



Renaissance Woman

by Jacqueline M. Duda

When I inquired what her “specialty” is, Edna Searles, a Minden, Louisiana native, replied with a chuckle and the slightest Southern drawl, “You ask me what I am, but I don’t know what I am. I just say, ‘artist.’”

The prolific Clarksburg resident illustrates poetry books, paints majestic murals and revealing portraits, and drafts countless musical scores. The recipient of an International Gold Medal from the Accademie d’ Arte, Rome, Italy, Searles’ lengthy resume includes domestic as well as international honors. Her work has been featured in numerous one-person exhibits, including at the Strathmore

Center for the Arts.

Searles works in cycles; whatever strikes her fancy at the moment. She is relentlessly (and joyfully) compelled to create.

InSight: Where does all this creative energy come from?

Searles: I don’t know. I’ve done this all my life—creating things. When I was very young, I made a wooden doll out of a two by four and leftover shavings from my father’s woodcarving project. I used the wooden curly Q’s to make the doll’s hair and a leather belt to make moveable arms and legs.

Then, another time, I used materials lying around the house after my dad’s plumbing project. I was younger than

ten years old and I remember watching him use a soldering iron to melt wire. I was amazed. I immediately saw something wonderful. One day, after he’d gone off to work, I grabbed that iron and plugged it in. I patiently dropped liquid metal a drop at a time, and made a tiny Nativity scene and crèche. It took me nearly all day.

That wire must have cost my dad a fortune. But when he came home that evening, he looked at the Nativity and said, “That’s beautiful.” His reaction gave me the idea that I could do something beautiful.

InSight: How did your talents progress from there?

Searles: When I grew older, my mom and dad gave me a camera and a

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Artists Among Us



Jazz Trumpet

forever. I painted a mural on canvas at the United Methodist Church in Damascus, illustrating the church's history. I invited others to paint something on the mural, whether it was a flower or a tree. I got the children involved, too.

I painted scenes from Greece for the original Ambrosia in Rockville and also painted the new one after the old building was demolished two years ago. In February of 2005, I painted a 55-foot mural in the Baronessa Restaurant in Rockville.

Recently, I sketched a drawing of blues singer Marva Wright while we were on the same flight. She had just sung at the New Orleans Jazz Festival. She was very gracious and signed my drawing. As for my portraits, I paint you as I see you, not as the camera does. That's a whole different thing. A portrait captures the subject's personality. I painted a portrait of Dr. Clifford Beck of the Manhattan Project. It was a wonderful experience.

The Drummer



I also have a new folk music CD out, the *Walker Avenue Gang – Live at the Parlor*.

InSight: A lot of your paintings feature musicians. Is this a subconscious way of blending painting and music?

Searles: I love to hear music and I love to get into the music. I'm very rhythmical. When I paint, someone once said, 'Edna, you put the most energy into your paintings. Your easel dances around the floor.' Up until then I had been unaware of how I actually move the canvas with my brush.

Your eyes see, your heart feels and it comes out your hands onto the canvas. This is a very true thing about art.

Edna Searles' paintings can be viewed online at www.ednasearles.com. Searles can be reached via email at artistpalette@aol.com or by phone at 301-972-3113. Current gallery affiliations include the Janice Aldridge Gallery in Washington, DC.

developing kit. I might have been a photographer if not for my allergy to the processing chemicals. That is what I believe truly made me an artist. I thought, "If I can't take the pictures, I'll paint them instead." I also made up songs and recorded them. That's how I became interested in music.

Some people say you'll never get anywhere doing different things all the time. I feel the opposite is true. My art is all what God puts in my head at the time. If it makes people happy, then I'm happy.

InSight: Can you describe a few of your favorite projects?

Searles: I love writing poetry, so I illustrate books for poets—eight so far. And I could take that huge expanse of white-walled nothingness that runs along the expressways, start painting, and just keep right on going