts Paper

www.palmbeachartpaper.com

Art

Nigerian artist's works explore the 'third space'

By April W. Klimley
ArtsPaper Art Writer

It isn't often that an artist comes along who says something new in an original way. But that's just what Nigerian-born artist Njideka Akunyili Crosby has done. Her colorful mixed-media artwork makes big statements about the dualities of life, while intriguing the eye with their abstract structure and decorative rivers of transfer prints.

Each monumentally sized painting lets the viewer glimpse a special moment — usually in a domestic scene where people are meeting, talking, or just reflecting, in a setting from the country of Crosby's birth, Nigeria. It's almost as if the viewer were spying on the people — or a room waiting for people to arrive — in the same way Vermeer let us glimpse his wealthy patrons at home in the 17th century.

The Norton Museum is offering an exceptional opportunity to see the first survey exhibition of Crosby's work. Titled *I Refuse to Be Invisible*, this exhibition features 16 large-scale, early and recent mixed-media works made up of painted and collaged elements on paper. It is a major achievement for Cheryl Brutvan, the Norton's curator of contemporary art,



5 Umezebi Street, New Haven, Enugu (2012), by Njideka Akunyili Crosby. This painting is part of an exhibit of Crosby's work at the Norton Museum of Art. **Njideka Akunyili Crosby**

who identified this 33-year-old rising star and brought her to West Palm Beach. Crosby is the youngest artist to receive the Norton's Recognition of Art by Women (RAW) award that began in 2011 and was made possible by the Leonard and Sophie Davis/MLDauray Arts Initiative. The Crosby exhibit runs through April 24.

The depth inherent in Crosby's work is immediately

apparent in *Nwantinti* (2012), a painting named after a love song from Crosby's youth. You will find the painting on the left wall as you walk into the exhibition. It shows a man sprawled out on his back on a bed, relaxing, with his head in a woman's lap. We are watching one of those special, private moments Vermeer captured so many centuries ago. Everything is silent. The

canvas is almost entirely red and black except for the blue in the transfers — the small pieces of fabric and paper that ripple through the painting almost like a river toward the back of the room. It's actually a self-portrait of Crosby and her husband, Justin Crosby, who is white, and expresses the duality Crosby strives to

See **CROSBY** on page AT10

Music

Jazz piano prodigy plays beyond his years, peers

By Bill Meredith
ArtsPaper Music Writer



Joey Alexander will appear at Festival of the Arts Boca. **Photo provided**

Most people who watched the venerable CBS program *60 Minutes* on Jan. 3 probably weren't blind, and didn't tune in right in the middle of a playing segment by jazz pianist Joey Alexander.

But if those possibilities aligned, anyone listening would've heard a musician playing with the creativity, dexterity and improvisational

skills of jazz keyboard legends from Art Tatum and Thelonious Monk to Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock.

That alone makes Joey — who performs March 11 as part of the Festival of the Arts Boca — special, but why was he featured and interviewed for the program by Anderson Cooper? Primarily because he's only 12 years old. He's also shown wowing the crowd in 2014 at Jazz at Lincoln Center's annual gala in New York City

at age 10.

If you're rolling your eyes, you probably didn't see this segment, and/or you've figuratively heard this tune before. Prodigies come and go in all musical genres, and in jazz, they tend to be pianists. Two who've emerged in the 21st century are 29-year-old, Soviet-born Eldar Djangirov, who started performing in the United States at age 10;

See **PIANIST** on page AT11



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Joey Alexander, just 12 years old, typically gets standing ovations for his performances. Photo provided

PIANIST

Continued from page 9

released his first CD in 2001, and earned a 2009 Album of the Year nod in *Jazziz* for his *Virtue* CD; and 23-year-old American Matt Savage, an autistic whiz who started his recording career before age 10, and whose latest effort is *It's My Request: Live at Bar Request*.

There's a major difference, though, between these jazz musicians and the Indonesian Alexander, who was born on the island of Bali. Both Djangirov and Savage had to be indoctrinated into improvisation, the lifeblood of the genre, following early studies of the more exacting forms of classical music.

Joey studied neither jazz nor classical music. As detailed on *60 Minutes*, parents Denny and Fara Alexander gave up on his brief classical studies once they realized his gift for improvisation.

"When I'm on stage, I never plan, you know, I'm going to do this," he told Cooper. "But of course, you have a concept of what you're going to do."

"So every time — it might be different?" Cooper asked. "It sounds really hard."

"It is kind of hard," he replied.

Classical and jazz are thus more demanding than forms of popular music. But Joey already knows how to keep things in perspective.

"You have to work really hard," he says. "But also have fun performing; that's the most important thing."

Joey's parents allowed the phenom to start performing live in Bali when he was 6 years old. The closest he came to jazz lessons came at age 8, when prominent Indonesian pianist and educator Indra Lesmana allowed him to repeatedly sit next to him at the piano bench at his own Jakarta nightclub.

"He was very gifted," Lesmana says, "and clearly had a huge potential to become a great musician."

Those abilities made Joey the youngest performer ever at the 2015 Newport Jazz Festival. He also released his debut CD, *My Favorite Things*, on the Harlem-based Motema label last year. It received two Grammy nominations, one for Best Jazz Instrumental Album and one for Best Improvised Jazz Solo for Joey's performance on John

IF YOU GO

The **Joey Alexander Trio** will perform at 7:30 p.m. March 11 at Mizner Park Amphitheater, 590 Plaza Real, Boca Raton.

Tickets: \$15-\$100

Info: festivaloftheartsboca.org

Coltrane's *Giant Steps*. Among several standards including the title track, there's even an original, *Ma Blues*, written by Joey at the ripe old age of 10.

Yet prodigies are usually judged by their technique and tone, if not their emotional heft, or lack thereof. And with Joey, that technique and tone get displayed through flurries of notes that dazzle the listener. So some critics cite him as a prospective cautionary tale.

"He's not a fully formed musician yet," cautions Jason Olaine, who produced *My Favorite Things*. "We don't know who he's going to turn out to be."

It's possible that he might turn out to be bored because his natural abilities make things too easy, and/or that the public gets bored if, at age 22, he's still a standout pianist but no longer a prodigy.

The 2014 Jazz at Lincoln Center performance, Joey's U.S. debut, was orchestrated by trumpeter and JALC artistic director Wynton Marsalis — perhaps the world's best-known jazz musician and one not prone to praise of other veteran musicians, let alone child performers.

"I've never heard anyone who could play like him," Marsalis says. "And no has heard a person who could play like him. Oh man, somebody 12 playing like that. Why? We don't — we don't know why."

Joey didn't even break a sweat while performing last month at the Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. And though he didn't win an award, he lost to jazz giants in guitarist John Scofield and bassist Christian McBride. He was also, of course, the youngest nominee.

Gary Walker, artistic director at New York City jazz radio station WBGO, also testified on *60 Minutes*.

"At any age, his language is pretty special," Walker says. "But at the age of 12, you almost think, 'You know, I might even believe in reincarnation.'"

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Paws Up for Pets

WWII vet helps others get service dogs

Meet Irwin Stovroff, an energetic 93-year-old from Boca Raton. He regards himself as “the luckiest person there is.” Let’s add remarkable and inspiring.

This decorated World War II fighter pilot and ex-POW built a successful furniture business career and is now known as the guy who gets things done for military veterans. When he retired at 75, he quickly discovered that the leisure life of playing cards, golf or tennis just wasn’t for him.

Instead, he launched his second career — assisting veterans with their pension and medical-care paperwork and, for the past six years, overseeing an organization called Vets Helping Heroes.

This nonprofit group raises money to sponsor the training of assistance dogs for military veterans and active-duty military personnel contending with physical disabilities and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Since 2008, his group has raised more than \$6 million and trained more than 200 dogs that fall into six categories of assistance to veterans: guide dogs for the blind; hearing dogs; service dogs for people with physical limitations; skilled companion dogs for people with cognitive disabilities; combat stress relief dogs; and facility therapy dogs who visit Veterans Affairs hospitals and hospices.

But let’s go back nearly 72 years ago — Aug. 13, 1944 — when Stovroff was a second lieutenant in the air force. On that date, he woke up before dawn and climbed into a B-52 bomber to fly behind enemy lines on what was to be his 35th and final mission. He got shot down over France and, being Jewish, quickly ditched his dog tags before being captured by the Nazis.

“I was one day from going home,” he recalls. “Everyone in our squadron had our bags packed to go home and we were envisioning parades. Instead, we ended up in a prison camp.”

He spent the next year as a POW, fighting fatigue and starvation before being freed by the Russians in May 1945. His 5-foot, 10-inch frame had shriveled to a mere 85 pounds by his first day of freedom.

Freedom. It is a word Stovroff doesn’t take lightly. It will be the centerpiece of his salute-worthy talk, aptly titled, “An Extraordinary Life Gone to the Dogs,” set for March 6 at the 10th annual Festival of the Arts Boca, held at the Cultural Arts Center.

“My message is simple: Freedom isn’t free,” says Stovroff. “Somebody has paid a price for it and we are the beneficiaries. I will share my story and explain why I am what I am today.”

Stovroff tirelessly delivers talks and raises money and awareness for his cause: to help



Irwin Stovroff plays with his golden retriever, Cash. Photo provided by Maria Teresa Creations

If You Go

Irwin Stovroff’s talk, ‘An Extraordinary Life Gone to the Dogs,’ is scheduled for 4 p.m. March 6, at the Boca Raton Cultural Arts Center.

For details on how you can attend his talk as well as the other presentations planned at the 10th annual Festival of the Arts Boca event, call 368-8445 or the box office at 866-571-2787 or email info@festivaloftheartsboca.org.

veterans enjoy enhanced lives thanks to being partnered with these talented dogs.

“For as long as I’m able, I will do everything I can to help these veterans and work to get them specially trained dogs who can help them live their lives to the fullest,” says Stovroff.

At a recent talk given in Sarasota, which helped raise more than \$100,000 for Vets Helping Heroes, Stovroff was pleasantly surprised to discover who was in the audience.

“It was a gal named Louise who I had not seen since we were classmates at my grammar school in Buffalo, New York,” he said. “Can you imagine?”

Stovroff also champions the cause for the Southeastern Guide Dog Program.

“This is an outstanding organization that breeds and trains purebreds to be guide dogs and dogs for those with PTSD,” says Stovroff. “I promised them that for every dollar someone writes in, I would agree to double it. I gave

them \$120,000 — worth every penny.”

He shares his home with a pair of tail-wagging companions: Jenny, a 15-year-old corgi; and Cash, an 8-year-old golden retriever. Both earn their stripes in bringing joy to all they meet.

“Jenny is smart and she used to go with me to visit residents at senior citizen homes and hospitals, where she would greet everyone while wearing a specially made bomber jacket,” says Stovroff. “Cash is a service dog who is with me all the time. I am blessed to have both of them.”

Stovroff was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross from Sen. John McCain in 2000, 56 years after his final flying mission. His life is also documented in a book authored by L.A. Weiser, *An Extraordinary Life Gone to the Dogs*.

“Yes, I do believe I am the luckiest person there is,” he states for a second time.

And, for the rest of us, we are lucky to have Irwin Stovroff around to help those in need.

To learn more about Stovroff as well as the Vets Helping Heroes organization, visit www.vetshelpingheroes.org.

Arden Moore, founder of www.FourLeggedLife.com, is an animal behavior consultant, editor, author, speaker and master certified pet first aid instructor. Each week, she

hosts the popular *Oh Behave!* show on www.PetLifeRadio.com. Learn more by visiting www.fourleggedlife.com.



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