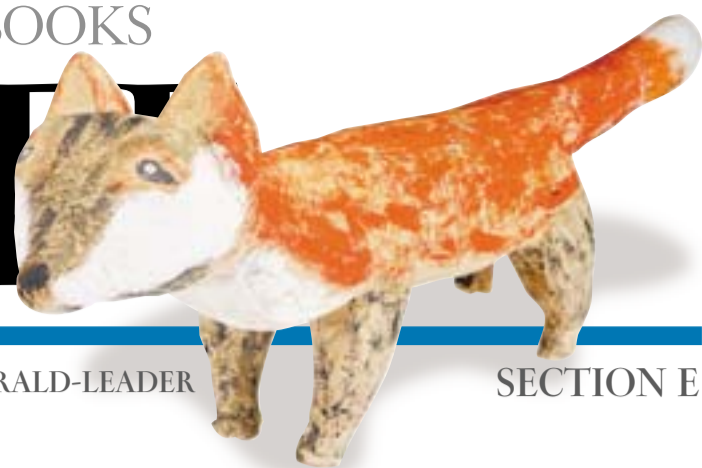




STAGE | MUSIC | MOVIES | TRAVEL | BOOKS

ARTS + LIFE



SUNDAY, MARCH 18, 2007 | WWW.KENTUCKY.COM | LEXINGTON HERALD-LEADER

SECTION E

Brave Combo rolls out a barrel of possibilities

Band gives maligned polka a step, hop, step into mainstream ... even 'The Simpsons'

By Walter Tunis
CONTRIBUTING MUSIC WRITER

Consider, if you will, the poor polka. For ages, it has been the ugly duckling of the music world, a dance sound ridiculed as too square for anyone other than devout traditionalists or comics who seize upon it for purposes of parody (Weird Al Yankovic, for instance).

So how is it that a rock outfit from Denton, Texas, has made a living

exploring polka for the better part of three decades? For Brave Combo, polka is not only resourceful enough to get multiple generations on their feet and in the groove, it's a steppingstone to the music of the world.

"What polka is to the world and what polka is to us is the cornerstone of what we're about," said Brave Combo guitarist, keyboardist, accordionist and founder Carl Finch. "We intentionally

took the most maligned music in the world and tried to see if we could mess with people's perception of it. It wasn't just some funny experiment, either. We were truly digging the music. We thought, 'Man, this music has never been perceived properly in the mainstream world.' So we wanted to change that perception, especially beyond people's love of the music as a novelty."

So in 1979, with punk and New

Wave reaching even into the remote roots music corners of Texas, Brave Combo was formed. While a rock band at heart, Finch and company saw how young artists were electrifying and roughing up the musical corners of all kinds of music, from Tex-Mex to blues. Thus the band began forging a new electric sound for polka.

See POLKA, E7

FOLK ART APPRECIATION

Whittler Minnie Adkins has many roosters — and rooters

IF YOU GO

'Against the Grain: The Works of Minnie Adkins'

When: Through May 27. Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Mon.-Sat., 1-5 p.m. Sun.

Where: Kentucky Folk Art Center, Morehead State University, 102 W. First St., Morehead.

Admission: \$3 for ages 12 and older, \$2 for senior citizens and members of touring groups. Folk art center members and school groups are admitted free.

Call: (606) 783-2204.

Online: www.morehead-st.edu/kfac.

A carved rooster has long been Adkins' signature piece. Her other work is as varied as the fox at the top of page, the self-portrait at right, and the skunk family below.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF KENTUCKY FOLK ARTS CENTER

By Benita Heath
CONTRIBUTING CULTURE WRITER

MOREHEAD — It seemed as much like a neighborhood block party as an upscale art gallery opening for a living legend.

That Thursday night last month at the Kentucky Folk Art Center, there were as many people in jeans and sweatshirts as in suits and ties queuing up at a buffet that offered deli roast beef and spinach-camembert mousse. Off to one side was a bucket of Rolling Rock on ice that more than held its own with bottles of an Australian chardonnay.

In the midst of it all stood the reason for the soiree: Minnie Adkins, the grande dame of American folk art, who has almost as many of her famous blue rooster carvings in galleries, private collections and museums as Calder has mobiles.

For close to a quarter-century, Adkins, the grandmother from Happy Gizzard Hollow in Elliott County, has whittled her way to fame and a certain amount of fortune — depending on how you measure that — with her menagerie of horses, anteaters, bears and possums that have yet to lose their appeal as the quintessence of self-taught art.

It's art that was created out of necessity.



DAVID STEPHENSON | STAFF

Shelby Fannin, left, visited with Minnie Adkins at the opening of Adkins' retrospective last month at the Kentucky Folk Art Center in Morehead.

Simply, Adkins started carving and selling her art as a way to make money for her family. Yet the accolades that her work has garnered from scholars and collectors after almost three decades have done much to curb the predilection to pigeonhole creativity according to an artistic hierarchy.

In the eyes of Jay Williams, curator at the Morris Museum of Art in Augusta, Ga., that's a significant win for the art world. The Morris, a museum begun in 1992 to promote and preserve Southern art, has one of Adkins'

See ADKINS, E10



Bittersweet memories line her road to success

By Benita Heath
CONTRIBUTING CULTURE WRITER

MOREHEAD — To watch Minnie Adkins hugging friends and laughing with admirers, you'd never know that the opening night of the retrospective of her work was bittersweet.

All along the walls of the upstairs gallery at the Kentucky Folk Art Center were display pedestals filled with Adkins' carvings. Almost 30 years of art had been brought together for the show.

But something, or rather someone, was missing. Garland Adkins died in 1997. He was Minnie's first husband and partner in an undertaking neither ever imagined would have such momentum or bring them financial security.

"It was kind of sad to see all the things me and Garland made together," Adkins said a couple of weeks later. "It was the most enjoyable time in our life making folk art, having a steady income and not having to go away to work."

They met at church, courted at pie suppers and wed in 1951. For a while they stayed around Isonville, where Garland worked construction or operated a coal loader for strip-mining operations. But jobs in Eastern Kentucky were

See MINNIE, E10

He improvises strumming and stories

Leo Kottke's performances are all the same: Each is different

By Walter Tunis
CONTRIBUTING MUSIC WRITER

Leo Kottke's concerts come with an undeniable air of familiarity.

Sometimes you sense it in the playing, the rich assimilation of American finger-picking styles that long ago made Kottke one of the country's most heralded guitarists.

In other instances, it emerges in the repertoire. While he continually incorporates new material into his performances and an increasingly greater amount of improvisation, some tunes have become staples: the parlor-perfect love song *Rings*, the shadowy cover of The Byrds' *Eight Miles High*

and the spy instrumental *Airproofing*.

And there are the stories — wry, whimsical and frequently hysterical remembrances of Kottke's family, childhood misadventures, his brief tenure in the Navy or any number of road sagas.

For him, though, these seeming constants of performance life abound with change. Just as audiences differ from night to night, so does the temperament and distinction of his playing. For Kottke, an acceptance that his musicality and humor could be easily replicated from one concert to the next would be the equivalent of artistic death.

"If I want to have a bad night," he

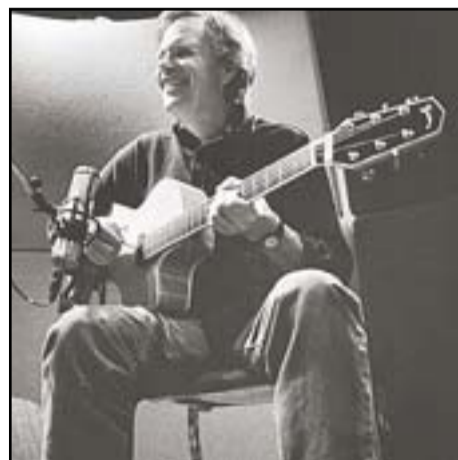
said in a recent phone interview, "all I have to do is start repeating myself. That will take the gas right out of the bag."

"I found out back at the very beginning that a performance won't get off the ground, that it won't mean anything to the player or the audience, unless there is some element of risk involved. There has to be a tension with the release, a risk with the certainty."

See KOTTKE, E2

A performance "won't mean anything to the player or the audience unless there is some element of risk," Leo Kottke says.

BRAD PALM



BOOKS

A 'MINOR WORK' STANDS OUT

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Humana play turns into a party

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TRAVEL

WINE-COUNTRY CASTLE IS STUFF OF DREAMS

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