

SEARCH SITE

INFORMATION

- About Annapolis
- Boating
- Historic Sites
- Image Gallery
- Local Maps
- Lodging
- Real Estate
- Rentals
- Restaurants
- Schools
- Services
- Shops
- Tours
- Transportation

MAGAZINE

- Staff & Writers
- Opportunities
- Ad Packages
- Quotables
- Requests

AFFILIATIONS

Annapolis & Anne Arundel County Conference and Visitors Bureau

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Creative Convergence

By Lynn Schwartz

Rob Levit has an unbounded enthusiasm for the creative arts. As a guitarist, composer, and educator who authors poetry and essays, Levit has now discovered another creative expression—painting. Diverse forms of artistic expression and originality, the mark of a true multi-dimensional artist, have always distinguished the work of Levit.

The process of merging unique and sometimes contradictory creative genres is what Levit is all about. It is what he calls "creative convergence."

His personal style is a complicated blending as well. Levit, known for his energy, humor and playfulness, also possesses a serious intellectual curiosity. "I guess you could say I have my head in the clouds but my feet in the mud," he says.

As a musician, Levit is a five-time consecutive recipient of the Maryland State Arts Council Individual Artist Award, a recipient of the Doris Duke/Chamber Music America Jazz Composition Award and an artist-in-residence at Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts in Annapolis. He has recorded 15 CDs. While his music encompasses classical and cutting-edge jazz, world, folk and contemporary styles, the sound is pure Levit.



Levit, 38, discovered his musical gifts at age 19 when he picked up a guitar and never put it down. Not surprisingly, his interest is jazz—it is the improvisational nature of the music, the process of exploring sounds and ideas, which intrigues him. "Jazz is not set, and the unexpected can happen. It's like a conversation. I don't want to know the outcome. I have to trust my skills as a musician to create a compelling performance and result."

The Rob Levit Trio performs frequently in Annapolis. The bass player, Amy Shook, says, "It is fun to play with Rob. He is an all around artist. He has very high standards but is still willing to try new things and to take chances with the music."

Levit's exploration with painting began in 2000 after he saw a film about Jackson Pollock. He was immediately attracted to Pollock's intuitive approach. "I loved his spontaneity and his boldness. This is work, whether you admire it or not, that takes the risk of being ridiculed. It's courageous."

Inspired by Pollock, Levit purchased some art supplies and began to experiment with paint. "I painted and I painted. Eventually, I got better and better." Using pastels, acrylics and watercolors, Levit describes his work as abstract impressionism where color is the main focus. In Levit's studio at Maryland Hall, where he is the first musician to be an artist-in-residence, his eclectic style and voice sing out loud and clear. There are paintings in a variety of forms and stages, musical instruments, chairs upholstered in pretty fabric, a mahogany partner's desk and window panes painted with delightful, childlike designs.

But the eight words freely painted on the wall in bold black are the most provocative element in the studio—Levit's eight core values: creativity, passion, patience, compassion, service, celebration, spirituality and strength.

During his past two years at Maryland Hall, Levit has taken an active role. Among other things, he created the Lew Cronin Concert Series in honor of the beloved musician and local community

TOWN PULSE

What event in the Annapolis area are you most looking forward to in 2006?

- Powerboat Show
- Sailboat Show
- Renaissance Festival
- Seafood Festival
- County Fair

Additional comments ?

Last time we asked, "**How many past issues of Inside Annapolis Magazine do you have?**" Out of all the responses, we found that **most of our readers keep at least 3 issues** of Inside Annapolis Magazine around the house, but **a couple of our readers have over several years of issues!** We're glad to hear that so many of you stay with us!

Thanks to all those that voted!

Results Posted Every Issue!!

supporter. More recently, he has founded an outreach program for students in the community who are underserved in the arts or at risk. Levit goes into schools for concerts and residencies but also hosts students at his studio for painting, music and activities.

His experience as an artist-in-residence at the Summit School, a school for children with learning differences in Edgewater, furthered his interest in integrating creativity and artistry into classroom learning. "We should teach history with poems and art. It has more impact. Being creative makes you confident and when people are confident they are successful."

Levit has the support of Linnell Bowen, the executive director of Maryland Hall. "Rob is a breath of fresh air," Bowen says. "He is a great ambassador for the arts programs at Maryland Hall. This is Maryland Hall's 25th anniversary of keeping the arts alive for the next generation, and Rob Levit personifies that."

Nadja Maril, president of the Cultural Arts Foundation of Anne Arundel County, agrees. "Rob really relates well to the younger generation, which is so important to Maryland Hall and to the community."

And it is a community that is important to Levit and his wife Elaine a kindred, creative spirit and speech pathologist at Mills-Parole Elementary School. As an accomplished musician and composer, Levit has already performed at the Montreal International Jazz Festival, the Boston Globe Jazz Festival, the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and the Knitting Factory in New York. Levit could reside as a professional musician anywhere, but he and Elaine choose to make their home in Annapolis.

"I find Annapolis to be a place where intellectuals, artists and business people all congregate. They are people who are open to new cultural ideas," says Levit. "I feel that to be here and to be able to work as a multidimensional artist is a true privilege."

Still, some might wonder why the prolific Levit refuses to settle down and focus on just "one thing." Levit has an answer.

"What is challenging to me as an artist is the taking of all of my interests and talents and uniting them into one statement. To me, creative convergence is about the unification of the whole body of work. Being creative is my "one thing." The forms of expressions are just different shades and colors of the same thing."

For performance schedules and other information: www.roblevit.com.

Lynn Schwartz is a freelance writer. She also owns and operates Café Beaux Arts at Maryland Hall.

[Back](#)

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