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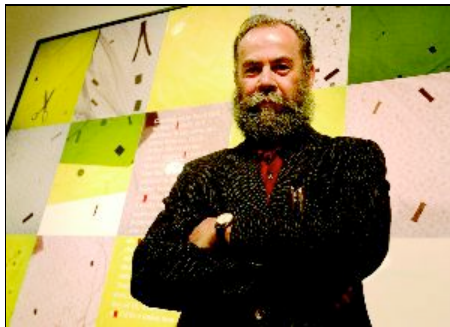
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**Mill life**

Composer, artist weave together 'A Piedmont Rhapsody' of sounds & sights of lost culture

By Shannon Greene The Herald  
Touring a working textile mill means loud looms, clanking spinners, lumps of fibers scattered about and busy bodies buzzing around. But Charlotte composer David Crowe heard music. And Rock Hill artist Phil Moody saw art.



Tracy Smith-Kimball • The Herald

The two have woven together a special project, two years in the making, that commemorates this lost lifestyle.

Phil Moody, artist and photography instructor at Winthrop University, made photograms with cloth found in former textile mills, photographs and interviews from former employees to make tiled images. The art is on display at The Light Factory in Charlotte.

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"Mill Village: A Piedmont

Rhapsody," written by Crowe, captures the essence of mill life through music -- from the rise of an industry to the generations of dedicated workers to the massive layoffs and closings. The work will be performed Sunday by the Charlotte Symphony Chamber Ensemble at The Freedom Center in Rock Hill.

Coinciding with the music is Moody's "Textile Towns" art exhibit at The Light Factory in Charlotte. The work, which will travel to Rock Hill later this year, illustrates industry changes through collages of old photographs, text, fabric and the use of vivid colors. Moody, a Winthrop University professor of art and design, will present a slide show Sunday before the ensemble work.

The concert is part of a two-year initiative to connect the community to music, said Susan Miville, director of education for the Charlotte Symphony Orchestra. She said symphony officials commissioned Crowe to create a chamber piece that reflects an aspect of society.

"At one time, we had such a strong and vibrant textile industry in the region," Miville said. "We wanted to give the community an in-depth exposure to this through music to make it more meaningful."

But it was no small task.

"It was particularly challenging because I'm not a native of this area," said Crowe, a New York transplant. "I had to completely immerse myself in mill culture."

Crowe and a group of symphony educators spent more than two years researching mill life. They attended seminars at the Levine Museum of the New South in Charlotte and collected oral histories from people who lived in mill towns.

The group learned these were simple, everyday people. Many came from the mountains and agricultural parts of the region in search of a

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better life. They lived in moderate homes in mill villages, much like the downtown Fort Mill area. And many children followed in their parents' footsteps as mill workers.

It was the only option for people without higher education, said Deborah Heintz, executive director of the Arts Council of Rock Hill and York County, which is presenting Sunday's concert.

Heintz knows a thing or two about mill life. Her father, a farmer, got his first job fixing machinery at a mill in Mount Pleasant, N.C. She watched him move up to a day shift and take on responsibility until he earned a management position.

Then came outsourcing and technological advancements. Massive layoffs and textile plant closings followed.

Fortunately, Heintz's father's retirement coincided with his plant's closing, but not everyone is as lucky. "When the mills started closing, it was an end of an era," Heintz said.

Not all plants closed. Some, like Clover Knits, diversified business and upgraded equipment to stay open. It was still a change of life, said Kevin McCarter, a second-generation textile worker who co-owns Clover Knits with his brother. They bought the business from their father, but McCarter doesn't expect his children to take over.

"The evolution of manufacturing in the U.S. is changing," said McCarter, who gave Crowe and Moody tours of Clover Knits for their research. "It's inevitable with free trade. That's just reality."

Crowe heard dozens of similar stories. He visited other working mills across the region and documented the sounds he heard.

"I listened to these sounds over and over until I started hearing patterns," he said. "I heard all these layers of sound, constant spectrums -- like the ca-chung, ca-chung, ca-chung, ca-chung of a weave room -- and I'd assign that sound to an instrument."

After months of research, it took just 10 weeks to compose "Mill Village: A Piedmont Rhapsody."

The piece opens with an empty stage. One by one, the musicians join each other and weave their instrument's sound into the work. "It's a metaphor for people from all walks of life coming together to work at these mills," Crowe said.

The focus of the second section is life in old mill towns. The ensemble plays background music while a narrator reads descriptions of mill life, accompanied by a DVD showing old photos and videos of mill villages. Then the ensemble portrays the sounds of mill life, from factory whistles to happy children playing to brass bands in a mill village church.

"We're not trying to imitate these exact sounds," Crowe said. "We just want to give a sense of what it was like."

The final section is more somber.

"It's what we're looking at now -- people losing jobs and towns closing down," he said.

The musicians leave the stage as they arrived. An emptiness is left in the room.

Crowe hopes to move people. He wants to stir memories and emotions for those who lived in mill towns or worked in the textile industry. He wants to share history with those who didn't.

So does Moody.

"Textile Towns" is a culmination of two decades of studies for the Scotland native. He started photographing mill towns when he moved to Rock Hill 20 years ago and said the industry was "quite unique."

"It was obviously something that formed the culture and landscape of an entire community," he said.

But Moody's project changed over the years.

"When I started out, it was a very positive project," the artist said. "I thought I was dealing with the dominant force of the area. But the past few years has been more about closings, mass layoffs and changes in lives."

"Textile Towns" reflects both aspects.

On one 6-by-6 foot tiled image, grafted together like a family tree, Moody chronicles three generations of mill workers from the Brakefield

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clan of Rock Hill. Family photos are centered on powder blue, white and gray panels. And text runs down the center to describe everyday life of a mill family.

On another piece, Moody illustrates a joyful holiday season at Rock Hill's Bleachery, once the city's largest employer, when the mill gave toys to workers' children. The checkerboard collage includes old tinted photos from Christmas parties and silhouetted images of toys. The text reads: "The Bleachery's Christmas party was the mill's gift to Rock Hill. Each bag of cheap toys entered into the hearts of children to become the memories of adults."

The joy is quickly contrasted with feelings of loss from the sale of property owned by a mill to developers, who replaced about 60 mill homes with upscale condos as economics shifted from textiles to tourism.

Moody was flooded with emotions as he worked on the exhibit.

"I felt a mixture of regret for these workers, because their lives have been radically upset," he said. "And there's also a sadness that we've, as a society, become more focused on cheap goods."

Moody didn't create the work to evoke feelings of anger or blame. He just wants to provide a greater understanding of the textile transitions in the community.

"I wanted to honor their contribution," he said. "We'd still be fields and cow pastures without this rich past. Rock Hill and York County is what it is today because of the textile industry."

Shannon Greene • 329-4076

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#### WANT TO GO?

**What:** The Charlotte Symphony Chamber Ensemble's "Mill Village: A Piedmont Rhapsody," presented by the Arts Council of Rock Hill and York County.

**When:** 6:30 p.m. lecture and 7 p.m. concert, Sunday

**Where:** The Freedom Center, 215 E. Main St., Rock Hill

**Cost:** \$5

**Details:** 328-2787 or 327-7888

**Also:** Other performances include 3 p.m. April 23 during The Cotton Mill Reunion and Convention, A.L. Brown High School Auditorium, 415 E. First St., Kannapolis, N.C., and 2 p.m. May 15 at The Mint Museum, 2730 Randolph Road, Charlotte.

**Art exhibit:** "Textile Towns," runs through May 12 at The Light Factory, 345 College St., uptown Charlotte.

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