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All that jazz At 80, music provides rhythm to Hostetler's art

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The studio of Athens artist David Hostetler resonates with movement and rhythm. In one wing, he carves female forms out of hardwoods - work that has gained him national recognition. In the other wing, there is "Club Dave," a jive-time jazz venue where his trio salutes the geniuses of jazz.

Recently, his art and music have become intertwined.

Hostetler explained that when these two creative forms are operating simultaneously in his life, it provides a call-and-response experience within his studio.

While carving, he is never without the sounds of free-form jazz playing in the background. Hostetler discovered that it's this rhythm, the essential element in music, that drives his carving tools forward.

Messenger photo by Kristin Heinichen David Hostetler plays drums in "Club Dave," an addition he put on his art studio near Athens. A nationally recognized sculptor and woodcarver, Hostetler has found that the rhythms of jazz can propel his art work

"People have a different tap tap in carving," Hostetler explained. "As I'm carving, it is the same body language as I'm doing on the drums."

Once mindful of his rhythmic carving, he experimented with how various musical beats could influence the dynamic movements of his working style. He put on jazz numbers of regular, irregular and progressive rhythms and paid close attention.

"I'm carving either in 2/3 time or 3/4 time. I began playing with it to see how far it would go," he said.

Hostetler's relationship with the drums spans back to his days at Massillon Washington High School in Massillon. He realized early on that he moved to a different cadence than his football-frenzied town. While exploring his individuality, he joined the high school band.

"I was looking for some kind of persona ... never could find it in athletics," he said. "The only alternative I had was band."

Although Hostetler got a kick out of playing the drums, he never rejoiced in his conductor's choice of jubilee music.

"I hate Dixieland. Playing it fouled the nest for me," he said with a laugh.

Dixieland is under the umbrella of jazz, however, it is not the form he identifies with. For Hostetler, the "front line" of

Club Dave is the rhythm section - with Jim Wachtel on piano, Stuart McDargh on upright bass and Hostetler on drums.

Hostetler's art studio lies on 40 acres outside of Athens, but housing his music with his art came only within the past decade.

"I just started to figure out that a commercial venue (to play music) wasn't needed," he said. "It never occurred to me (until recently) to build my own spot."

Susan Hostetler, his wife and business partner, explained that he applies practical action to every objective.

"All of his life he makes do, he makes things that he finds into what he needs," she said. "He's very creative, hence building on to his studio for his own personal enjoyment never occurred to him."

His story is not short of irony. Hostetler first put his mark on the art world by accident. He enlisted in the Army straight out of high school. During World War II, he suffered a shrapnel wound to his leg during a training exercise in California. To keep him amused during his six months of recuperation, a Red Cross volunteer supplied him with drawing materials.

"I thought, 'damn, why didn't I do this before,'" he said with a laugh.

He wrote a letter home to his parents explaining that he bagged the idea of becoming an engineer - but, not to fear, as he was to become an artist.

"I told them, I really found what I want to do, I'm destined to be an artist. They replied, 'you're probably being medicated, we'll discuss it when you get home,'" he recalled with a smile of satisfaction.

Hostetler's art career spans more than 55 years, progressing from folk images to stylized forms. He is foremost a wood carver and bronze sculptor of works capturing the female form. His feminine icons are widely acclaimed and appear in more than 25 museums and galleries. He graduated with a master of fine arts degree from Ohio University, where he was a professor of sculpture for 38 years, and has traveled across the continent teaching and lecturing.

"He is very disciplined. He does everything 100 percent," Susan Hostetler said. "He absorbs himself into the material."

Hostetler revels in the female. His art is dedicated to celebrating the grace and strength of women.

"All the good stuff is feminine," he said. "I've always felt that women were stronger (than men)."

This said, Hostetler is mighty in his own right. Having turned 80 last month, he continues to produce large bodies of work and jams until the break of day. Although Hostetler is into playing his gigs, they can be fatiguing. Thus, his art remains his priority.

"When you're giggin' until 2 or 3 a.m., there is a loss of physicality in the studio the next morning," he said. "(But) this has been the best decade musically in my life."

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