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ON THE COVER

1. Richard Prior, Music Director and Conductor, LaGrange Symphony Orchestra
2. Annie Greene, Visual Artist, Retired Art Educator
3. David Arnold, Videographer, GPS Studios
4. Kim Barber Knoll, Actress, Professor of Theatre Arts, LaGrange College
5. Lisa Arnold, Videographer, GPS Studios
6. Annie Pauley, Singer/Actress
7. Sugar Plum - Holly Lord, Senior Company Dancer with Lafayette Ballet Company
8. Nutcracker - Thomas Prater, Senior Member of Lafayette Theater Academy
9. Mary Stewart, Hogansville Hummingbird Festival
10. Bill Nixon, Managing Artistic Director, New Horizon Community Theatre
11. Carol Cain, Storyteller, Retired Drama Educator
12. John Lawrence, Photographer, Fuller E. Callaway Professor of Art & Design, LaGrange College
13. Bill Stankiewicz, Hogansville Hummingbird Festival, Mayor of Hogansville

Photo by Lee Cathey; Kim Barber Knoll – Stylist; John Lawrence – Creative Consultant; Luke Foco – Technical Director; Justin Bowen – Technical Assistant

CONTENTS

4 | A Letter from the President
6 | The Creative Economy
   Fulfilling Dreams, Creating Opportunities
10 | Local Stars Shine Bright
16 | Small Business Development
   A Time to Prepare
18 | Holden On
19 | Movies in Georgia
20 | Resolve to be Healthy
   9 Tips for Getting Fit in 2016
22 | Mystery Traveler
   The Arts Write New Chapters in Troup County
24 | Countdown to Annual Parade
   It’s a Star Spangled Christmas
28 | The Hearts of Three Men
   The Art of Lamar Dodd
32 | Movers, Shakers, Risk-Takers
35 | Business Spotlight
   Poplar Creek
36 | Non-Profit Spotlight
   CASA of Troup County, Inc.
38 | Spotlight on West Point
   New Horizon Reaches for the Stars
40 | Spotlight on Hogansville
   Dreams Do Come True
42 | Chamber Events
44 | Finance
   The ABCs of EMVs
46 | HYPE
48 | Calendar of Events
From Hogansville to West Point, and points in between, the Creative Economy, which includes several different components, is having a positive and lasting impact on Troup County.

For more than a decade, the concept of Creative Economy has been bandied about by business leaders, scholars and others. According to an August 2013 report entitled *America’s Creative Economy, a Study of Recent Conceptions, Definitions, and Approaches to Measurement across the USA*, the idea of a Creative Economy and its importance first gained attention in the United States with the publication of the 2002 book, *The Rise of the Creative Class* by author Richard Florida.

The report, produced by The Creative Economy Coalition (CEC), a Working Group of the National Creativity Network, consists of 27 different study documents, from which there seems to be consensus emerging around the idea that the Creative Economy involves both individuals and organizations who engage in activities that add value to society in one or more ways. 1

Troup County is fortunate to have a wide range of contributors to the Creative Economy. No less than five professional performing or visual arts organizations, with combined annual operating budgets that exceed $1 million, provide a range of cultural and educational experiences that have helped our community to become the hub for cultural arts in West Georgia.

In West Point, New Horizon Community Theatre stands as an example of community involvement and commitment. You can read more about Bill Nixon and his organization on page 34 of this issue.

Under the guidance of Executive Director Jennifer Shook, Lafayette Society for the Performing Arts (LSPA), presents through its performance groups - Lafayette Theatre Company, Lafayette Ballet Company, Lafayette Dance Academy, and Young Singers of West Georgia – a variety of live theater, ballet and dance and choral programs with talent of all ages.

The Azalea Storytelling Festival, another LSPA organization, presents an incredible array of nationally-known storytellers during its three day run each March, drawing visitors from all over the country. Celebrating 20 years in 2016, the Festival has recently added a community event, “Stories in the Gardens at Hills & Dales” to their annual performance calendar.
Since its inception in 1981, LSPA has strived to be one of west central Georgia’s most instrumental organizations for promoting cultural awareness, artistic expression, and appreciation for the performing arts. Through participating in LSPA’s multiple endeavors, artists and audiences alike collaborate to realize meaningful experiences through live productions meant to energize the individual imagination and to enrich the community as a whole.

Now in its 26th season, the LaGrange Symphony Orchestra has evolved from a community orchestra launched by the vision of local college professors and community leaders to an important regional orchestra performing in Callaway Auditorium, an acoustically excellent hall on the campus of LaGrange College. Led by Music Director and Conductor Dr. Richard Prior, the LaGrange Symphony Orchestra consists of a core group of approximately 50 professional musicians that present five subscription concerts per season.

Award-winning conductor and acclaimed composer, Dr. Prior holds the Edward Goodwin Scruggs Conducting Chair at Emory University. Now in his first season with the LSO, Prior has led performances with members of the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Houston Symphony, Montreal Symphony and Minnesota Orchestra.

The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Music Director Robert Spano commissioned “…of shadow and light…” (incantations for orchestra) which premiered in October, 2013. The piece identified Prior as “perhaps the most gifted of the Atlanta composers” citing his mastery of orchestration, lyricism and musical drama.

Choral music is also a major component of the local Creative Economy. Founded in 2005, The Choral Society of West Georgia consists of the LaGrange Civic Chorale (mixed voices) and Bel Canto LaGrange, A Women’s Vocal ensemble. Elizabeth (Bettie) W. Biggs is the founder and artistic director of the Choral Society of West Georgia. A native of Charlotte, North Carolina, she taught for twenty-eight years as a music educator in the Troup Country School System. She leads the groups in a series of performances each season.

The Sons of Lafayette, under the leadership of Artistic Director R. Wayne Woodson, is a male choir that presents multiple concerts per season.

Live music is also available at Pure Life Studios, a locally-owned performance space that attracts national recording artists and emerging local talent. Owner Maggie McDonald has recently celebrated the first anniversary of Pure Life and has plans to bring a wider array of national acts to her quaint location at 206 Clark Street in LaGrange.

Sweetland Amphitheatre, opening in spring of 2016, is located in downtown LaGrange and will be the location for an annual concert series featuring prominent national acts. With seating for 2,200 and state-of-the-art production capabilities, this facility will become a must-see attraction for locals and tourists alike.

Off stage, there is an equally impressive roster of participating organizations providing a glance into the worlds of photography, sculpture, painting, pottery and more.

In Hogansville, the annual Hummingbird Festival hosts more than 200 vendors offering the finest in artisan crafts, a wide variety of food and games and a play area for children. Selected once again as a Top 20 Event for the month of October by the Southeast Tourism Society, the festival draws more than 15,000 visitors from across the southeast. Led by the husband and wife team of Bill Stankiewicz and Mary Stewart, the Hummingbird Festival generates a substantial contribution annually for the Hogansville Charitable Trust.

For more than 50 years, visual arts have played a prominent role in the evolving arts community. Chattahoochee Valley Art Association, the artistic foundation of the LaGrange Art Museum, was created in 1963 by a group of local artists and art patrons as a venue for showcasing the work of local area artists. The permanent collection...
began when a hometown boy of national prominence, Lamar Dodd, donated his painting entitled “Solitude.”

Executive Director Karen Briggs, and her staff at LaGrange Art Museum (LAM), provide the region with a rotating series of exhibits. Relying on its extensive permanent collection and touring exhibits, LAM covers the spectrum of art in all media. Whether it’s a collection of photography of prominent Hollywood stars or a study of Norman Rockwell works, visitors to the museum are challenged and inspired by their experiences.

Community spirit has played a prominent role in the Museum’s history. In conjunction with the Lamar Dodd Arts Center at LaGrange College, the museum co-sponsors the LaGrange National Biennial, a nationally juried exhibition held in both venues.

Opened in the spring of 2015, the Center for Creative Learning (CCL) at the LaGrange Art Museum has created space for an expansion of the educational programs offered for students of all ages by the museum. The CCL also provides creative and exhibit space for its long-time partner, the Visual Artists Alliance of LaGrange.

Visitors to The Cochran Gallery, located on the square in downtown LaGrange, often have the chance to meet Wes and Missy Cochran. The Cochrans have devoted their lives to supporting the arts, artists, and collecting. Their Cochran Collection, which travels across the country, offers a wide sampling of Andy Warhol prints, dating from 1968 through his last series done in 1986, just before his death the following year.

The Collection documents some of the most compelling American art executed in the 20th Century. Works by most of the noted and recognized artists (Rosenquist, Johns, Blackburn, Barnet, Gilliam, Picasso and many others) are represented here.

They are perhaps most proud of their collection of African-American Works on Paper. This is not an ordinary collection, and it is duplicated nowhere. This exhibition grew out of their love and their imaginative dream. They wanted to create a collection of prints reflective of African-Americans which could primarily be displayed as an artistic, educational, and cultural presentation.

The aforementioned Lamar Dodd Arts Center and Legacy Museum on Main also host permanent displays and rotating exhibits for all to enjoy. You can read more about LaGrange native Lamar Dodd, and his impact on the medical community, on page 26 in this publication.

In Troup County, the variety of creative experiences is broad and deep for a community this size. Professional performances are not the only focus of these organizations. There is a very strong focus placed on the education component as well. Each of the major arts organizations offer educational outreach programs to help introduce their respective disciplines to new audiences and spark the interest in young people who then go on to pursue their dreams. Our community has produced a number of nationally-known performers, some of whom you can read about on page 10.

The Creative Economy does not exist solely of arts organizations or experiences. In Troup County, Kimble’s Food by Design is just one example of how successful businesses are developing new product lines to diversify their income streams and provide opportunity for their employees.

From its humble beginnings in the basement of a paint store at Lee’s Crossing to a multi-faceted food service provider employing more than 100, Kimble’s Food has maintained one constant theme – innovation. If you have lived in Troup County for very long, chances are you have eaten food prepared by Kimble’s Food by Design.

The Ole School Corn Flake Chewy is the latest innovation to fall under the Kimble’s Food umbrella. Kimble’s entrepreneurial and innovative spirit naturally led to the creation of the candy. Often people ask, “How did you come up with the idea?” The answer is simple. It was a solution to a problem.

Originally made in small batches and sold only to Kimble’s customers, investments in technology and equipment have allowed Kimble’s to produce up to 150,000 pieces of candy per week from their production facility, a.k.a. Candy Factory.

These same
enhanced production techniques have also made it possible to expand
distribution of the candy from within a small radius of Troup County
to around the southeastern U.S. Currently being sold to more than 40
distributors in 9 states, Kimble’s is on the verge of securing a contract with
H.T. Hackney, one of the largest convenience store distributors in the nation,
that will place the product in 28 distribution hubs across America.

Innovation, creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit, each of these traits
certainly apply to Kimble Carter and his team at Kimble’s Food by Design and
is proof that the Creative Economy is more than a catch phrase used to define
the arts.

The existence of a thriving Creative Economy, due in part to having a vibrant
arts community, is often cited as one of the top 10 factors people consider
when looking to relocate. In a December 2013 interview with consulting
giant McKinsey & Company, Richard Florida discussed among other topics
the changing world of economic development. Florida - author of “Who’s
Your City” and “Rise of the Creative Class” - explained “Economic development
used to be, ‘I want to collect company headquarters. I want to bribe company
factories to come.’ Companies are important, but you have to look at people.
And that’s one of the big themes that came through [in my article]. People are
an economic asset, and for economic development we not only attract and
recruit companies, we attract and recruit people.”

All of the organizations discussed in this story contribute to the Creative
Economy in Troup County and, in turn, the state of Georgia. The creative
industries in Georgia represent a combined $29 billion in revenue, including
200,000 employees earning $8 billion in wages. The creative industries
represent five percent of all employment and six percent of all business revenue
in the state according to a 2012 study entitled “Creative Industries in the
South.”

Georgia’s Creative Economy not only contributes to the state’s bottom line,
but also draws millions of tourists each year, adds significantly to the quality
of life and vitality of every community, and represents the bulk of Georgia’s
rich cultural heritage and identity. In 2013, tourism alone in Troup County
generated $151.74 million in direct tourist spending, supported 1,160 jobs
and generated $4.33 million in local tax revenues.

Within an ever-changing marketplace, the space occupied by the Creative
Economy and/or creative industries, has continued to grow. Greater
availability of information and easier access to creative experiences, both of
which have been fueled by the digital revolution, has only heightened the
realization by many that there is a great need to diversify and explore new
avenues in which to make a living.

Opportunity is found in many different areas, and personal dreams –
consisting of imagination and ideas – need only the right channels through
which one can express their creativity. In Troup County, the fields are rich,
fertile and awaiting the next seed of innovation that will help transform the
lives of our neighbors and continue the growth of our Creative Economy.

1 Reproduced with permission from America’s Creative Economy: A Study of Recent Conceptions,
Definitions, and Approaches to Measurement across the USA. A Report from the Creative Economy
Coalition (CEC), a Working Group of the National Creativity Network, Christine Harris, Margaret
Collins, and Dennis Cheek. Oklahoma City, OK: National Creativity Network in collaboration with
Creative Alliance Milwaukee, August, 2013, pp. 1 – 7.”
Given Sharp, a recent LaGrange High School grad, got bitten by the acting bug at a very young age. After appearing in several TV and film roles, she has now amassed quite an impressive résumé. She has also honed her skills appearing in community theater. She has appeared in shows at New Horizon in West Point, Newnan Community Theatre, and South Side Theatre Guild in Fairburn where she won a Metro Atlanta Theatre Award for her portrayal of Scout in “To Kill a Mockingbird.” She also got rave reviews from another local, Tamlin Hall, for her performance in his movie “Holden On.”

Given says she is thankful for Troup County’s support for the arts. At LaGrange High, Given was very active in the school’s drama department under the direction of John Riggs. Prior to that, she attended West Side Magnet School for the Arts with Carol Cain and participated in West Georgia Children’s Theatre with Erica Nashan.

How did you get started in this very difficult business?
“|Began acting on-camera when I was ten. I played myself in the indie mockumentary, ‘Paper Heart.’ The film premiered at The Sundance Film Festival in 2009, was nominated for a Grand Jury Award and won the Waldo Salt Award for best screenwriting. It was later picked up and distributed by Overture Films.”

And then what happened?
“I continued to act in short films ‘A Peacock Feathered Blue’ and ‘Je’ Taime.’ Then I appeared in a national commercial for Ryan’s Restaurants and also played the character of April in ION Television’s ‘Mandie and the Forgotten Christmas.’ Most recently, I co-starred in the season premiere of ‘The Vampire Diaries,’ on the CW Network.”

What advice would you give to other aspiring actors?
“The best advice I could give is to get a good agent, enroll in an on-going acting class and perform as much as possible. There are several good agencies and acting schools in Atlanta, (do your homework when choosing one). I am represented by Houghton Talent and I study acting at The Company Acting Studio. While you’re waiting to get represented, look on reputable casting sites such as The Southern Casting Call to find indie films and sign up for the numerous extra jobs available now in Georgia. Many times, there is little or no pay for these jobs, but the on-camera experience and networking opportunities are invaluable.”

Given currently plays the principal character of “Sam” in the on-going web series/live show, “KidStuf,” at www.kidstuf.com. She will also co-star in an upcoming episode of “Game of Silence,” premiering mid-season on NBC. For more information about Given, please visit: www.imdb.me/givensharp.
Ashleigh Smith

Music is in Ashleigh Smith’s DNA. Her father, Dr. Ed Smith, is a life-long educator who was a high school band director before moving into school system administration. Her grandfather was a jazz saxophone player, and her grandmother was a classical pianist. Her siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins are all musical. When she was growing up in LaGrange, she never thought she would one day grow up to be an award-winning jazz singer, whose style has been described as “sultry, soulful and sincere.” Last year, the 25-year-old former Miss Troup County took top honors in the Sarah Vaughan International Vocal Jazz Competition, billed as the “search for the world’s next great female jazz singer.”

You started out majoring in classical music, but switched to jazz. How did that happen?
“I went to Columbus State University after graduating from LaGrange High to major in classical music, but a professor encouraged me to attend a summer jazz workshop at the University of North Texas in Denton, TX. I had never been around live jazz, and the workshop was my first thrust into jazz education. I had figured out things like ‘scatting’ on my own, but I really didn’t know what I was doing.

“I was so inspired by the workshop that within a matter of weeks, I had enrolled at UNT as a full time student. UNT is the number one school for jazz. I knew I needed to be there if I really wanted to perform professionally.”

How has winning the Sarah Vaughan Vocal Jazz competition helped your career?
“I came in second place in 2012 at the Sarah Vaughan Competition in New Jersey, but in 2014 I decided to give it another try. It’s known in the industry as the ‘SASSY Award,’ and it’s the only jazz vocal competition of its kind. Along with a cash award, it also gave me the opportunity to record and release an album. I hope to finish the album in November; then I would like to do an international tour.”

You’ve already had the chance to sing across the globe.
“I’ve performed in Paris, London, South Africa, Northern Ireland and all across the U.S. And I’ve been very fortunate to share the stage with the world-renowned vocal jazz group The Manhattan Transfer and Jon Hendricks during the Kennedy Center’s ‘Swing, Swing, Swing’ concert series. nd recently, I had the opportunity to do background studio work for Grammy award winning artist Chrisette Michele.”

How did growing up in LaGrange influence your life?
“I can’t imagine growing up anywhere else. I flourished in a close-knit, loving community that invested in kids. I always felt accountable because you know everyone and everyone knows you. That was the best part of growing up in LaGrange.

“Oh, of course, I’d love to win a Grammy someday, but what I really want to do is start a school for the arts in an economically disadvantaged area. The arts are so important, and they are disappearing from our schools. I want to be able to give back what others gave to me.”
Elijah Kelley decided to follow the Yellow Brick Road to Hollywood as soon as he graduated from Troup High School, and it has led him straight to Oz. The 29-year-old is currently in rehearsals for the role of Scarecrow in NBC’s live production of “The Wiz” set to air in December.

How did he get started?
Kelley grew up in LaGrange singing and performing in a gospel band and even appeared in several Coca-Cola commercials. As soon as he graduated from high school, he and his family set off for Los Angeles so that he could pursue an acting career. It didn’t take long for him to get noticed.

What were his first roles in Hollywood?
Elijah had several minor TV and film roles before his breakout performance playing Seaweed J. Stubbs in the 2007 production of “Hairspray” with Queen Latifah and John Travolta. For the role, he received a Young Hollywood Award for One to Watch and was nominated for a Critics Choice Award.

Who are some of his co-stars?
In 2012, Elijah had another significant movie role when he played Samuel “Joker” George, one of the Tuskegee airmen, in “Red Tails.” Then in 2013, he appeared with an all-star cast in “The Butler.” The movie, starring Forest Whitaker as Cecil Gaines, is based loosely on the life of Eugene Allen who was an eyewitness to many historic events of the 20th century during his 34-year tenure as a butler in the White House. Kelley played Gaines’ younger son Charlie in the movie which also starred Oprah Winfrey, Cuba Gooding, Jr. and Robin Williams.

What’s next?
Elijah is currently preparing for one of his most challenging roles in the NBC production of “The Wiz Live.” Kelley will play the Scarecrow, the first of the three friends to meet Dorothy, who will be played by Shanice Williams. The role marks a reunion between Kelley and his “Hairspray” co-star Queen Latifah who stars as the Wiz. Other notables include Mary J. Blige as the Wicked Witch of the West, David Alan Grier as the Cowardly Lion and Ne-Yo who will play the Tin Man.

“The Wiz Live!” airs Thursday, December 3, at 8 p.m. on NBC.
Fred Newman

Fred Newman, who spent his childhood in LaGrange, is the perfect example of someone who found a way to make a living by doing what he loved, making sounds with his mouth. Degrees from the University of Georgia and Harvard may (or may not) have helped him ultimately in his careers which include carpet salesman, a stint at Newsweek, stand-up comedy, and now the sound effects guy for “A Prairie Home Companion.”

He also spent time as a puppeteer with Jim Henson, hosted many shows for Nickelodeon and Disney, including the New Mickey Mouse Club. He created voices, music, and sound effects for the long-running Nickelodeon and Disney cartoon series “Doug” and along the way won numerous awards. He can also be seen and heard on the PBS reading show “Between the Lions.”

At cocktail parties, what do you tell people you do for a living?
“I get paid, now, to do what I used to do behind the backs of LaGrange teachers. I honk for a living. At a cocktail party if I were to actually say that I’m an actor, writer, sound designer, and radio clown, folks would say ‘good for you’ and leave to freshen up their drink.”

Is there a sound that you haven’t mastered?
“I don’t honestly think I’ve mastered any sound – on ‘A Prairie Home Companion,’ I’m really doing little caricatures of sounds, on the fly. The sounds I do are mouth-made, improvised, and come from the old, folk art of storytelling, that blend of Scots/Irish/African storytelling that created the rhythm and culture of the South. The very best stories I ever heard were told by old black guys around Troup County. They really taught me everything I know. They taught me to listen. And that’s the secret. Listening. If you were lucky enough to hear one of those guys unwind a good Middle Georgia Bruh Rabbit yarn with sound and voices, you never forgot it.”

What’s the most recent sound you learned?
“The sound of a chiropractor giving a spinal adjustment. Moments before a live episode of ‘Guy Noir’ on ‘A Prairie
Home Companion,’ Garrison Keillor, the host, mentioned, that his character would be going to a chiropractor. I knew what that meant. I'd have to invent something. I grabbed my half-filled, plastic water bottle, wrapped a terry cloth hand towel around it, and when Garrison described the chiropractor slowly twisting Guy Noir’s back, vertebrae popping, I squeezed the bottle – never having heard what it would sound like, close-miked and muffled by the towel. And, in what probably was the best single reaction I've ever heard from an audience, the entire crowd cooed an audible ‘ooooh’ and noticeably twisted in their seats. Bingo. They had felt the spinal adjustment, and it hurt-good.”

Who is your idol?
“When I was a kid my first imaginary friend was, no joke, Thomas Jefferson. But that's just creepy. He rode with me in my wagon. I don't think I've ever had an idol – just one person who I looked up to for inspiration. Maybe I'm an idol sponge – I admire so many people – I admire action and character and people who change the way I think about something. But no one person.”

Are you ever serious?
“I gave up the concept of adulthood – of growing up and getting serious – a long time ago. When my father, John Newman – a businessman and upright Elder of the First Presbyterian Church, was at the end of his life, nearly 65 years old, I asked him what surprised him most about his life, and he said ‘I still feel like I’m 12 years old inside.’ And it hit me like a bag of hammers: We don't grow up, we grow around the kid inside. I try my best to stay open, curious and playful at all times. Growing up is just being responsible, not serious.”

Hidden talents?
“Perhaps my greatest talent is my ability, with a cloth napkin, to snap just the ember off a lit cigarette held in someone's mouth. I've done it a few times on stage, but otherwise found no real use for it or way to monetize the gesture. It’s just a God-given gift, and I take it as such. And, every once in a while, I can still do a pretty good impression of Connie Francis singing ‘Where the Boys Are.’”

Who's your favorite football team (and we're assuming it's an SEC team)?
“I live in fear that someone will discover that I don't really follow sports. I watch playoffs and the occasional game, baseball more than football. But, I was such a loner kid, and even now, teams and rosters and rankings lose me very quickly. I do have soft spot for UGA. I spent four great years there, and it's only gotten better and better as a school.”

What's your favorite Southern dish?
“Butter beans, hands down. Real Southern butter beans and iced tea. Ain't nothing better. And you can't get either of them up North. (I once talked a waiter in New York into brewing some tea and pouring it over ice for me. He did. And he served it to me in a little, stemmed wine glass.)”

What do you miss about living in the South?
“Butter beans and iced tea.”

You and your sister, Sue Landa, are both exceptionally creative. What did your parents do to foster this when you were young?
“Thanks for calling it creative. I think we're all a little nuts. But, to me that's not necessarily a bad thing. Sue, my brother Bob, and I were lucky to have grown up on the cusp of the Sixties, when kids still roamed neighborhoods like coyotes. We were allowed to be unwatched and unsupervised – no one arranged playdates. We had relatives all around us. We built tree houses and played wiffle ball with made-up rules. Bikes became horses or get away cars. We were allowed to break arms, throw rocks, fall and fail. And TV had not yet told us how were supposed to act or imagine. We just played. As to my parents – they never once said 'no' to any hair-brained idea I had. They just said, 'Take it outside…’ That's about as good as it gets.”
What’s on your plate now?
“I’m always juggling projects. In addition to traveling weekly with ‘A Prairie Home Companion,’ I lecture a bit and perform my little shows around the country. I’ve written and perform several stories that I describe as a mash up of B’ruh Rabbit storytelling and quantum physics. And I’m pulling together a non-fiction book about new discoveries in the sociology and anthropology of sound. I write short stories all the time. And I design sound for museum displays and the odd film and invent new musical instruments. And, every day, I make something with my hands.”

What was the moment you felt like “I have finally made it” in show business?
“When I entered my parent’s house through their television set. For the first time, my mother and father relaxed and thought maybe I’d be ok, even being odd and all. And, I realized there was no such thing as failing – it’s called learning. And it’s lifelong. And I forgot everything I was taught growing up about obeying rules and the importance of what other people thought. And I started working only with people I really liked.”

Who was most surprised by your success?
“Me. (And I’ve stumbled across a good shortcut to success, maybe even a cheat – defining success myself, not letting anybody else do it for me. I adjusted the goal posts.)”

What was the best part about growing up in LaGrange?
“When I was growing up, little LaGrange lay in between big Atlanta and Columbus, connected only by telephones and two-lane blacktop. It was a little world unto itself. The schools were good. The Callaway family and business leaders were prosperous and generous about nurturing and about as enlightened as they could be. And there was a lot of civic pride. I watched with wonder in the 60’s as the African-American struggle for respect and equality churned up towns and cities around us, but in LaGrange, change came with cooler heads and decorum, and dignity prevailed. People were mostly kind to one another.”

Future plans?
“I’ll keep on, keeping on: traveling with ‘A Prairie Home,’ which remains a weekend jaunt, mostly. I’ll be hanging with my family: two grown, out-the-door kids who are launching sputtering acting and comedy careers in New York, a wife who tolerates me, and a dog who doesn’t. Next year, I know I’ll be heading down to Hills and Dales in LaGrange for their 100th year celebration come Fall 2016. I’ll keep writing and performing, always making time to come back to Georgia, where I still have family, a little piece of land, and a big piece of my heart.”