

Artist's collection reflects colorful life, dance career

Artist Richard Maitland's life has been as colorful and exciting as one of his paintings. Although his roots are deep in New Mexico, he's traveled the world and worked with a veritable Who's Who of great entertainers.

Maitland's Rio Rancho home is jammed with antiques, work, trinkets, photos and collectibles he's been gathering since he was a child, reflecting his career as a dancer, teacher and artist in exotic places like Nepal, India and Bali. His "family archives" are ensconced in the master bathroom, a museum of mementoes from the far east in one bedroom, a photo gallery in another, religious art in a third, a collection of china and daguerrotypes in the kitchen and stacks of his art work in the garage.

"I call it the Smithsonian of the Southwest," explained Maitland, leading the way past a stained glass bathroom door from a Santa Fe bar and a cow skull with staring glass eyes and a bead necklace hanging on the closet door to the bedroom where his photo gallery hangs.

With a 1912 recording of Italian opera singer Amelita Galli-Curci playing on the windup Victrola he bought at an auction for \$45, ("It was made the same year I was") Maitland shows a closet full of scrapbooks and photo albums detailing his life from when he was born in Bisbee, Ariz. On one wall hangs autographed photographs of performers he worked with — Marilyn Monroe, Katharine Hepburn, Harpo Marx, Louis Armstrong, Marlene Dietrich, Greer Garson, Jimmy Durante.

Maitland was not the first in his family to have an exciting career. His grandfather Cooper performed in a minstrel company and his own "Cooper's Comedy Players" from which Maitland still has an 1888 program, brought the first Edison-gram to the New Mexico Territory to show moving pictures, was a marathon walker, as well as a postmaster, barber and organ player in Pinos Altos, N.M., where he staked a mining claim. Maitland still has a razor his grandfather owned that was used to shave Billy the Kid. In one bedroom, a old photograph of a handsome Cooper hangs next to that of his stunningly beautiful wife he married when she was 15 and he 42.

When he was about five, Maitland and his parents moved to San Francisco where he made his dancing debut as a Meglin Kiddie.

"Shirley Temple and Jane Withers were Meglin Kiddies, too, but I never performed with them," Maitland said. He began to study ballet when he was 16 and in 1943 was in his first road show, "The Merry Widow," choreographed by George Balanchine. In 1945 he went to New York where he received a scholarship to the American Ballet School and danced in "Anna and the King of Siam" which starred Irene Dunne.

Soon after he joined the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and performed in "Song of Norway" with a young Mitzi Gaynor all over the country. He went on to perform in "Brigadoon," both the stage and movie versions but ruefully noted of his movie career, "I usually ended up on the cutting room floor." After appearing in a movie starring Richard Burton, he went on to the

"I made them a lot of rupees so they couldn't throw me out," Maitland laughed. He also was a cabaret manager in Bombay.

"I introduced the twist to India," Maitland averred.

Maitland acted on a long-time interest and started painting while he was in India. He would have an exhibit of his works at places where he performed. Harriet Bunker, wife of Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, acquired one of his paintings in India, as did Jacqueline Kennedy.

A black-bordered thank-you note from the former first lady is dated June of 1964 and expresses her gratitude for the painting as a memento of her trip to India. (The painting was of two nuns in white tropical habits on a windy beach, Maitland recalled. "It was whimsical. I thought she'd like it.") Since former

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road company of "Call Me Madam" with Ethel Merman, to Broadway in "L'il Abner," and other movies, including "Oklahoma!" "Carousel" and "There's No Business Like Show Business," where he coached Marilyn Monroe in dance.

"I was a chorus boy, a movie gypsy... It was ungrateful work — you worked like mad and you didn't get paid much, but it was fun," Maitland noted.

He went on to Las Vegas and then to New York where he was told he would have a job in "Peter Pan" starring Mary Martin but that didn't work out. Instead, Maitland and a lady friend decided to go to Asia where he lived through a bandit attack on a train he was on, a military coup in Bangkok and attended a ballet rehearsal in Thailand with a prince descended from the famous King Mongkut of Siam.

Maitland fell in love with India and stayed there for six years. While there, he taught dancing to diplomats' children and organized an international children's dance theater. His visa was only for six months, but authorities let him stay because of the numerous charity benefits he staged for flood relief and leper homes. He performed a variety of exotic "character" dances like Indonesian, Javanese and Balinese as well as tap, ballet and jazz to audiences which included Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Mother Teresa.

first ladies don't have to pay postage, her signature is in the upper right hand corner of the envelope instead of a stamp.

Maitland finally decided to return to the United States, selling enough of his paintings to pay for passage on a freighter to San Diego. He lived in Los Angeles for a time, where he sold paintings to well-known people such as Beverly Sills, Jack Lemmon, Leontyne Price and Ralph Bellamy. Maitland moved to Santa Fe in 1964 where he continued to teach, perform and choreograph for local dance groups. He was also co-owner of a gallery for several years.

The expense of living in Santa Fe finally drove him to relocate in Rio Rancho last year, bringing with him his collection of antiques and artwork he had gathered over the years. Maitland's home is a museum of what he calls "organized clutter." He loves music and has a huge collection of old records and tapes of opera, ragtime, Dixieland, jazz — anything but rock.

"I abhor rock and roll. The kids next door tell me I'm an old fogie," he said.

Antiques and curios nestle next to artwork by Maitland and other artists, old and modern, on almost every square inch of wall and table space. Most of the items have an intriguing story of where or why he acquired it.

Because a fireplace in his house

would have been too expensive, Maitland fastened a graceful mantel to the living room wall and painted a trompe de l'oeil landscape inside. An antique bust and other exquisite pieces adorn the mantelpiece.

A Spanish church confessional with still-functioning sliding doors acts as a headboard alongside several pieces of religious art.

Many pieces from Maitland's collection he has incorporated into a series of whimsical and beautiful shadowboxes. The razor that shaved Billy the Kid is in a shadowbox along with pictures of Maitland's grandparents. Another shadowbox called "Across the Ditch" represents a brothel in turn-of-the-century Silver City and contains a piece of gilded wallpaper, French postcards and a wisp of black lace. Others contain vintage valentines, tiny sea shells, a signature and obituary of French sculptor Frederic Bartholdi who designed the Statue of Liberty, poetry, photographs and even toy clasps that date to before Christ.

A closet holds Maitland's collection of vintage children's books, including one illustrated by Maude Humphrey who used her son — a blond-haired, sailor-suited, dimpled young Humphrey Bogart — as a model.

In one of the bathrooms hangs a picture of a Victorian toddler he has embellished with seashells and calls "Undine as a Child" alongside a terra-cotta statue of a mother fox in a dress and her child which came originally from a beer garden in Los Angeles and now holds hand towels. The statue came to Maitland after two interior decorators wrecked a Volkswagen bug they were going to buy from him and traded him some antiques instead. A startled friend visiting from California came out of the bathroom and told him the figure had been stolen from his yard years before. Maitland traded him a painting for it.

A chair in the dining room is actually a gondola chair that belonged to a Wagnerian German opera singer.

"It's obvious she never sat in it — she weighed about 300 pounds," observed Maitland, eyeing its graceful, but narrow, velvet-covered seat. The singer later went on to perform in vaudeville and made records touting the benefits of Gerber baby food, he added.

The dining room also holds art deco, art nouveau, Bohemian and Tiffany glass pieces while Maitland's collection of blue and white Staffordshire china decorate the kitchen walls. An old wooden



Richard Maitland

cabinet contains daguerrotypes.

Even the garage and laundry room contain Maitland's own works. A painting of Nijinski and Pavlova leans against the washer, waiting to be sent to a buyer. On the garage walls are several of his paintings. "The Changeling" was inspired by "A Midsummer Night's Dream" while "Santa Fe Party" portrays a group of people dancing on a box

car in a field of grain while a little naked man, that Maitland said is himself, sits on the other end peering out over the landscape to the deep blue sky.

I don't buy any more. I don't have room," Maitland lamented. "I need a home with a hundred rooms. But then I'd probably start buying things again and fill them up."

Story and photo by Mary Beth King