

The Island Weaver

Weaving the sparkle of light and the depth of color



“Dressing the loom,” Maria Wohr begins her ancient magic of creating, brilliant one-of-a-kind textiles.



Hand-woven serape “Dazzling Sea”

by **Janina Birtolo**

Listening to Maria Wohr speak is like listening to a fine instrument. Her voice lilts and falls into rhythms and ends on light notes. But her greatest compositions come not from her voice but from her hands. Maria Wohr, *The Island Weaver*, is a maestro when it comes to one-of-a-kind, hand-woven cloths.

Wohr came by her passion serendipitously. An ad in the Door County, Wisconsin, newspaper led to a job weaving upholstery for a woodwork artist in 1981. She fell in love with the loom—but not with the stiff fabric. Two years later, she was working on her own loom in her own gallery, creating softer, fanciful cloths—many of them designed to be worn.

“When people have one of my wearables on, it’s almost like a soft sculpture draped on them,” Wohr says. It’s also like a magical transformation. Working with hand-painted Bombyx silks, ribbons in all sizes and hues, luxury Italian feathers, and glitter novelty threads, Wohr creates cloths (scarves, ponchos, wall hangings) that evoke dreams and mystery.

In 2000, Wohr relocated to Sanibel—and the move is reflected in her work. “There’s a story to why I use glitter in my work,” she says. “One day when I crossed the causeway, I was in awe of the beauty of the sun’s reflection on the water. It was as though stars and diamonds were dancing on the sea! I wanted somehow to incorporate this feeling into my weaving. I think I have!”

There’s little doubt of that. Wohr’s creations have beguiled and fascinated people from Wisconsin to Chicago to Provincetown to Naples to Ireland. Those who’ve seen them understand that a piece by Maria Wohr, *The Island Weaver*, is a tapestry of music on the body or on the wall.

To experience the work of Maria Wohr, *The Island Weaver*, schedule an appointment to visit her studio by calling 239-472-8702. 🌊

Janina Birtolo is a freelance writer for Times of the Islands.

Golden Voice, Golden Handcuffs



Randy Thomas's voice may travel everywhere, but for her to do so requires some advance planning

by **Libby Boren McMillan**

You may have never seen her, but you have likely heard her voice in your home. Southwest Florida resident Randy Thomas has broken barriers as the first and only woman to announce the most prestigious award show in the world, the Academy Awards. She has announced for the Oscars an impressive total of six times, and odds are high that she will be asked to do so again.

Thomas has also had five consecutive appearances at the Tony Awards in New York, the same number of times she's announced the AFI series, 100 Years...100 Greatest Movies. Still not sure you've heard her? Get thee to the living room. Thomas is also the voice of *Entertainment Tonight* and *The Insider*

television shows, and one of the busiest voice-over artists in America today.

"My 'golden handcuffs' keep me here in my studio," says Thomas of her high-tech setup at home. "We're producing daily shows, and during sweeps we run radio as well," she says of *Entertainment Tonight*, a celebrity-oriented infotainment show, "so they always need pickups from me. As the news breaks, they constantly rewrite, so I have a digital phone line in my studio. They fax me, I grab the page. They're on a deadline, and as soon as they record me, they hit a button and send it to the bay for editing. That's my digital world." Thomas did, in fact, end our interview to take an unexpected call at noon from *Entertainment Tonight* the

day Anna Nicole Smith died.

Luckily for Thomas, she's in a different time zone than the writers. The rest of the *ET* team is in L.A. "Their first production meeting is at 5:30 in the morning," Thomas says. "By the time they're rolling, I'm 'in good voice.'" And how does one get 'in good voice'? "Talking to my husband," answers Thomas, in her beautifully deep voice. "I talk to myself, I talk to my animals. I walk around talking."

ET is a 52-week-a-year show, keeping Thomas on a pretty short leash. "Anywhere I travel, I have to make sure there's a studio that can accommodate me," she explains.

"When I go to New York and Los Angeles, Paramount Television [for

Even though her voice is heard all over the country, she is not often seen at all the extravagant events for which she announces, like the Tony Awards.



whom she works] has their own studio.”

We may see Thomas, if briefly, in local bookstores in 2008, when her book *Voice for Hire* is being published. Conceding that it might serve as a blueprint for her competition, Thomas laughs and says, “I believe you can’t hold on to it, you have to give back.”

For the Academy Awards, Thomas flies to Los Angeles for three days of rehearsal. “Within a day or two, I get my script,” she says. “But I have to be there, in person, for the show, because anything can happen.” As of this writing, Thomas was waiting to hear if she would be announcing the 34th Annual Daytime Emmys in May and the 61st Annual Tony Awards in June.

“I’m doing something I love,” says Thomas. “The gift is unbelievable.” Of her ground-breaking achievements in a field dominated by men, she says, “I’ve been excited that I’ve been able to break barriers for women in my industry, and yet I’m shocked by that, that women are still not ‘right there’ with the men.” After manning the microphone at the world’s most famous award shows, what’s left for Thomas in terms of goals? “The one thing women have not really done,” she says. “There have been a few along the way, but no woman is doing trailers at the movie theater. ‘Coming in June 2007,’” she says, with explosive power.

Announcers are generally heard but

not seen. Perhaps the most famous voice-over artist of all time, Don LaFontaine, broke that barrier this year, appearing in a humorous ad for Geico insurance, doing his thing with a microphone behind a housewife at her kitchen table.

Thomas says the best voices, in her opinion, are warm, real, interesting, or distinct. She finds both Emma Thompson and Meryl Streep’s voices enthralling. We were hoping to call Thomas at home and get a recording, certain that she would have left it. “Actually, my daughter does it for us,” she says with a laugh. “It’s so cute. She’s also a voiceover artist.” The family’s youngest talent is pushing 10.

Thomas does record messages for telephones, for charity auctions. We can hear it now: “Live, from Gulf Harbour!”

Thomas, who moved to Southwest Florida four years ago from L.A. to raise her daughter in a nicer environment, admits she uses her “work voice” when she’s trying to get people’s attention, saying it does come in handy once in a while. “But I never take for granted what I do,” she says. “I always embrace my work and give it my best.”

Randy, we’ll be listening for you at the movie theater. 🐾

Libby Boren McMillan is a freelance writer for Times of the Islands.

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