

arts & entertainment

Artist sews 'love affair with circus' into sculptures

Review by Peg Sheldrick

"My work is to be experienced—handled, played with, worn, sat on, talked to, moved, laughed at, poked, squeezed, fondled, slept with and loved."

Not many artists encourage that sort of thing. But Lee Ridge is basically a softie. So are her creations.

"Soft Circus" is the name of her show at the Haymarket Art Gallery (9th and O streets), and that name sums it up nicely. The medium is soft sculpture and the exhibition is a three-dimensional, three-ring extravaganza of cloth and sequins.

It has everything a real circus has, from the fat lady to the trained seal, but the difference is that the performers are fabric sculptures. You can't really call them stuffed animals. For one thing, they aren't all animals, and for another, that name conjures up the kind of plush toys you see in the department stores.

Ridge's circus is not just a collection of toys, it's a novel and effective array of portraits skillfully stitched rather than painted or sculpted.

Charming circus

The circus folk include a ring master, a "brass" band (complete with soft sculpture notes), a pair of gypsies, a trapeze artist, and a child-size clown. Some have embroidered faces, some have more dimensional, sewn-in features, and all have a great deal of charm. There is even a car full of clowns.

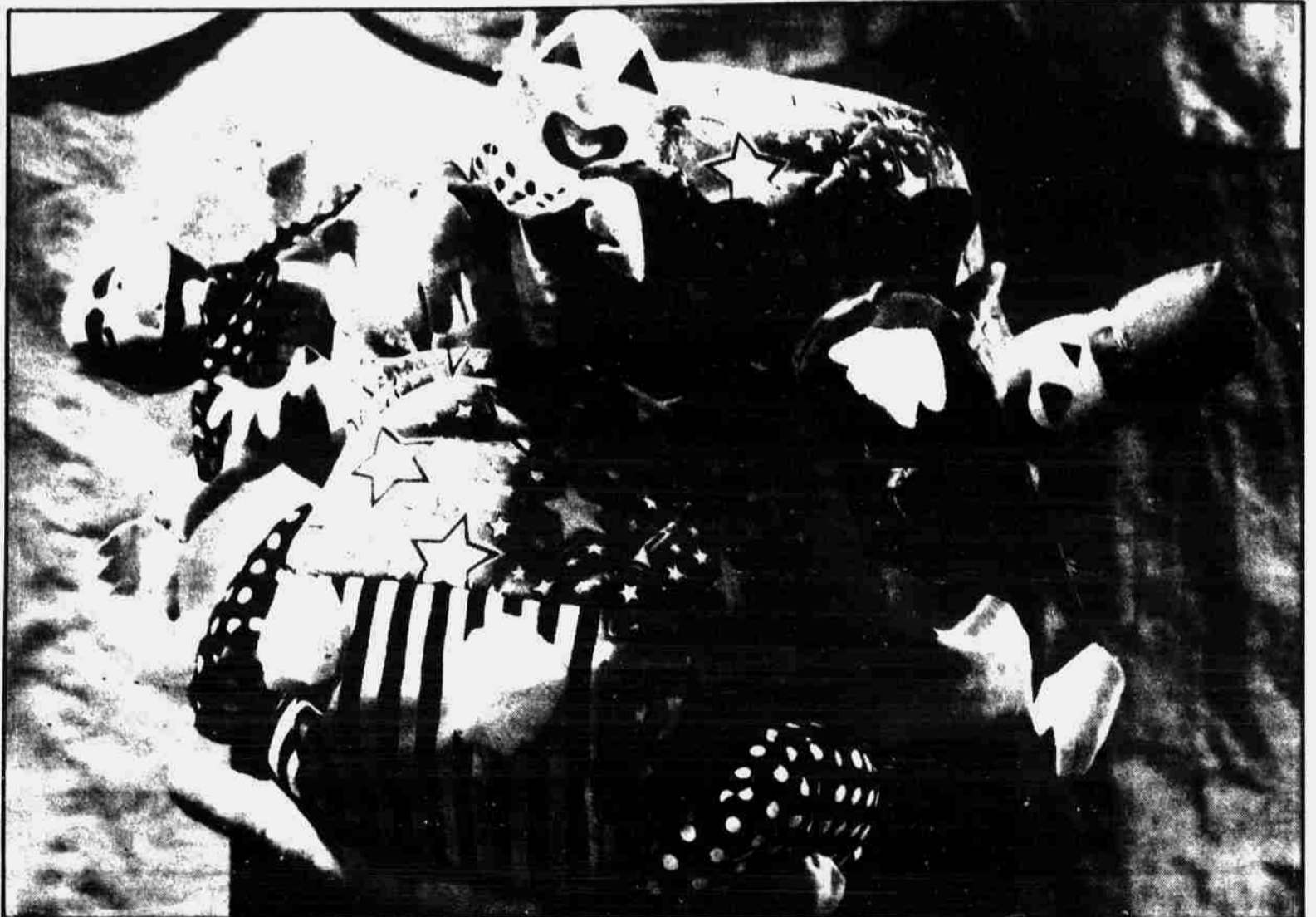
The animals range from a mellow lion to a nearly life-size horse named Umberto. The works are often funny, sometimes subtle. They have a sort of gaiety and liveliness that wouldn't come across in conventional sculpture.

"I've chosen a circus theme for this exhibit because of a life-long love affair with county fairs and circuses," explained Ridge in her written commentary on the show. "I like the tempo, the assault on the senses. My family has always expected me to run off with the carnival. Perhaps I shall."

Popular on coasts

Ridge has been "working in soft sculpture seriously for two years." The form is popular on the coasts but relatively new to the Midwest. She has worked at everything from costuming to puppetry at the Lincoln Playhouse. Her puppetry has been fun and has gained her the most attention locally. In a phone interview she said she liked the puppeteer work for the opportunity it provided to work with a wide spectrum of people, but that she prefers the soft sculpture work.

"This is more personal," she said. "It's more me. I like this work better, but I don't like the isolation that is necessary. As an artist, you either work or you socialize."



A circus full of soft sculpture clowns and animals waits to be cuddled, snuggled, teased, and enjoyed at the Haymarket Art Gallery.

Ridge began sewing at age two and has been at it ever since. She can create her sculptures without even making a pattern. She sews the way other people doodle.

Let it be

"I kind of like to let things be born," Ridge said. "They turn out better for me. It's sort of like putting your zen in gear... sometimes you fail miserably. If they're failures, that was how they were born." She never corrects her work as others do by reworking.

"If it looks like it could be improved, I might make it over."

The production time for her creations varies, depending on the ratio of hand work to machine work. Hand work takes much longer.

Prices tend to be somewhat beyond the student budget, anywhere from \$6.50 for a small tiger to \$135 for Umberto the Horse. The show, which will run through November 17, has sold out.

"All of it was bought by adults—I mean big adults, sixty years old," according to Julie Wilson of the Haymarket. Only a few of the pieces were purchased with kids in mind. A child psychologist from Omaha ordered a large clown for the office. But the entire band went to a gentleman in his sixties."

Obviously, Ridge's works have the unique ability to bring out the child in everyone.

"I think we're all children," she said. "Why do we have to stop playing at a certain age? People play ball all their lives."

Ultimately, "Soft Circus" is more than a group of sophisticated stuffed animals and dolls. Each character has a personality all his or her own. Together they comprise a world with an appealing reality all its own. It's a kind of art that can be very cheering at this time of year. Lee Ridge's works are truly "such stuff as dreams are made of."

Album puffed with pretense, but fun if salt grain taken

By Jeff Taebel

After listening to Jeff Wayne's *The War Of The Worlds* for the first time, I had two reactions. The first was that it was an incredibly pretentious, overblown piece of fluff and the second was that it could prove to be a lot of fun if taken in the right frame of mind.

After hearing the album a few more times, I came to the conclusion that each of these impressions held some truth.

album review

Jeff Wayne's main claim to musical fame until now was as the producer on David Essex' hit single of 1974, "Rock On." Wayne's production work on "Rock On" earned him a *New Musical Express* award for the best produced pop single of 1974.

In 1975, Wayne began work on a musical version of H.G. Wells' classic science fiction novel. The finished product is a star-studded two record set which is one of the most unusual rock albums of 1978.

Wayne wrote all the music for the album as well as handling the production and orchestration with help on the lyrics from Gary Osborn and Paul Vigrass.

Impressive cast

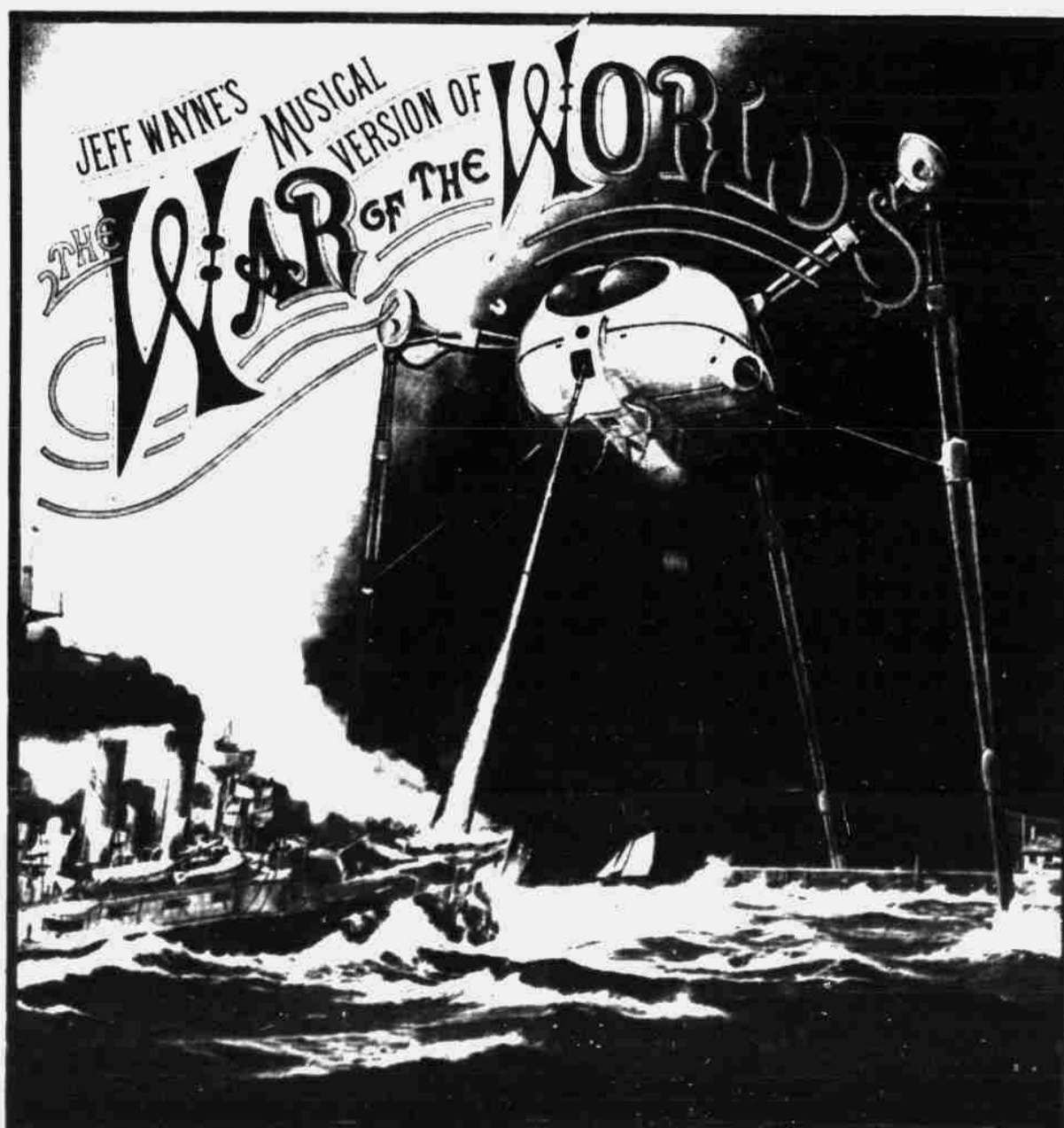
Doreen Wayne wrote the script, which was adapted from Wells' book. For "actors," Wayne recruited an impressive cast, featuring Richard Burton, Julie Covington of *Godspell*, David Essex of "Rock On" and Philip Lynott of Thin Lizzy.

The vocalist cast includes Justin Hay-

ward of the Moody Blues, Chris Thompson of Manfred Mann as well as Covington, Essex and Lynott.

The band behind the headliners includes

Chris Spedding and Jo Partridge on guitars, Herbie Flowers on bass, Barry Morgan on drums and Ken Freeman and Jeff Wayne on keyboards.



The War Of The Worlds' long soliloquy sets the tone for the album. This is followed by a short song called "The Eve of War." The rest of the album is mostly composed of dialogue spoken over repeated musical themes. This is probably just as well since the lyrics are not as powerful as the narratives.

Builds tension

The background music for the dialogue is not particularly inspiring, but it does build tension at the right places and contains some memorable licks.

Richard Burton is excellent in the lead role of the journalist, and Philip Lynott also turns in a fine performance as the deranged country parson.

David Essex is quite believable in his portrayal of an idealistic artillery man. But, Julie Covington is the weakest link in an otherwise outstanding cast.

Covington seems ill at ease in her role as Beth, the parson's wife. However, she is a much better singer than an actress on this album. Her duet with Lynott on "The Spirit of Man" is one of the musical highlights of the album.

With a few exceptions, *The War Of The Worlds* is a lot of fun when listened to in the proper frame of mind, i.e. taking it all with a grain of salt.

The pretension and fluff come in when Wayne and his cohorts try to do too much with the music and lyrics. Things begin to sound constrained, like in the "surprise" ending, a sloppy epilogue that sounds as if it were tacked on as an afterthought.

Wayne said that *The War Of The Worlds* is only the first in a series of similar works. If he can continue to recruit good dramatists and work out a few of the bugs in his songwriting, the coming series should be quite interesting.