

Iowa Renaissance man

Exceptionally gifted artist takes it all on himself.

By John Busbee

Paul Micich reflects an enviable, enigmatic complexity of talents and is an Iowa treasure, with an established reputation as both musician and visual artist. Exceptionally gifted in both disciplines, he is perhaps most visible for his virtuosity on the Electric Valve Instrument (EVI).

His love of musical expression keeps his band, World Port, playing on a regular basis, performing at events like the Des Moines Art Festival, Des Moines Farmers' Market, Two Rivers Art Festival, Riverssance (Davenport), Art in the Park (Clinton), the Covered Bridge Festival (Winterset), and a variety of special events and private parties. Trained in the trumpet at Drake University, he also plays the flute and worked for several years playing a wide range of gigs — R&B, big band, classical. Fifteen years ago, while living in Nashville, he discovered the “fully expressive” instrument he would master as no one else has — the EVI electric horn. He had found his “musical voice.” A complex, hand-held synthesizer with an incredible range of musicality and moods, the EVI electric horn is the lyrical heart of World Port's World View Music, with its rhythmic and mesmerizing sound.

Although always a musician, he didn't discover he could draw more than stick figures until after age 30 when he was inspired by the book “Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain” (1989, Betty Edwards). Ideas from this book even inspired his music.

The late-blooming visual artist has achieved much success in this arena, too. He illustrated the classic children's story, “The Littlest Angel” by Charles Tazewell, in a 1991 Ideals Children's Books edition that has sold more than 1 million copies.



One of his most recent projects is the new Greenwood School mural, a work that evokes feelings of Grant Wood's and Edward Hopper's works. He has added bold, colorful limited edition prints to his artistic repertoire, too. Coming soon to the Iowa Hall of Pride is a collaboration with David Dahlquist of Dahlquist Clay Works. Micich created the design and drawings, from which Dahlquist will create a 25-foot, three-dimensional mural in relief.

Micich wrote his own original music and started with two CDs, “Prairies” and “Stacking Stones,” with guitarist Mitch Espe. He continued working with Rich Beachler, and has now worked several years with Dan Nicholson, most often as a duo. World Port can expand up to a six-piece band, and Micich savors those times. “Make no mistake,” he explains. “Once you step up on the platform with other musicians, it's a total collaboration.”

With no media conglomerate or 1,200 stations playing his songs, his self-promotion of his CDs during performances and through select retail outlets (Tandem Brick Gallery on Ingersoll Avenue, Des Moines) has provided a gratification for which he's grateful. “When someone hears us live and walks up to put down \$15 for a CD,” shares Micich, “I know the music has touched them.” He is looking forward to releasing two new CDs this fall. He has sold thousands of CDs, and, once you've heard World Port, you will understand why.

Micich believes the art produced in Iowa is a huge asset to the state. “It's vigorous, muscular and diverse,” he enthusiastically claims. “I love what I see and hear from Iowa visual artists and musicians.” He continues by simply stating, “The arts are a vital part of our culture and economy.” He hopes Iowa's arts organizations continue to step up and expand the venues that make that social and cultural interface possible. With artistic leaders like Paul Micich, that most certainly will happen.

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