

The Art and Science of Vic Cook

BY CAROLE CARLSON

Vic Cook may not take life in small portions, but he doesn't gulp it either. He's discovered time and patience are his best friends.

The Anderson-born artist-designer-musician-teacher has spent three years photographing butterflies. Eight years ago, he began work on a piece of music, and now he is combining the music and pictures into an audio-visual piece.

Cook says he will try to give viewers the feeling they are following a single butterfly moving in slow motion through a meadow. "The music needs to exude this feeling, too."

He thinks he's finally getting a unified, 22-minute piece. "I'm still editing it in my head, but I'm getting my music to where it wants to be," he says. "It's such a complicated form, I'm glad it's finally coming together."

Cook's artistic background is varied and unusual. He has only a high school and self-taught musical education. He received his first guitar from his father, noted Hoosier artist Frank Cook, when he was 13 years old. At 15, he began giving guitar lessons at an Anderson music store. After high school, he formed the Vic Cook Trio, a jazz group whose itinerary included Hilton Hotels and Holiday Inns in the Indianapolis area. By the time he was 35, he was scoring for 400-piece orchestras.

Since disbanding the trio after 13 years, Cook has missed that abiding association with other musicians but says he doesn't miss the nightclub work.

"From a musical standpoint," he explains, "my real strength lies in the essence of the creating of it rather than the performing of it over and over again."

Cook's earlier compositions included a lot of computer-generated music, something he describes as "rigid and robot." Not so with "The Butterfly." His computer will provide background orchestration, but "the impetus is to make it flowing and waterlike."

Cook says he likes long-term projects. He likes experimentation, allowing audio-visual ideas to "flow and evolve."

But there is more to Vic Cook than meets the eye and ear, and what he is doing with the already completed theme of "Butterfly" defines that extra something.



Vic Cook stands in front of the house he built himself deep in the woods near Pendleton. Photo by John Cleary, courtesy of Anderson Newspapers, Inc.

In the foreground is the platform where Vic Cook hopes to stage Mozart concerts in his handmade home. Photo by John Cleary, courtesy of Anderson Newspapers, Inc.



Paintings by Frank Cook cover the walls of his son Vic's bedroom. Photo by John Cleary, courtesy of Anderson Newspapers, Inc.

He is using it as a backdrop in his house, set deep in the woods near Pendleton. On the long walk through trees and over homemade bridges, you can hear it growing ever louder, grabbing your attention just as a butterfly would.

It's impossible to separate Cook from his house. He returns to the subject again and again—telling of its gradual unfolding like a butterfly.

Cook designed and handmade the 250-foot-long, curved building by himself

from giant trees felled on the property. Along its rough-hewn interior, he built elevated staging areas for concerts or art displays. (He is already displaying a sizable number of his father's still lifes, landscapes, and woodland scenes.)

On one platform—the highest—atop a narrow, winding stairway, he works with his own electronic and acoustic musical equipment, in full view of Fall Creek. What better place to create the "waterlike" butterfly piece?

"I enjoy working on things you can walk through and walk around," he says, explaining his house design. "It shows the art and science of Vic Cook. I want to mix my art and science together.... Being creative means a lot of different things, not just pottery or canvas or sound.... The house reflects I'm not just blowing smoke at people. I can get things done. I put 23,000 hours in the house, and I did it all without any money.... It will show people what I could do if I could get funded."

Cook sees the house not only as his residence but also as "a springboard for me and a showcase for other artists' and musicians' work."

He already has a few enthusiastic volunteers calling on central Indiana museums, asking that the house be added to their tour lists. And he hopes by midspring to stage Mozart concerts on the platforms.

"I believe the house and Mozart would grace each other," he says.

Cook is permitting tours of his home, hoping they will create interest in his most ambitious project, a car he designed.

Car designing, too, was a slow evolutionary process. From scenery product designs in the Smithsonian Institution to the design and manufacture of intricate pieces for model builders to mass production of patterns, he began visualizing his inexpensive car design about 10 years ago.

He describes the design as a creative object and "the main impetus in my life." He believes it would be much safer than today's cars.

In addition to his many creative projects, Cook gives private guitar lessons to support himself. "As an artist, I'm not making as much as I think I should, but I think it's around the corner," he says.

A laser light show is another anticipated project. "I've never done laser work before," he says, "but one of my favorite ways to work is with optics and light. I'm planning a couple of pieces of work in the next couple of years with lasers."

The danger lies in overextending his talents and interests.

"I have so many themes going through my head, the only way I can get artistic things accomplished is by building a staff," he says.

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