

The Soulful Music

of
Anne Sutherland's
Art

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ROB BENCHLEY/The Independent

Sutherland: You know, it's really about stepping out of the box and going into a new realm and letting people see it. That's what feeds me."

Anne Sutherland conducts a symphony of reds, browns and greens when she paints. Her brushstrokes evoke the lyricism of a classic Bach concerto joined with the haunting jazz of Charlie "Bird" Parker. "I love all kinds of music, and I always listen to music when I paint," she recently said when asked about the influences on her work. "Music is really important to me. I'm not as much a Mozart fan as I am music with some classicism in it. There's a composer named Arvo Parte, he's Estonian, and his music is dark and very beautiful at the same time. I also love the work of composer Morton Laurinsen, an American whose choral work 'Lux Aeterna' I have sung and is one of my favorites."

Music infuses every aspect of Sutherland's life. She sings in two different groups every week, down from three last year. She is most inspired by unique mixtures of music created when two distinct styles come togeth-

explained. "I just listened to YoYo Ma on National Public Radio. He went to China and performed with the group Silk Road. There was a little snippet of his music, and there was this fusion of Chinese music with his playing. The Chinese instruments are different, and I found I was very excited by this music. I thought it was gorgeous. It appealed to me."

That fusion is seen in Sutherland's techniques, which she explained while reflecting upon her pieces "Evening Sky Transition" and "Sankaty Fugue in B." "You're seeing two different ways to use oil here. One is with the brush stroke, and then here you see some real highlighted areas and those are done with

tube of oil paint in a crayon form, but they're really fat. Because of my drawing background with teaching sketching, I'll actually paint first and then draw in energy, maybe getting some effects that I can't get with a brush." She knows what works for her, and her tools are extensions of her physical being. "Some people actually get interesting effects with palette knives, but I haven't used a palette knife much. When I teach my students, I teach them to not hold the pencil like you're writing your name, because I believe in arm movement. When I'm using the oil bar I can use a lot of arm movement. I think that gives my work energy."

That fusion and the energy created was first consummated in Sutherland's musical life. Interested in art but unable to pursue it in high school because it was not offered, she turned to music as her creative outlet. "I'm not formally trained in art but I have a music background, so it was in me. I didn't go to art school because I had a very small high school, a public school that didn't even have an art program for high school in grades 11 and 12. So I had no portfolio for art school, but I had a lot of background in music, in singing and in playing trumpet. When I went to college I majored in elementary education with a minor in music."

Her music did not take the place of her painting, however, but has provided a depth that is evident in the many layers of her work, a style that is fused together from the mixture of her music and her painting. According to Mary Beth Splaine, director of South Wharf Gallery where Sutherland's work is shown, Sutherland's music is the perfect accompaniment to her talent. "I really think her music informs her painting," Splaine commented. "I think there is a spirit and a lyricism in Anne's paintings and I think it comes from her love of music. It's in the color."

Sutherland's soul is evident in her work. In "Bartlett's Bounty," Sutherland uses cool blue for the sky that provides a sense of serenity contrasted with

partial occupation. It's their life. It is very reassuring and nice to know I'm in the company of serious painters." She has recently joined a critique group at the Nantucket Artists' Association with Ken Layman. She knows that she is in a transition period in her art and feels fortunate to have a group that can help her understand where she is heading. "I think what we do for one another is we see the bravery in each other. At least this is how I feel about the women artists I admire here. I admire their bravery and therefore I become braver myself. You know, it's really about stepping out of the box and going into a new realm and letting people see it. That's what feeds me."

Upon viewing Sutherland's work you sense the person behind the paint. "Your paintings are who you are. There are a lot of things that go on in painting that are very much the artist. We don't have choices about what we paint. It's just where we are."

It is this embodiment of Sutherland's soul that seeps from the canvas, the spirit that prompts her to create. "I notice, and I tell my students this, when you speak of something and you sigh, when you take a deep breath, that's a little signal that your body gives you that it's important. When I'm looking for a place to paint or subject matter, I pay attention to the sigh. What it means is that your body is responding to an image or a place, and you take it in. I used to drive around, sometimes an hour, two hours, sometimes I'd drive around all evening looking for that place where I had a sigh so I knew this is the place I'm going to be painting next."

She has found a resting place for her creative soul here on Nantucket in the company of an art community she respects and appreciates. "These people are truly dedicated to painting. It's not a hobby. It's not a

partial occupation. It's their life. It is very reassuring and nice to know I'm in the company of serious painters." She has recently joined a critique group at the Nantucket Artists' Association with Ken Layman. She knows that she is in a transition period in her art and feels fortunate to have a group that can help her understand where she is heading. "I think what we do for one another is we see the bravery in each other. At least this is how I feel about the women artists I admire here. I admire their bravery and therefore I become braver myself. You know, it's really about stepping out of the box and going into a new realm and letting people see it. That's what feeds me."

Sutherland is looking forward to the winter, to the season of serenity and creativity. "I'm painting six days a week," she said. "I do take Sundays off. This is my season now to be very seriously creative. In summer I'm teaching sketching and there's just a lot going on with art openings. And that's important food too, like going to a museum, seeing other people's work. People ask me 'Don't you get bored being on the island?' I say, 'Absolutely not. Everything I need is here. I don't need to be entertained.' As long as I'm singing, painting, cooking, and with [my husband] Jim, I'm perfectly happy. I have a wonderful life." ■

—Anne Sutherland's work can be viewed on her Web site at www.sketchingtours.com and at www.southwharfgallery.com, the Web site for South Wharf Gallery, 3 India Street, where Sutherland's work is shown.