

Performing Art

by Mike Harris

This subject is not about the “performing arts” – I asked specifically. There is no “s” after the “t” in art. This then is strictly about doing something so well that it transcends the usual and the doing assumes the aspect of art.

The first thoughts that come to mind are the soloists of the arts. The singers who stand alone who with just the power and beautiful melodic quality of their voice, mesmerize their audience. The masters of their various musical instruments, stringed or brass, who stand alone and perform and bring whole audiences to their feet, screaming and applauding, by their ability and virtuosity are performing art. That is one group who take performing to an individual height and a form of art. But how about what I saw once, a mason who pulled and laid block, mixed his own mortar and laid four hundred blocks all by himself in an eight hour day while taking one hour for lunch. Watching him work was like watching a ballerina, no wasted motion, like flowing water of a quiet stream, just smooth as silk.

How about the huckster-auctioneer as he gets your attention and sways you to part with your hard earned cash convincing you that you just must have what he is selling, the magician who with his expertise in misdirection astounds you with the impossible. Yes, in performing art it's the one individual who does whatever better than anyone else in a given field of endeavor. It is not just doing something better, it is doing it so much better that one gets carried away by the results of the performer.

When I was in high school there was young man who made marionettes, dolls whom he dressed and controlled with string and wire. He would go to children's hospitals and give free performances to the delight of the patients and staff. Believe me, he was performing art. With the help of a victrola and dance music, the dolls cavorted and performed to everyone's delight. Performing art is an active action that transcends beyond the ordinary standards of performing.

Back in 1936 I was at an auto dealership, a man carrying a violin case came in for his car, which he had left for service. Because extra unforeseen work was needed the dealership did the work. They explained to the man that while a certain part of the car was already dismantled they were saving him a lot of money by doing the service since the necessary part was already exposed. He did not argue, instead he said he had not counted on the extra expense. At this point the manager asked “Do you play the instrument in that case?” He said “Yes.” “It's a little slow, tell you what, I'll bring in the whole staff, I'll forgive the extra charge, you unlimber that fiddle and play “The Flight of the Bumblebee” and we will be even. I stayed and saw performing art and the art of barter. Two people did something so well that I still remember the buzzing bees and the manager grinning.

By the way, the fiddle the manager referred to was a Stradivarius. The violin player a classical concert violinist.