

Some Things Old, Some Things New

Navajo Restored

By Carissa Tonner, The Conservation Center

John Warner Norton, a charter member of The Cliff Dwellers, became one of the most accomplished and sought-after muralists in Chicago and across the United States by 1920. Earlier, however, in 1910 as Norton's career and our Club were both newly beginning, one of his first commissions became one of The Cliff Dwellers' earliest acquisitions of art—*Navajo*. During the recent closing for renovations, *Navajo* was restored. That story follows.

The Cliff Dweller's John W. Norton painting, *Navajo* came to The Conservation Center in the fall of 2012 in need of cleaning and reframing. The frame had been attached to the painting around the edges, and was causing damage to the paint layer, and there were cracks present throughout the figures with small related losses to the paint layer. Also present were small white drip marks on the surface, and general dirt and grime that accumulates over time.

Our conservators cleaned the surface of the painting, using solvents that were specially selected as the best to clean the surface of the Norton – removing the dirt and grime while leaving the paint layer undisturbed. The frame was carefully removed, and the areas of paint around the edges that had been damaged were microscopically consolidated so there were no additional losses, and all other areas of the paint surface were checked for stability. Conservation grade paints, that are reversible and detectable to professionals, were added to the areas of loss, to reduce their visual impact and better unify the paint layer.

After applying a layer of varnish to integrate the surface finish and allowing it to dry, the painting was installed into a new quarter-sawn dark oak frame to enhance and compliment the beauty of the painting.



J.W.Norton's 1910 *Navajo* at The Cliff Dwellers

Thiebout Portrait

By Bill Drennan CD'02

The most recent addition to The Cliff Dwellers art collection brings two long-time Club personalities together. Bob Guinan CD'84 recently completed and donated a portrait of Bob Thiebout CD 1970-2013. The 21x27 acrylic work was framed by Paul Hamer CD'05.

Guinan explained that Bob had posed for the portrait from his perch at the base of the stairs in the old Club back in 1994. At that time Guinan was working on producing a calendar with each month featuring the likeness of a member who had been with the Club for at least 20 years. Guinan could only get 11 members to agree to sit for him, leading Leonard Foster to pose twice. Though the portraits were completed, sadly, the calendar never materialized. On the other hand Thiebout who had been with the Club over 20 years readily agreed to sit for a portrait.

Guinan noted that having someone sit for a portrait is often quite revealing about the subject's personality. Bob Thiebout enjoyed posing and is fondly remembered by Bob Guinan and many other Cliff Dwellers, and he now graces the Club from his new perch watching over the candy bowl in the foyer.



Artist Bob Guinan remembering Bob Thiebout

THE KOBER SAGA

An Orchestra and Its Conductor

by Dieter Kober **Installment 19: Guiding the Orchestra from Afar**

The 1990s were ending and the world was getting ready to enter a new century. The Chicago Chamber Orchestra had settled at home base again after having completed four successful concert tours in Europe and Asia—unanimously acclaimed as world-class and the “equal of the world’s best.” The fall of the Berlin wall had caused political and social changes in Germany and that distant happening was to result in changes in the administrative operations of our orchestra.

Political and economic decisions by the government of reunited Germany led to the return of property that had been seized by the state from persons, such as my wife Magdalene, who had fled from the now-defunct German Democratic Republic.

All at once we became owners of an idyllic site adjacent to a forest in a suburb of Dresden and just a 15-minute drive to the world-famous Semper Opera House. So, why not build a home there to our own specifications? And perhaps move there for eventual retirement?

Our prompt inspection of the location along with information from local authorities and expert architects convinced us that it was prudent to begin with construction of a house that would meet future needs. Also, at that particular time it could be achieved at very reasonable cost as well as without possible new legal problems. And so, before entering the 21st century, the Chicago Chamber Orchestra opened its second headquarters, in Germany from where it would be administered by remote control, so to speak.

My function as creative originator and supervisor of concerts in Chicago was aided both by up-to-date communications and Chicago personnel. The well planned building in Radebeul (Germany) provided ample, well-organized space for all phases of concert planning and operations. Paper files, orchestral history, programs and a huge library of books and music scores were all easily accessible.

Telephone answering service from Chicago was supplemented by acquisition of an office computer with all of the relevant accessories. While it took me a while to become reasonably proficient as a self-taught user, it did not take long to master the frequent interchange of German and English information and thereby establish a functioning operations network. A result was the immediate advantage of quickly producing all necessary printed materials, from concert programs and press releases; to fund raising and business communications—all of which were easily forwarded to respective recipients in Chicago and elsewhere. In addition, the new system made it possible to keep all important information as digital files, including such compilations as performed past repertory, all past personnel and soloists, and (especially important), an up-to-date listing of past and current contributors.

Office proximity in comfort turned out to be advantageous

in cost savings and efficiency. While local clerical help was not always easy to obtain, German volunteers were much like their Chicago predecessors—eager to please and having greatly varied business experience or common sense. I recall my mother-in-law and her two sisters (all three of advanced age) folding and stuffing the first CCO membership mailing from Germany to Chicago. While their dedication was admirable, their accuracy was assured only by strict supervision, again reminiscent of their Chicago counterparts.

Most important was the result that the new administrative long-distance operation worked out so well that CCO concerts in Chicago continued without glitches, yielding accustomed success. Substitute conductors and my own podium appearances during regular Chicago visits, two or three times annually, insured continuity. These visits have been of particular importance to me because of needed personal contact with musicians whom I consider cooperating friends making music together. Of course it is also meaningful to meet with many other Chicago friends, including dedicated audiences. Likewise, a special bonus is an evening at The Cliff Dwellers, a century-old arts club, where I’ve enjoyed warm welcomes and formal recognition of my long-term relationship with the club and the city’s music scene.

Program contents of the current CCO concerts follows past principles of combining familiar repertory with innovation. There are traditional offerings, such as annual holiday concerts (St. Patrick’s Day, for example), composer anniversaries like Mozart and Sibelius, and historical events, all of which receive appropriate musical recognition. So, too, are musical memorials for the steadily increasing numbers of aging friends, supporters and for even one of our beloved orchestra members, Alice Render.

Our soloists continue to be drawn from the ranks of our own orchestra players in addition to established artists residing in Chicago. One notable debut that took place was when the then five-year old Amy Pikler (daughter of the Chicago Symphony’s principal violist) appeared as our soloist in a Violin Concertino by Friedrich Seitz in what was the beautiful garden setting (later converted to a restaurant) at Navy Pier. That same Amy is now attending college and also is a valued member of two orchestras.

The 50th anniversary of the Chicago Chamber Orchestra was celebrated in 2002 with a return to the Petrillo Music Shell in Grant Park. That free outdoor concert generated congratulations by a huge audience that included the attendance of many dignitaries, including the president of the American Federation of Musicians. Looking back, I recall only one occasion when we performed for an audience even





more sizable: it happened to be the inauguration of Indiana Harbor when we were asked to substitute our music for the announced, but no-show welcome speech by the Vice President of the U.S.

Speaking of dignitaries, my residence in Germany has proved to be beneficial in achieving an increase in activities that promote international relations. For example, at various occasions—concerts, social or family gatherings—I’ve been able to meet composers, musicians, and promoters who would be of interest and value to the CCO as well as the music scene in Chicago. This has resulted in local performances of works by new and even established composers. In that way I also “discovered” Rainer Lipka as well as soloists Holger Miersch, piano, and Joachim Schaefer, trumpet. Likewise, my contact with music industry agents led to a Dresden recital by our orchestra’s concertmaster, Charles Pikler. Unfortunately, at this point, my groundwork for a CCO annual residence in China has failed to be completed by our Chicago representative.

All in all, the Chicago Chamber Orchestra’s operations via “remote control” administration turned out to be as efficient as planned and an unparalleled success. Whether led from afar or from its home base, the CCO’s service and contributions to our city’s cultural scene has permitted it to continue performing through six decades, achieving the distinction of being the city’s second-oldest professional orchestra performing year-around. Its remarkable record of developing a broad repertoire reveals that it has played the music of sixty Chicago composers with nearly one premiere each season. For myself, I feel rewarded primarily in the orchestra’s successes and for the special recognition that has come in recent years, such as Mayor Daley’s proclamation of “Dieter Kober Day in Chicago” and the Illinois Council of Orchestra’s “Chicago Cultural Leadership” award.

That’s not yet the end of this story. During the past several years the concert schedule for the orchestra developed a routine. Programs have been given on Sunday afternoons, almost always at two very accessible venues, Preston Bradley Hall in the Chicago Cultural Center, adjacent to Millennium Park, and the Fourth Presbyterian Church, located about a mile north on Michigan Avenue near the historic Water Tower. They continue to draw near-capacity audiences regardless of the programming.

Shortly, the orchestra’s operation is about to return from “remote control” to more conventional local operations. For me, as I face retirement, it’s always a satisfying experience to re-live the past in conducting these fine musicians on those occasions when I’m in Chicago. There have been some exceptional concerts in years gone by in terms of content and execution as well as unusual incidents involving composers and performers that are worth re-telling. I’ll do just that in the chapter that follows, offering some recollections as a satisfying conclusion to the Kober Saga.

Edited by RLE

April 6, 2013



A Mid-Summer Get Together

With the early evening view of Lake Michigan, Millennium Park, and the Chicago skyline as a million dollar backdrop, the Prospective Member Reception on July 2 proved to be a truly successful summer gathering on the Cliff. The Club lived up to its founding principle: to provide “a place where people seriously interested in the arts...could come together in a congenial and friendly way.” While the fare was merely appetizers and drinks, the conversation and the company filled the Kiva with good camaraderie.

“More than fifty people attended the reception, including a fair number of members. Twenty-three stayed for dinner. Four new members signed on. What a good evening,” noted Bill Drennan, Membership Committee Chairman. As the evening wound down, one member was heard saying, “This is what the Club is all about!”

On August 6 and September 11, the Membership Committee will host similar events for our members and prospective members to gather atop the Club for a casual evening of light food and drink, great conversation and music.

Cliff Notes

Maestro Dieter Kober, CD'59 returned to our city for a farewell appearance with the Chicago Chamber Orchestra, the professional ensemble he founded in 1952 and led as its music director for the past 60 years. The concert took place in the new Buchanan Chapel in the Fourth Presbyterian Church Grantz Center on May 12, 2013.

The Cliff Dwellers' most recent distinction may be making the *READER's* "Best of Chicago 2013" List. In the June 20 issue the Club made the list as the "Best Semblance of an Arts Salon." You will enjoy Kate Schmidt's upbeat portrait of our Club "housed at the top of the Borg-Warner building, with a multimillion-dollar view." And, after you have scanned the rest of the 2013 Best of entries, check out the *READER* archives for other feature articles about The Cliff Dwellers. More than a dozen pieces appear, including several that feature Club members—John Warner Norton, Wil Hasbrouck, and Bob Guinan among them. It's good reading.

A timely reminder: Any member who donated \$500 or more to the Renovation Fund is still entitled to offer a 3-month Trial Membership to a worthy friend of the Arts. Trial memberships begin when the individual recipient first uses The Cliff Dweller facilities. Don't pass up this opportunity to share the pleasures and benefits of Cliff Dweller membership. See any Club officer for details.

Michael Hainey, CD'13 recently published *After Visiting Friends: A Son's Story* which has been on the New York Times Best Sellers list this summer. Michael grew up in Park Ridge and is now living in Manhattan, working as the Deputy Editor for *GQ*.

Since the Club's April re-opening 15 individuals interested in literature and the arts have joined The Cliff Dwellers. Our new members are:

- In April: Diana Chrissis, Kate Ford, Jonathan Gross, Michael Hainey, Maureen Schuberth
- In June: Joe Gonzalez, Erin McCarthy, Stuart Strahl, Allan Willey
- In July: Gloria Bowman, Adam Clement, Roxana Espoz, John Martin-Rutherford, Sheila Pigott, Helen Schubert

We welcome them and look forward to their taking an active role in the activities of the Club.

Thanks to the following Cliff Dwellers for sponsoring new members to the Club:

Susan Aaron, Bill Drennan, John Falhauber, Robert Guinan, Sarah Jerome, Walker Johnson, Larry Okrent, Rosemary O'Neil, Leslie Recht, Pat Savage, Dan Shannon, Melvyn Skavarla, James Smith

Postponed Events:

- A presentation, book signing and dinner with photographer Patty Carroll, based on the July art exhibition *Man Bites Dog*.
- A dinner and presentation on art conservation by Heather Becker, the Chief Executive Officer of The Conservation Center, featuring a description of the work done to repair and conserve the Club's J.W.Norton painting *Navajo*.

In Parting:

On Friday May 24 many Cliff Dwellers met for lunch at the Club to share memories of Bob Thiebout and celebrate his life both on and off the Cliff. As Richard Eastline CD'73 noted in his summary of Bob's life to the membership: "Our club's long-time greeter served more than 30 years as the dining room receptionist. But that's scarcely a full description of what he did. To the members who befriended him, he was a Cliff Dweller in so many ways—informed about the arts, an unofficial historian of the club's activities, and a habitual storyteller who wryly related the foibles of familiar persons, famous and infamous."

The Kiva quickly filled with stories about Bob. Andrew Patner CD'94 revealed that Bob had been a Courtesy Squad greeter at Creston High School in 1942—foreshadowing the next 70 years of his life. Then added, "He loved shows, reviews, and back stage goings on, and when he came to Chicago, he became a dancer, a chorus boy in Chicago theaters until he broke his back in a fall during the 40's. Then, he became a dance instructor for Arthur Murray Studios. Bob knew everybody in Chicago theater."

Leslie Recht CD'03 said, "Bob guided me to get to know individuals and to take care of the Club." Certainly, she was not the only Club President to receive Bob's mentoring. Walker Johnson CD'84 admired Bob's "innate ability to recognize people even after decades...he protected the Club at its gates." Yolanda Deen CD'87 fondly observed that Bob was "truly our treasure."

Several of the CD staff also shared their experiences with Bob. Nora, who brought Bob lunch during the Club's closing at the beginning of the year, said, "He was like a father to me. He made sure that I got my lunch each day, and then we told each other stories. He made me laugh."

Club Manager Don Santelli shared his feelings about his longtime friend, "We had lunch together for 14 years and talked about everything. Movies...*Dr. Strangelove* in particular. Bob hated that goofy movie, and I loved it. We argued about it at least once a month." Don then paused and added, "The best thing about Bob was that through all the crazy things that have happened at the Club—the financial crises, the fire, the lease—he always returned with a single statement: 'Let's look at the bright side!' It was his thing. His mantra.

"The whole staff will miss him. I'll miss him."

We all will miss him.



Bob Thiebout 1923--2013