

CHICAGO  
Sunday Show

**SYMPHONY CENTER** A concert series guides us through six regions of America, highlighted by Marshall Crenshaw's overview of the rock and soul of Detroit

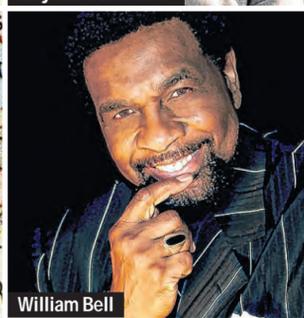
# A tour of Sites & sounds



Marshall Crenshaw



Alejandro Escovedo



William Bell



Donald Harrison Jr.



Suzanne Vega



## Chicago's next hub of hilarity?

COMEDY | The Laugh Factory braves a city where many clubs fell

BY MIKE THOMAS

Staff Reporter/mthomas@suntimes.com

Does anybody remember laughter? Specifically, the laughter that once emanated from a thousand comedy caverns and chuckle huts that dotted Chicago's downtown and North Side in the '80s and '90s?

All right, it wasn't a thousand, but there were lots. Top destinations included Byfield's, the Comedy Cottage, the Chicago Improvisation, the Funny Firm, Catch a Rising Star, Chaplin's (which vanished in mere weeks) and Zanies. From 1991 to 1998, All Jokes Aside gained national notice and ruled the South Loop.

And then — not overnight but quickly — it was over. Virtually every comedy club that had sprouted during the boom withered when supply outpaced demand and would-be patrons increasingly opted for other entertainment alternatives. An overabundance of mirthless hacks and free (or discounted) tickets didn't help matters. Neither did the burgeoning popularity of improv, which now dominates the local comedy scene and attracts students of the centuries-old art form from near and far.

In the end, only Zanies in Old Town remained as the city's sole full-time punchline palace. And despite the presence of a cavernous improv franchise in Schaumburg, the two-decade-old (and recently relocated) Riddles Comedy Club in Alsip and the 2006 emergence of Jokes & Notes in Bronzeville — a 150-seat, five-day-a-week space that bills itself as "the only African-American

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BY DAVE HOEKSTRA  
Staff Reporter/dhoekstra@suntimes.com

The beautiful irony of travel is how it stops in time. Singer-songwriter Marshall Crenshaw can still see the afternoon dance show "Swingin' Time with Robin Seymour" from his Detroit youth. The high-octane Seymour introduces the Hollies' jangly hit "Bus Stop," and nearly 75 teenagers start dancing. Like a black-and-white postcard, that moment sends Crenshaw back to August 1966.

"They put the camera on these black girls and they're singing along to 'Bus Stop!'" Crenshaw said after pulling over on a drive to a gig in St. Louis. "They know all the words. What a different time period it was. It was almost a cohesive community in the Detroit area. That all blew all apart during the late '60s. It was always bubbling under the surface and then it happened. Things became stratified."

Crenshaw, best known for his 1982 hit "Someday, Someway," is musical director for the Detroit chapter of Symphony Center's ambitious "United Sounds of America," which spotlights six distinct musical regions.

The series kicks off Friday with Suzanne Vega's New York tribute, which includes



Arlo Guthrie



singer-songwriter Richard Julian on guitar and Chicago ringer Kurt Elling on vocals. The New York segment begins in the Roaring Twenties and spins through Duke Ellington and Frank Sinatra while also featuring Chicago native Tom Paxton in a set dedicated to the New York folk scene of the 1950s and '60s.

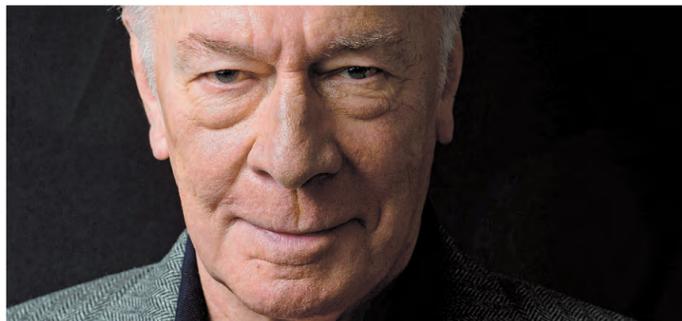
The timeless Route 66 is celebrated Saturday when Arlo Guthrie's posse features vocalist Eliza Gilkyson and singer-songwriters Vance Gilbert and Chris Smither — although the historic roots scene of Springfield, Mo., should have been included with Brenda Lee, the Skeletons and Wayne Carson, who wrote "The Letter."

The deep heritage of New Orleans is honored June 12 with the national touring project "A Night in Treme (The Musical Majesty of New Orleans)" with the Rebirth Brass Band, alto saxophonist Donald Harrison Jr., trumpeter James Andrews and others in a performance narrated by Wendell Pierce, star of HBO's "Treme."

A sure-to-be-sultry June 16 session honors Memphis, where Kirk Whalum performs with Stax-Volt legend William Bell in a rare Chicago appearance and the New Memphis Horns,

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## Not quite one of his favorite things



Actor Christopher Plummer, 81, says retirement isn't in the cards. | CHARLES SYKES-AP

MOVIES | Von Trapp a bit of a trap for Plummer

BY CINDY PEARLMAN

Raindrops on roses. Whiskers on kittens. Bah humbug, says Christopher Plummer.

Of course, he has the inside track silver white winters that melt into springs — but Capt. Von Trapp himself has always had "an issue" with the screen classic.

At age 81, he's tired of being stalked. By a movie. "I don't hate that film, but it follows me around. That's the problem," he says.

On a sunny spring afternoon, the Oscar nominee is talking about his screen classic "The Sound of Music," where he famously played the stern father.

"There's nothing I detest about it," he says. "I mean, it's a very well-made film."

"But a musical is not always my cup of tea. It always brings the house down when I say those words," he says. "Sure, I may say a few other off-color remarks every now and then about 'Sound of Music,' too."

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