

Hanging out with the 'medevac guys' Swooping in to save the wounded in Iraq

By JOHN CAMP

LSA ANACONDA/BALAD AIR FORCE BASE, IRAQ — Balad is a small American city of a specialized kind, with firemen, cooks, honey-wagon drivers, mailmen, mechanics, truckers, PR men, store clerks, security guards, gym rats, construction workers, video game freaks, bureaucrats, doctors, pharmacists and so on — and also jet-fighter jocks, chopper pilots, ordinance handlers, crew chiefs, medics and door gunners, the latter group earning the small-town “specialized” label.

But of all the groups and units at Balad, maybe the coolest is what the Army calls the C/7-101st Aviation Regiment, and everybody else calls the “medevac guys.” The medevac guys pretty much know that they’re the coolest, and other pilots, who are pretty cool themselves, will sometimes secretly admit that Charlie Company is pretty f—ing cool.

So cool that a couple of the pilots, who’d retired, re-enlisted on the condition that they fly with the medevac unit.

Like this: a couple of guys are out in the street throwing a football around, and company commander Capt. Michael Pouncey is loitering on the porch in front of the operations center, watching the football and chatting with his pilots and medics. He points at one of the guys and said, “He played wide receiver at Oregon State.”



MinnPost photo by ERIC BOWEN

Medivac pilot CW2 Jason Jakubecz unloading his equipment from 464 after a mission.

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Minnesota skaters should cut quite a figure at the national championships in St. Paul. Leading the pack is Rohene Ward who grew up in north Minneapolis and always makes a splash with spectacular jumps. **page 5**



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Bush's trip to Mideast filled with hope, then reality sets in

By DOUG STONE

President Bush returned home this week after his first trip to the Middle East where he had hoped to encourage the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, solidify U.S. allies against Iran and urge the Saudis to ease up on the price of oil by increasing production.

But he came back to Washington "mostly empty-handed, said several analysts and politicians throughout the region," reported McClatchy's Hannah Allam in the Seattle Times. "Arab critics deemed Bush's peace efforts unrealistic, his anti-Iran tirades dangerous, his praise of authoritarian governments disappointing and his defense of civil liberties ironic." (Allam, by the way, used to be a reporter at the St. Paul Pioneer Press.)

The president discovered that things change quickly in the Middle East and that events in real time sometimes affect the best-laid plans. A day after the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas met to rekindle talks begun last month in Annapolis, Israeli troops, responding to rocket attacks, entered the Gaza Strip and killed 19 Palestinians, most of them Hamas gunmen. A Palestinian sniper killed a farmer from Ecuador working on a Kibbutz in Israel. A number of Israelis were injured in rocket attacks. A day later three Palestinian civilians were also killed.

After two days of fierce fighting, Haaretz reported that the Israeli Defense Forces were willing to call off military action if Hamas stopped firing rockets into Israel.

But the renewed fighting had already threatened the peace talks, with Palestinian officials calling Israeli military action a "massacre." The Jerusalem Post quoted a Palestinian official as saying, "Israel is strengthening Hamas and undermining the credibility of the Palestinian Authority," which is based in the



By MOHAMMED SALEMN, Reuters
Palestinians in front of Hamas' Interior Ministry in Gaza after the building has hit today by an Israeli missile.

West Bank.

Hamas also said that Israeli raids into Gaza would jeopardize the chances for release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, whom Hamas has held captive since 2006.

Coalition government weaker

To further complicate matters, a right-wing member of Olmert's fragile coalition government, Avigdor Lieberman, quit the coalition, further weakening Olmert's position.

In Saudi Arabia, the president, despite announcing a \$20 billion military aid package, "faced difficulty in convincing his Saudi hosts to wholeheartedly support the twin pillars of his tour — greater backing for the Middle East peace process and a willingness to confront the 'threat' of Iran," wrote Aljazeera.

Maureen Dowd, in her inimitable style, put it this way in The New York Times:

"His [Bush's] message boiled down to: Iran bad, Israel good, Iraq doing better. Blessed is the peacemaker who comes bearing a \$30 million package of military aid for Israel and a \$20 billion package of Humvees and guided bombs for the Arabs. Like the slick Hollywood guy in 'Annie Hall' who has a notion that he wants to turn into a concept and

then develop into an idea, W. has resumed his mantra of having a vision that turns into freedom that could develop into global democracy."

The president himself maintained a sense of optimism about the trip and the prospects for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement before he leaves office a year from now. In an interview with ABC's "Nightline" from Saudi Arabia on Tuesday, Bush said: "I have talked to these leaders face to face. I have asked them point blank, 'Do you understand how difficult these issues are?' Yes. 'Are you prepared to make the painful political compromises?' They say they are."

'I view myself as peacemaker'

The president also said that he feels misunderstood in the Middle East.

"My image [is] 'Bush wants to fight Muslims.' And, yes, I'm concerned about it. Not because of me, personally. I'm concerned because I want most people to understand the great generosity and compassion of Americans.

"I'm sure people view me as a warmonger and I view myself as peacemaker," the president said. "They view me as so pro-Israeli, I can't be open-minded about Palestinian peace, and yet I'm the only president ever to have

articulated a two-state solution. And you just have to fight through stereotypes by actions."

And even some of his critics said they sensed a bit of change in Bush during the trip. Matthew Price, reporting for the BBC, said: "For many years I watched this president from afar while reporting from the Middle East. What has been interesting watching him up close is how, on occasion, his understanding of the issues has seemed far more nuanced than in the past. I spent four years talking to people who loathe the man... On this trip, though, there seems to have been a slight change. George W. Bush has appeared more balanced in his public statements."

Price concluded that "when Mr. Bush addressed staff at the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem I am told the president welled up with emotion as he spoke of the importance of what he was trying to do. He really believes in his strategy. Many will call that naive. A handful may call it visionary. The reality is that belief alone will not bring peace to the Middle East."

The success or lack thereof of such a presidential trip may not be known until weeks or months from now. In an open letter to Bush written before the trip, http://www.metimes.com/Opinion/2008/01/16/op-ed_dennis_ross/9414/ long-time peace negotiator Dennis Ross advised him to ask the Israelis and Palestinians "how they can be convinced to deal with the core issues of the conflict. By doing this, you can give the process you launched at Annapolis its best chance. It may, in fact, be your last one before the momentum you hoped to create is lost."

Doug Stone is director of College Relations at Macalester College in St. Paul and a former reporter for the Minneapolis Tribune and assistant news director at WCCO-TV. The views in this article are not those of Macalester College.

Study causing some chest pains over cholesterol drug

DR. CRAIG BOWRON

The real purpose of cholesterol-lowering medications like Lipitor is to reduce atherosclerosis, the buildup of cholesterol within the lining of blood vessels.

Since it's impractical to peek inside blood vessels to see how our treatment is going, we follow serum cholesterol levels instead. They're easy to check, and they've proved to be a reliable indicator for what's happening on the inside. Controlling A seems to lead to good outcome B.

That's why Monday's press release from Schering-Plough Pharmaceuticals, the manufacturer of the cholesterol medication Zetia, came as such a shock to physicians and to the millions of patients taking the drug. The company released data from a self-sponsored, two-year study that followed a group of patients with severe cholesterol problems. The patients took either simvastatin (the generic version of Zocor) or Vytorin, a combination drug produced by Merck that includes Zetia and simvastatin.

Both drugs showed powerful reductions in levels of LDL (the "bad" cholesterol), which fell 41 percent in the group on just simvastatin alone, and 58 percent for those taking the simvastatin/Zetia combination of Vytorin.

The shocker

But researchers also took serial ultrasound measurements of the thickness of atherosclerosis in the participants' carotid arteries, and that's where the surprise came. Despite the drop in LDL

levels, both groups showed a slight progression of their atherosclerosis, and those on the combination drug — the more powerful cholesterol-lowering medication — had twice as much thickening (0.8 percent on simvastatin vs. 1.6 percent on Vytorin).

That's not what Schering-Plough Pharmaceuticals or anyone else was expecting to find. But that's what had Dr. Kevin Graham's cell phone abuzz Tuesday. As director of preventive cardiology for the Minneapolis Heart Institute, Graham is a nationally recognized expert on cholesterol and heart disease.

No matter the caller, the question was, "Should patients stop taking Zetia?"

"No, I don't think so — not from what we know now," he told me. "The difference in arterial thickness between the two groups was not statistically significant, and besides, there's an inherent danger in changing your practice based on the release of an abstract [a brief summary of a study] like this. There's still a lot we don't know about the study details, and it's certainly not enough to overthrow four years of clinical experience with the drug."

Although the study was not designed specifically to measure clinical outcomes, Zetia users may be reassured that there were no appreciable differences in cardiovascular events such as heart attacks and strokes in study participants. "There are three large event trials under way involving Zetia, and those should

tell us a lot more about this issue," Graham added.

If cholesterol levels are a barometer for the process of atherosclerosis, could they be an imperfect one? Is it conceivable that a drug might lower cholesterol levels but have little effect on atherosclerosis?

"It's possible, but to this point there's been no big study showing that a lower LDL cholesterol doesn't lower the risk of atherosclerosis. This would be a first," he said. "We do know, however, that some cholesterol-lowering drugs like the statins [Lipitor, Crestor, Zocor] have atherosclerotic benefits that go beyond simply lowering cholesterol, what we call pleiotropic effects."

The statin drugs were designed only to lower cholesterol; all other effects are incidental, accidental, "pleiotropic."

To understand the pleiotropic effects of statins, one has to understand that atherosclerosis is far more than a plumbing problem. It's not just too much cholesterol clogging up the pipes. Various factors — smoking,

diabetes, high blood pressure, saturated fats — damage the lining of our blood vessels, causing inflammation and scarring. That's atherosclerosis. The pleiotropic effects of statins seem to include a soothing effect on the lining of our blood vessels, calming the inflammation.

While the cholesterol-lowering capabilities of these medications are well documented, there has always been the suggestion that some medications have stronger pleiotropic effects than others, i.e. their clinical benefits seem to outperform their cholesterol-lowering potency. If any of the preliminary data from this Zetia trial holds up, it may be that Zetia lacks pleiotropic prowess.

What to do in the meantime? We'll know more come March, when the full study is presented at the national American College of Cardiology meeting. That's six weeks away. The study ran for 104 weeks and there were no measurable differences in clinical outcomes over that

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Swooping in to save the wounded in Iraq

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Other guys are hanging out in the coffee shop, or watching TV in a plywood lounge, or just hanging around.

During this quiet time, a group of people gather in a plywood “coffee shop” to chat, and Pouncey mentions, in passing, that there was an IED — improvised explosive device — at the back of the room. A bomb disposal unit, he said, had had a man injured, and Charlie had flown him into the hospital. As a way of thanking the company, the bomb guys had sent them a disarmed IED as a trophy.

And it’s a strange looking thing — a big artillery shell with a small commercial walkie-talkie, like those used by Minnesota deer hunters, strapped to the top. Some circuitry tied the walkie-talkie to the artillery shell, and, in theory — and too often, in practice — when the walkie-talkie gets a call from a remote location, the shell explodes.

For all the casual talk and hanging-out, nobody goes too far from the operations center. They’re waiting, waiting...

A call and everyone’s running

Then a call come in, a plea for help, and a subset of the guys get a burp on the radios hanging from their pockets: “medevac medevac medevac” and everybody, it seems, starts running. One guy bursts out of the coffee shop and dashes toward the operations center, others grab gear and sprint toward the Blackhawk helicopters sitting on the flight line.

While other units will take several hours to brief and plan a mission, Charlie Company wants wheels-up — the chopper off the ground — in what Chief Warrant Officer 2 Mike Grieco calls, “the single-digits of minutes.” Essentially, Charlie is always briefed on the hostile threat situation, always knows the weather, is always loaded, is always ready to go.

On most days, the unit takes

several calls — sometimes, many calls.

On Monday, a call comes in at 1605 (4:05 in the afternoon) for an injury of some kind — at this point, almost nothing is known, except that the injury is serious — at FOB Warhorse. FOB means forward operating base (called “fobs,” to rhyme with “jobs”) and they are the pointy end of the military ground war in Iraq. So everybody starts running: the pilots run into the operations center to get the details of injured man’s location. Crew chiefs and medics run toward the Blackhawks; the run can be up to 300 yards or so, depending on how the aircraft are parked.

At 1613 or 1614, everybody is strapped in and the first chopper jumps off the ground, and then the second one, and they crank out over the airbase and over the wire, over a village and farm fields, past the fat green snake of the Tigris River, and low, so the individual clods of dirt are visible in the farm fields, and the hand-sized splotches on the black-and-white cows, and the face of the cowherd looking up; at one place, under a plume of smoke, fire snakes through the underbrush of a palm plantation; in another, a bunch of kids are playing soccer on a dirt field and pause to look up as the two Blackhawks sweep by.

Earlier, Capt. Pouncey, Capt. Nathan Forrester, Boddie, the medic, Chief Warrant Officer 4 John Patterson, and others, took the time to explain how the equipment and the system works. All of the men are permanently stationed at Fort Campbell, Ky., when not on rotation into Iraq.

The Blackhawks, technically UH-60s, are specifically set up to carry wounded men. Instead of normal seats, they have, installed across the midsection, a “carousel,” which is a turn-table device like a lazy susan.

Two litters are stacked vertically on each side of a central pivot post. The wounded are

loaded straight in from the side of the Blackhawk. If there’s only one man, he remains that way, lying across the midsection of the helicopter. If there are more, they are stacked, and then the carousel is pivoted from an across-the-aircraft configuration, to a position where the litters are parallel with the centerline. That allows the medic to move around both sides of the carousel, and take care of all the patients at once. Four injured people will fit on individual litters on the carousel, and if necessary, two more can be put on the floor under the carousel.

The medic does not do sophisticated medicine: his main job, Boddie said, is to control the bleeding and keep the airways clear. He has oxygen and suction equipment available, as well as a medical kit.

The Golden Hour

But, as Patterson explains, the unit’s main asset is speed.

“Doctors talk about the Golden Hour,” Patterson said. “If you can get a badly injured patient into a trauma center inside an hour, then the chances of a good recovery increase astronomically.”

Because of the inherent problems of operating in a war zone, the military can’t always make the hour — though they frequently do. When a man is badly injured, is unit is required to call for help within 10 minutes and to supply within that time a “9-line,” which is essentially a block of information (like location) that will allow the medevac unit to get to the patient as quickly as possible.

At the highest level, “urgent” missions, the standard is to get the injured person to the hospital within two hours. Urgent calls are those in which there is a danger to the victim’s life, limb or eyesight. At the next level down, there is a priority call. There, the standard is no more than four hours from injury to hospital.

There’s judgment involved

in all of this. Occasionally, Pouncey said, they’d had “urgent” calls, and when they arrive, the injured man walks out to the aircraft — the injury is overstated. On another actual occasion, he said, they’d gotten a “priority” call, and when they arrived, found two men with serious head injuries in what should have been an “urgent.”

“It didn’t make any difference, because we got there right away, but sometimes the judgment of the unit on the ground can be a little off,” he said. For that reason, if it’s not necessary to prioritize flights — if aircraft are immediately available — they move fast even on lower-level calls for help.

In addition to emergency missions, the medevac teams also move injured patients from smaller, outlying hospitals to Balad for further transfer onto hospitals in Germany or the United States and may transfer urgent supplies like blood to forward hospitals. (At the time of the mission Monday afternoon, three cases of whole blood, packed in dry ice, are sitting in the operations center, awaiting movement.)

When a mission goes out, Forrester said, the people back at the operations center keep up a continuing flow of information to the flying aircraft, particularly anything available about ground conditions — the enemy threat, and anything else that the pilots need to know. The pilots are also updated on any weather changes and any other flight operations in the area. As far as types of injuries, he said, “You name it, we’ve seen it.”

John Camp is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and best-selling novelist who writes under the pen name John Sandford. He can be reached at jcamp@minnpost.com.

Local fans' favorites

Minnesota skaters should cut quite a figure at national championships

By PAT BORZI

In the time it took Rohene Ward to hand the CD with his program music to an Xcel Energy Center worker and skate onto the ice, six people took seats about 15 rows up, at the end of the rink where one of the hockey goals is usually anchored.

They anticipated magic.

That's the effect the athletic, enigmatic Ward has on people. Of the eight Minnesotans who qualified for next week's U.S. Figure Skating Championships at Xcel in junior and senior events, the 24-year-old Ward is the one with the chance to make the biggest splash among the spectators, even if he doesn't come within 10 places of the senior men's medal stand.

Ward's spectacular jumps and undeniable charisma have long made him a crowd favorite. In this specially arranged practice session last month for six of the qualifiers, Ward stood out, and not just because he was the only skater of color in the house.

Minnesotan Rohene Ward likely to wow folks

Dressed in a gray sleeveless shirt and black tights to accentuate his muscular build, Ward stumbled trying to land a quadruple toe loop, the most difficult jump in his program. But otherwise, his speed and grace brought smiles to the faces of those watching, even several members of the event's media relations staff.

If you follow figure skating and have never heard of Ward, who grew up in North Minneapolis, there's an explanation. For a variety of reasons — a lack of maturity and shaky confidence, to name two — Ward has never excelled on a big stage, despite potential that persuaded Robin Wagner, who coached 2002 Olympic gold medalist Sarah Hughes, to train him for a short time. Ward washed out in two previous appearances at nationals, finishing 16th in 2004

and 17th in 2006. He failed to qualify in 2005 and again last season.

But after rededicating himself to training for more than a year, Ward secured a St. Paul berth with a strong second at the Midwestern Sectionals. Now, Ward feels primed to put on a show next week.

"You can expect a lot of energy," Ward said. "You can expect to have a good time, because I'm going to have a good time. My goal is to rock out and have fun."

For Ward and the rest of the Minnesota qualifiers, the championships, which begin Sunday and run through Jan. 27, should provide a glimpse into how much elite figure skating is progressing here.

Since 1952, Minnesota has sent only one figure skater to the Olympics, Minnetonka's Jill Trenary in 1988. And that came with an asterisk. Trenary moved to Colorado Springs, Colo., to train with the legendary Carlo Fassi, who helped turn Peggy Fleming and Dorothy Hamill into gold medalists and American icons.

State's coaching and training ranks stand out

It's far too early to say whether any of this year's Minnesota qualifiers will be in the mix for the 2010 or 2014 Games. But the success they've had, mainly at the novice and junior levels, indicates the kind of coaching and training available in clubs throughout the state.

"Figure skating is a big thing here," said Kirsten Olson, 16, of Savage, who qualified in junior ladies. "I don't think people really realize it here, if they aren't skaters. It's a completely different world."

(Perhaps you've seen Olson before. In the 2005 movie "Ice Princess," a Disney skating vehicle starring Joan Cusack and Kim Cattrall, she played little Nikki Fletcher, the so-called "jumping shrimp.")

The U.S. Figure Skating Association website lists 54 Minnesota clubs from all parts of the state, from Albert Lea to Thief River Falls to International Falls. Twenty-three are based within 50 miles of the Twin Cities, including Shattuck-St. Mary's, the boarding school in Faribault better known in athletic circles for producing such hockey players as Sidney Crosby and Zach Parise.

Five Minnesota clubs contributed to the national contingent — St. Paul, Braemar-City of Lakes, Duluth, Red River Valley and the Starlight Ice Dancing Club. Olson, who transferred from Shattuck-St. Mary's to Burnsville High for this school year, lists no club affiliation, while two others train with a fast-rising elite club in Ellerton, Fla., near Bradenton.

"It's not like one club has so many skaters," said Minnetonka's Alex Johnson, 17, the national novice men's runner-up in 2007 and this year's Midwestern Sectional junior champion. "Many clubs are getting where they have a few top skaters who compete at this level."

A few clubs even draw from out of state, the surest sign of an up-and-coming program. St. Paul Figure Skating Club director Ann Eidson says her organization, based at Pleasant Arena, has skaters from South Africa and England, as well as Alaska, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Iowa and Florida. Novice ladies qualifier Samiera Abou-Nasr is from Montana. But the club's brightest prospect lives within walking distance of the arena — 17-year-old Eliot Halverson, who won national novice and junior championships the last two years and will compete as a senior at nationals.

Three years ago, Shattuck hired nationally respected coach Diana Ronayne to start the figure skating program, the nation's first at a private boarding school. The 13 girls and two boys in the program come from as far away as Japan, Mexico and Mongolia. Ronayne, who formerly coached in Colorado Springs, is impressed

with what she sees from Minnesota clubs.

"To produce top-level figure skating, you need the right mixture of arena situations, where arena management and the figure-skating community work together," she said in a telephone interview. "And you have to have a qualified and interested coach to build skaters to that level. It's a real elusive combination." Ronayne said she sees that in several Minnesota clubs, among them St. Paul and Braemar.

Minnesota skaters root for each other

Minnesota's skaters are a tight-knit bunch, too, having built bonds at previous competitions. At the Xcel practice, Olson politely stopped an interview to take a cell phone call from Halverson, who was helping track down a misplaced camera. Johnson, a Braemar member, said the skaters generally ignore club affiliations and root for each other.

"It's really good," Johnson said. "When we go to competitions, it's like Minnesota pride."

"Pretty much all of the skaters from Minnesota are pretty good friends with each other," added Olson. "Most of us made it out of sectionals, which is great, just awesome. Last year, at (nationals in) Spokane, I think there was only one skater from Washington. We have a lot more than that."

A few could find themselves on the medal podium, too. In a sport where two or three points generally separate finalists, Johnson won his junior sectional by nearly 33 points. He could give Minnesota its second consecutive junior men's champion. In senior pairs, Moorhead's Mark Ladwig and his partner, Amanda Evora of Sugar Land, Texas, were fourth at nationals last year.

Read the complete story at www.minnpost.com.

Jazz takes the stage in CTC's 'Bud, Not Buddy'



PAMELA ESPELAND

Ten-year-old Bud Caldwell is a motherless child in search of his father during the Great Depression. Bud has pluck, hope and a battered suitcase full of clues to the family he longs to find: a handful of rocks with numbers written on them, a picture of his mama as a young girl, and a flyer advertising a performance by Herman E. Calloway and his jazz band – the Dusky Devastators of the Depression.

"Bud, Not Buddy," based on the award-winning book by Christopher Paul Curtis, opens this weekend at the Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis. Even though the play is not a musical, jazz runs through it as a theme and an original score by CTC resident composer and sound designer Victor Zupanc. (Reginald André Jackson adapted the Newbery Medal-winning book for stage.)

Zupanc, a three-time McKnight Fellow and a 2005 Bush Foundation Artist Fellow, has been the music director at CTC for 17 seasons. He worked closely with the play's director, Marion McClinton, an Obie winner, Tony nominee and renowned director of August Wilson's plays.

Jazz infuses music and cast

MinnPost spoke with Zupanc, winner of numerous awards, on his way home from a five-hour rehearsal.

Jazz informed more than the music – it also guided the cast. Zupanc explains: "Right off the bat, McClinton said, 'You guys need to figure out what instruments you are. This is a jazz play, and you are instruments. You need to learn about the characteristics of your instrument. That's how you do your lines. That's how you deliver. That's how you act.' It made sense to me. I was doing the same thing, literally, with the music."

For his research, Zupanc listened to music of the era: Billie Holiday, Coleman Hawkins, Lester Young. Familiar tunes emerge in his score: a swinging "No Place Like Home," bits of "God Bless the Child," Duke Ellington's "Mood Indigo."

Cole Porter's "You'd Be So Nice to Come Home To" brackets the play, during a tender mother-and-son dance near the beginning and as a complete performance by vocalist Regina Williams near the end.

Tuning into 'YouTube' for research

Were there any big discoveries during Zupanc's research and writing phase? "YouTube," he says. "I was able to go on YouTube and watch these people perform — Lester, Billie, Charlie Parker. I thought YouTube was all Hannah Montana and contemporary things, but there are thousands of clips of



By **ROB LEVINE**

Bud, played by Nathan Barlow, rides with the Dusky Devastators of the Depression in "Bud, Not Buddy," which opens this weekend at Children's Theatre Company.

early recording sessions."

The video website also helped the actors. "I was able to tell them, 'Check out YouTube and watch this trumpet player and that sax player. Look at how they act, notice their mannerisms.'" There's a magical scene late in the play where Shawn Hamilton, Samuel G. Roberson, Namir Smallwood, Kevin D. West, and Payton Woodson lift "instruments" shaped from wire, the music begins, they strike a pose, and it's real.

Most of the music was prerecorded by Zupanc on keyboard and percussion and Brian Grivna on reeds (saxophones and clarinet).

Grivna's jazz pedigree includes years with the Buddy Rich band and many performances at local clubs. Grivna, an adjunct faculty member at the University of Minnesota and former staff woodwind performer for the Guthrie, also plays for the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra and the Minnesota Orchestra. "He's the best," Zupanc says. "His wealth of experience is so deep, and he plays all the horns."

Performances by the luminous Regina Williams are live, not prerecorded. Like most other adults in the cast, Williams has multiple roles in "Bud, Not Buddy." In the first half of the play, she's an abusive mother in a foster home and a kind mother in a shantytown. In the second half, she's the singer for Calloway's band.

Williams, a local treasure, is a former Sounds of Blackness member and current company member of Penumbra Theatre. If you missed her brilliant star turn as Dinah Washington in Penumbra's musical drama

"Bud, Not Buddy" (for ages 9+)

- Children's Theatre Company, 2400 Third Ave. S., Minneapolis
- Now through Saturday, Feb. 16; matinees and evening performances (call or go online for times)
- \$22.50–\$37.50
- 612-874-0400
- www.childrenstheatre.org

"Dinah Was" in 2003, you can kick yourself now. "Working with her is a joy," says Zupanc. "She's a generous person and extremely talented."

Nathan Barlow, a junior at the St. Paul Conservatory for Performing Artists, carries most of the play's weight on his 16-year-old shoulders as Bud. A gifted young actor who has appeared in 11 previous CTC productions, he also plays the saxophone in his school band, which comes in handy during the final scene.

Zupanc enjoyed working on "Bud, Not Buddy," immersing himself in the music and laying down tracks in his home studio. "I'm a big fan of music of that era, and of jazz."

Which local jazz musicians does he enjoy? He doesn't get out to clubs as often as he would like -- a price one pays for working in theater. But when he does: "Brian Grivna, of course. Dennis Spears. Ginger Commodore. Debbie Duncan. And I think our resident genius is Adi Yeshaya. He's an amazing arranger and composer."

Global warming's pressing moral question



SHARON SCHMICKLE

A pressing moral question for these times came from the audience last week at a "Headliners" event, where experts meet monthly with the community on the University of Minnesota's St. Paul Campus.

Professor Deborah Swackhamer, featured expert for January, had been talking about some disturbing changes Minnesota could expect if greenhouse gas emissions aren't curbed and global warming continues apace. Swackhamer is interim director of the University's new Institute on the Environment.

As is true in most discussions of climate change, the talk called for crossing a certain time warp: We can't yet see the full effect of the impending change. We also can't see real benefits from steps we take to mitigate the problem. Both the dangers and the rewards belong to a future generation.

"We can't afford to wait," Swackhamer said. "We must make these changes now for our children to see an impact."

Then came the question from the back of the room.

"Is there any historical precedent for people making a large societal change when they don't, in fact, feel a crisis — when they don't see the bullet coming?" a man asked. "Is there any historical precedent for one generation deciding to be generous to its own children?"

Tough question. It calls to mind the federal deficit, delayed repair of roads and bridges, depletion of everything from fossil fuels to wild tuna.

We know the political rhetoric. But do we know how to collectively control our appetites and leave something for the future?

Actually, Swackhamer said there is precedent. During the 1980s, alarms sounded over ozone depletion. Chemicals used for solvents, refrigerants and many other applications were damaging the planet's ozone layer. Because the layer shields life on Earth from the sun's harmful radiation, dire consequences were predicted.

The chemicals, called chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), had been considered miracle creations, and companies had invested large sums in their use. But after much debate and finger pointing, industrialized nations began phasing them out in the 1990s.

By comparison, global warming is a far more complicated problem in that greenhouse gases are "emitted from so many quarters," Swackhamer said. Curbing them calls for sacrifice by everyone.

The stakes Swackhamer outlined in her talk include Minnesota's temperatures (higher), lake levels (lower), ice-out dates (earlier) and humidity (muggier — think tropical summers.)

Note: If you're reading this during the first cold snap of 2008, you'll have to let your imagination take you back to a 90-plus degree day last summer; the state is due for many more of them under Swackhamer's warming scenario.

Swackhamer's bottom-line summation is that Minnesota would become like Kansas.

"Am I cheering you up yet?" she asked the audience of about 200 people. They laughed nervously.

No one laughed when Swackhamer

described the implications. The state's famed lakes would host more algae, and some fish species would be threatened.

One profound change, she said, would be a shift in Minnesota's forests. The deciduous forests — maples, oaks and elms that grace the Twin Cities area — gradually would move north, leaving prairie grasslands to fill in behind. The stately conifers — spruce, fir, tamarack and some pines that define northern Minnesota's beauty — would disappear into Canada.

Expert opinion varies on whether Minnesota would see more or less precipitation in a warmer future. And the precipitation question plays into shifts of forest lines. But there is plenty of expert support for the scenario Swackhamer outlined.

Most of us know, by now, steps people could take to deflect that future. Swackhamer's list included: less driving, teleconferencing rather than flying to business meetings, switching to energy-efficient light bulbs, recycling, planting trees, turning heat down, urging elected officials to take the threat seriously and launch large-scale corrective efforts.

Many families already are well into the recycling and light bulb transition and some are buying energy-efficient vehicles. But we shouldn't fool ourselves about the scale of the change that is needed, Swackhamer said.

"You can't just change light bulbs and say, 'There, I've modified my behavior and fixed the problem,'" she said.

Which brings us back to the question: Is there any precedent for people making large-scale behavioral change when they don't see the bullet coming at them?

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COMMUNITY VOICES

Comments cover everything from Iraq and falling bridges to jazz trombones

Here's a recent selection of reader comments on Iraq, jazz trombones, falling bridges, saving downtown Minneapolis, politics and more:

David Gawboy had this observation on John Camp and Eric Bowen's Tuesday story from Iraq, "Mission Sadr City: Flying in on Blackhawks":

Some things change, and some things stay the same. This is especially true when it comes to military life. Except for the advanced technology, this could have been a story about a Vietnam, or even a Korean war mission. Good job.

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Susan Lesch commented on Steve Berg's Jan. 11 story, "Downtown Minneapolis is a retail under-achiever: Can these ideas bring shoppers back?":

Yes, transportation incentives would help, but I would start with something simple and inexpensive like bus schedules at every Nicollet Mall stop (I think they are only in the shelters now) rather than suggest a new light-rail line. Then I would add a bus stop at the new Central Public Library (who forgot that?). Then try staying open on Sundays.

Yesterday in a six-block walk I found about three stores open on the mall: Barnes & Noble, Macy's and Target. I saw a customer walk away from Neiman-Marcus (closed) and Walgreen's (closed), for starters. Who needs more stores if they aren't open?

Steve's story sparked this opinion from Douglas Fredlund:

When I was a child, I was raised to be a downtown shopper. While I still enjoy shopping

in the city, the biggest obstacle to my shopping downtown is the cost of parking. Stated simply, I will not pay to look, and I will not purchase unless I can see what I am buying. All the parking vouchers for a purchase in the world will not change that.

While all the suggestions from the experts provide a piece of the puzzle, cost and availability of parking needs to be elevated on their list of "stoppers" to retail vitality.

Paul Udstrand also weighed in:

I've traveled all over the world, and to many U.S. cities, and people in Minnesota just don't get one thing: Public transportation. Every vital city that I've ever been to has extensive, easy-to-use and inexpensive public transport into and within the city.

San Francisco has cool, old cable cars and street cars as well as an extensive bus and ferry system. Boston has commuter trains and subways. Amsterdam has really cool trollies. London has subways and double-decker buses that serve as cheap tour buses if you get on the correct route. When people come to a city to visit, they don't want to drive in traffic on unfamiliar streets, or pay for taxis to get everywhere. And people who live in and near cities don't want to drive in traffic and live in constant search of parking spots.

What we need in the Twin Cities is an extensive, easy to use and inexpensive public transport system that gets people downtown, and around downtown. Then people will go there, and shop and hang out. We keep building these ... stadiums and arenas downtown so traffic is ridiculous and parking on "event" nights is outrageously expensive — and there is no alternative. The idea of putting auto traffic back on

the mall is simply insane. If you want retail downtown to succeed, you need to get people down there and around there in the first place.

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Don Berryman trumpeted his appreciation of Pamela Espeland's Jan. 11 Current Post, "Trombones help beat the winter blahs":

Cool. Valves Meet Slide is a great band, Brad is a great valve player in the Bob Brookmeyer tradition and Dave Graf is a monster on slide. I hope Lucia Newell has a chance to sit in like she did last summer at the Artists Quarter. I'm looking forward to hearing them again.

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James Nordgaard had this to say about Sharon Schmickle's Sunday story, "University of Minnesota scientists create beating heart — and hope for people awaiting organ transplants":

I've read several articles on this story, and this was the best one written, overall; easily understandable with a lot of info. Thanks.

I heard the rat cells pumped at about 2 percent of normal capacity, but also that they injected the cells in only one site, and the cells migrated throughout the heart, though not equally. If the cells were injected in multiple places, there could be a large improvement.

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Adam Duinick had this comment on Britt Robson's Monday Current Post, "Bridging the transportation funding gap?":

I believe that the leadership and willingness to compromise were a part of the negotiations last spring. If you recall, the gas

tax amount was dropped from the original House and Senate bills. Furthermore, the modest final package was just over half of what Governor Pawlenty's Department of Transportation estimates is a \$1.7 billion funding gap.

The DFL caucuses have been willing to compromise and show leadership. Where are the House Republicans with the courage to tell the governor he is wrong and to do what's right for Minnesota?

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Bruce Kvam opined on Adam Graham-Silverman's Tuesday Current Post, "NTSB's findings on bridge collapse have political consequences":

Calling the bridge collapse a "design flaw" is, bluntly speaking, a lie. The bridge was not designed to support the traffic volume it eventually came to have. The design limits were further exceeded by the addition of hundreds of tons of construction materials.

The large traffic volume and construction project were conscious decisions made by the Pawlenty administration, and were not some random act of God. Members of MnDOT knew the bridge's design limits had been exceeded long ago and that the bridge was badly corroded. They were discussing engineering solutions to fix the problems.

The NTSB's announcement is blatant political cover for Tim Pawlenty.

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