BeauSoleil avec
Michael Doucet
A Cajun Christmas

Saturday, December 7, 2019
7:30 pm
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BeauSoleil avec Michael Doucet
A Cajun Christmas

Saturday, December 7, 2019, at 7:30 pm
Hancher Auditorium, The University of Iowa

MICHAEL DOUCET – Piano, Vocals
DAVID DOUCET – Guitar, Vocals
BILLY WARE – Percussion
CHAD HUVAL – Accordion
TOMMY ALESI – Drums
BEN WILLIAMS – Bass

Tonight’s program will be announced from the stage.
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For the past 40 years, BeauSoleil avec Michael Doucet has been making some of the most potent and popular Cajun music on the planet. Born out of the rich Acadian ancestry of its members, and created and driven by bandleader Michael Doucet’s spellbinding fiddle playing and soulful vocals, BeauSoleil is notorious for bringing even the most staid audience to its feet. BeauSoleil’s distinctive sound derives from the distilled spirits of New Orleans jazz, blues rock, folk, swamp pop, Zydeco, country, and bluegrass, captivating listeners from the Jazz and Heritage Festival in New Orleans, to Carnegie Hall, then all the way across the pond to Richard Thompson’s Meltdown Festival in England.

For their first studio release in four years, and the 25th in their 37-year career, BeauSoleil teamed up with Nashville-based roots music label Compass Records. The band named the new album From Bamako to Carencro, a title that alludes to the cultural and migratory connection between Bamako, in Mali, West Africa, and Louisiana (symbolized in name by the Lafayette, Louisiana, suburb of Carencro), a connection that draws a sonic bloodline back to BeauSoleil’s roots. On the album’s 11 tracks, the band performs with a resounding authenticity all the while bringing a refreshed playfulness to the genre—the fiddle, flat-picked guitar, and accordion carry driving melodies over the two-step and waltz dance beats characteristic of their Cajun and Zydeco music, but not without the country, jazz, and blues leanings that informed the genre in the 1920s. They channel the godfathers of other music as well by including a Cajun/La La-style reimagining of James Brown’s classic 1962 Live at the Apollo version of “I’ll Go Crazy” and a swing version of John Coltrane’s tune-de-force “Bessie’s Blues.” Guitarist David Doucet even tucks an occasional Lester Flatt-style bluegrass G-run into his highly melodic guitar solos.

Since becoming the first Cajun band to win a Grammy with L’amour Ou La Folie (Traditional Folk Album – 1998) and then a second Grammy in 2010, Live at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, BeauSoleil has garnered many accolades, including twelve Grammy nominations, the latest being their 2009 release, Alligator Purse. They were regular guests on Garrison Keillor’s National Public Radio show A Prairie Home Companion, where Keillor has dubbed them as “the best Cajun band in the world,” and their music is so integral to the Cajun culture that they were featured on the New Orleans-based hit HBO program Treme, appearing on screen during the final season of the show. Critics unanimously agree that it is “bon temps, every time they play.” (New York Times).
“Playing Jazz 88.3 KCCK-FM”

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César Pelli (1926–2019)
Hancher architect and friend

César Pelli was a brilliant architect, and it was truly an honor to have him design the current Hancher Auditorium. We were even more honored to call him our friend.

That friendship began immediately after Pelli Clark Pelli Architects was selected to design a new Hancher Auditorium following the destruction of the original building by the flooding of 2008. César felt a personal connection to Hancher’s work, and he made sure to connect with members of the staff and the University of Iowa community to ensure his ideas honored Hancher’s past and elevate its future. At his firm’s offices in New Haven, Connecticut, he devoted an entire room to the project, and he was always happy to share his thoughts about the building with visitors.

César was delighted by the beautiful setting—often commenting that it was the most gorgeous site for which he had designed a building—and he was committed to making the most of the space. He brought the indoors and the outdoors together in the lobby spaces and rehearsal room and designed an exceptional performance space.

His joy for the project was palpable from beginning to end. He came to Iowa City for the major milestones of the project, including our Site Ceremony connecting the original Hancher to the new, our Leave Your Mark beam signing (after which he joined hundreds of construction workers on the as-yet-unfinished stage for lunch), and our Gala Opening. On opening night, César took the stage with Hancher Executive Director Chuck Swanson to launch a new era for Hancher. We’ll always remember his words that night: “Hancher was built with love.”

We are saddened to lose our friend. We are blessed to have the opportunity to serve our campus and community in a building that will always stand as a tribute to César.

Above: César Pelli at the opening night of the Hancher Auditorium, 2016 (Photo: Bill Adams)
Opposite page photos: scale model of Hancher Auditorium at Pelli Clark Pelli offices in New Haven, 2012; Hancher Executive Director Chuck Swanson (seated) looks at scale model while César Pelli (holding glass) looks on from behind, 2012; Pelli and the rest of the Pelli Clark Pelli team in front of Hancher during the Leave Your Mark event, 2014, (Photo: Miriam Alarcón Avila); Pelli and Swanson in 2016 (Photo: Bill Adams); Pelli and Swanson at opening night of the new Hancher Auditorium, 2016 (Photo: Bill Adams); exterior of Hancher Auditorium (Jeff Goldberg/Esto).
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The Vision for Hancher Auditorium: Inauguration toward a Different Future

This is the second in a series of essays about Virgil Hancher and his vision for the arts in general, and Hancher Auditorium in particular, at the University of Iowa. The essays will appear in playbills throughout this season and will be available on the Hancher website, as well.

By Daniel Boscaljon

Virgil Hancher was inaugurated as president of the State University of Iowa on May 24, 1941, taking over the role from a retiring Eugene Gilmore. The weather that day was “fair and warmer” for the general public and over 280 delegates from educational institutions around the country. The Daily Iowan’s coverage of the event took more space than stories about the war—the British gains in the Battle of Crete and a discussion of ways to defeat the fascist forces that took the form of Nazism, although coverage of the inauguration was contextualized by speakers demanding—and also decrying—U.S. entry into WWII.

The threat of fascism and violence seemingly influenced the program for Hancher’s inauguration as well. Rather than business as usual, the inauguration was preceded and framed by an education conference featuring three keynote addresses anchored on the theme “Education for the Future.” The concern uniting the speakers was the role that education could play toward a more thoughtful culture and community. The presence of Hancher Auditorium seems to address the concerns and challenges offered by the invited speakers.

Edwin R. Embree looked at the strengths of the State University of Iowa and discussed the need to train humanologists:

> Upon the fine foundations of your Institute of Child Research, your experimental education, your already notable researches in psychology and social sciences, I urge you to build a program devoted to the study of man and his society. Leave to others the triumphs in natural science and mechanical invention and concentrate on the science of man.

Embree’s comments reflect an emphasis on “experimental education” and the thought that tax-supported institutions should not duplicate services to its students. This legislative philosophy would consume much of Hancher’s time in office during his tenure in an effort to prove how the offerings of SUI (now the University of Iowa) were unique. As an example: because UNI was already using resources to train teachers, Iowa’s education program emphasized educational theory.

The meaning of this potential at Iowa was set even more clearly in the other inaugural speech, offered by Lee Sieg, the then president of the University...
I do believe that our curricula should continue those topics that can serve humanity. We institutions of higher learning owe that to the public which supports us. Education should not be selfish...The well-trained engineer can help humanity by designing a new type of dam; but the poet can equally serve his fellows by bringing beauty into their lives.

Sieg continued:

...but the whole university, from the youngest freshman to the senior professor, must be shot through with faith in creative thinking, else the university shall cease at once. There may have been a time, indeed there was, when universities were solely the conservers of learning...Teaching what? Teaching facts of yesterday, then, later, facts of day before yesterday? Whence did those facts arise? I trust I have made it clear that I am talking, today, about creative thinking.

Although the value of this approach to education won’t likely surprise those who are based in the fine arts, the increasingly pragmatic emphasis on education with a corresponding focus on acquiring a degree makes this opinion seem incredibly out of vogue. At the same time, if anything, the passage of time should make this argument even more prescient. Interdisciplinary influences have been shown, time and time again, to demonstrate how critical and creative thinking share similar sources of inspiration. Assuming that students are curious, the promise of the liberal arts education, in fact, is this kind of curious blend—where young students can form kinds of connections in growing minds that would be impossible within a siloed career. Beauty becomes an important ally in the war against fascism.

Problematically, instead, educational systems still seem stuck on an emphasis on compliance, obedience, and memorization as ways to produce qualitative proof of learning. The need for efficient learning seems essential in a society where jobs are scarce and student debt becomes a crippling problem. This makes the conservative approach to education seem prudent, if not necessary.

Nonetheless, the potential that Sieg saw in Iowa remains present, and Hancher Auditorium’s programming provides the opportunity for students to see performances from world-class acts that would otherwise have little reason to come to the state. The ability to see a variety of features provides students with an ingredient within their education that inspires creative thinking. As long as Hancher Auditorium continues to invite the world to its stage, promoting an expansive vision for what art is and how art remains crucial to the human experience, Iowa will continue to produce humanologists well-versed in critical and creative thinking.

Daniel Boscaljon is a longtime contributor to arts writing in the ICR, often providing interviews, reviews, and essays on aesthetics for Little Village and The Englert as well as for Hancher. An independent scholar, teacher, and arts critic, he is committed to inviting others to incorporate wisdom and joy as part of everyday life. In addition to teaching workshops and holding free public conversations in the area, Daniel also has three current ventures including the Center for Humanist Inquiries (professional consultations), Coffee with Dan (spiritual direction and philosophical life coaching), and The Thoughtful Life (a non-profit venture that includes his “Making Space for Yourself” podcast). You can find his writing and more information about his services at danielboscaljon.com.
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