

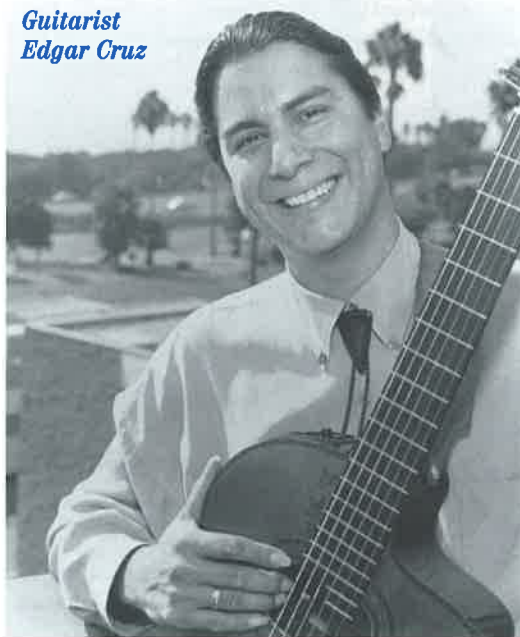


by Alicia Monroe

Oklahoma Artists *Finding Success in their Hometown*

Three artists born and raised in Oklahoma City have found success without moving to the Big Apple or Tinseltown. Solo guitarist Edgar Cruz '86 manages his international career, which includes hundreds of performances every year, from the comforts of his hometown. Former student Belle Melvin Dickerson's paintings have donned the walls of many local art galleries, and Rosemary Eckroat Bachle '94 is the author of "Women's War Memoirs," a recently-published book packed with intimate glimpses of a hidden corner of women's history.

**Guitarist
Edgar Cruz**



Edgar Cruz

When Cruz came to study guitar at Oklahoma City University he was not a novice, but rather a budding musician. He began playing the guitar at the age of 14, and by the time he was 16 he was playing the Mexican bass with his father, Manuel Cruz II, who has been performing at Oklahoma City restaurants for more than four decades.

"Unequipped with an extensive repertoire, I would sit down with my father's guitar during breaks and slowly work up some of those popular songs I knew I needed to learn eventually in order to work as a solo guitarist. One night during our regular engagement my father was needed at a private function and asked if I would like to stroll the restaurant myself — my first big career break. I remember walking to the first table

prepared to play any of the 20 songs I had memorized. I asked those sitting at the table what they wanted to hear and, like most, they responded 'Play whatever you like.' I believe I selected 'If I Were a Rich Man.' The next thing I knew, I was handed my first tip, a \$5 bill. This was quite a salary increase compared to the \$3-an-hour job I had at the local cafeteria washing dishes and mopping floors. It was then I knew my career was off to a great start."

After attending a couple of other colleges in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area, Cruz transferred to OCU on the String Bass Scholarship and earned a bachelor of music degree in guitar performance.



“Those three years of studying at Oklahoma City University were vital to my abilities — how I play today and how I am able to execute my arrangements,” he said. “The knowledge I gained there under the direction of [Guitar Instructor] Michael Millard helped me to build up my concert list or repertoire.”

Today he performs, arranges, publishes, records, distributes and markets his music on a full-time basis. Besides performing throughout Oklahoma, much of his time is spent touring colleges, universities, festivals, conventions, and corporate and private performances throughout the United States, Europe and South America.

His repertoire now consists of more than 400 songs, mostly popular requests and his own personal favorites. He has recorded six albums and sells thousands annually.

In 1991 he placed second in the 20th Annual National Guitar Fingerpicking Championships, held in Winfield, Kan. The “Oklahoma Gazette” named him Best Acoustic Guitarist three years in a row.

Cruz has been featured frequently on ABC, NBC, CBS and PBS-affiliate television and cable stations as well as in “Guitar Player,” “Acoustic Guitar,” “Fingerstyle Guitar” and many other worldwide publications.

His brother, Mark Anthony Cruz '87, followed in his footsteps as an OCU guitar graduate and a successful performer. Mark Anthony returned to OCU as a guitar instructor for several years in the 1990s after earning a master's degree at Southwestern Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. He recently released his fourth album “Hymnody,” a collection of inspirational hymns and gospel pieces for solo classical guitar.

Cruz and his wife, Danielle, have one daughter, Sadie Lee, who will celebrate her first birthday in March. His seventh album, a Latin collection, is scheduled to be released this spring.

This album is one he has been looking forward to for quite some time. It presented a long-awaited opportunity for his older brother, Manuel Cruz III, to provide the artwork. It also allowed the Hispanic-American musician to carry on his heritage.

“Latin music is in my blood. This album will be as much of me as I can give.”

Belle Melvin Dickerson

Dickerson has painted landscapes in Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona; however, she continues to return to

the red clay of Oklahoma. Her plein-air art work captures the unique beauty of the countryside in and around Oklahoma City with an understated elegance similar to the work of Montana painter Russell Chatham.

Plein-air painting refers to a movement in art that originated in France in about 1870. It involves rendering effects of atmosphere and light in nature rather than in the artificial light of studios.

According to Dickerson, the process of taking the easel outdoors and painting from nature is unique because it is simple.

“I capture enough information with composition and get basic colors outside, then take the painting into the studio for the finishing touches. This enables me to portray the feeling of



Belle Melvin Dickerson practices the art of plein-air painting.

the subject and what the light is doing — something spontaneous rather than just detail.”

She still uses the drawing techniques she learned from Hulsey Gallery Director and Art Professor Brunel Faris while she attended OCU in the 1970s, taking art courses at night while her husband was home to care for their two children.

“He’s probably the best teacher I’ve ever had,” she said of Faris. “Our styles were very different. His paintings were abstract and contemporary while my direction was toward realism. Yet he was still able to convey the basics, and in advanced painting classes where we had many different styles he managed to guide each of us. I try to apply that principle when teaching my students, helping them to develop styles of their own.”

Eager to bring out the budding artists in students of all ages, Dickerson teaches oil painting for the Bethany High School Continuing Education program. She also is hoping to



begin teaching a few students at the studio in her home in Edmond, Okla., where she lives with her husband Bill, a retired engineer.

The artist recently studied with fellow plein-air painters Scott Christensen at The Fechin Institute at the Branham Ranch in New Mexico and Clyde Aspevig at the Loveland Art Institute in Colorado.

An active member of the Oklahoma Art Guild, she has held several offices, including president and show chairman. She was the featured speaker at the McDowell Institute's 75th Anniversary Meeting in 1995.

Her art work has been exhibited throughout the metropolitan area, including the Nichols Hills Plaza Art Festival, Paseo Arts Festival, Edmond Art Festival, Canterbury Arts Festival, Guthrie Arts Festival, The Backdoor Gallery and the annual Tri-Delts Art Show. She also has been featured as guest artist at the Hanging Gallery at 50 Penn Place and as part of a two-person art show held at the Omniplex. She is represented by Pickard Art Gallery and has work on display at Heenans Home Furnishings.

Rosemary Eckroat Bachle

Bachle began writing poetry as soon as she was old enough to write. Her love for writing evolved over the years, leading to the publication of her most recent book and the one of which she is most proud, "Women's War Memoirs."

Bachle attended Oklahoma City University in the late 1930s with dreams of becoming an opera singer. This dream was cut short when World War II interrupted her college education. Rather than returning to school a few years later, she followed another dream — she married and started a family. After providing an education for each of her six children, including daughter Laura Denise (Bachle) Stevens '83, she decided it was her turn. Five decades later she returned to OCU, participating in the PL+US program (Prior Learning + University Studies).

"I took a history class with Christiane Faris [professor of modern languages]. I never cared much for history in high school, but I became very interested in history with the way Christiane taught. This is one of the reasons I decided to study more about World War II," she said.

Her interest in the war led her to enroll in a war memoir class at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, Okla.

"We had 15 books to read, all written by men about men. Not a single story was about a woman and that made me kind of

irritated," she said of the reading list for the class at UCO.

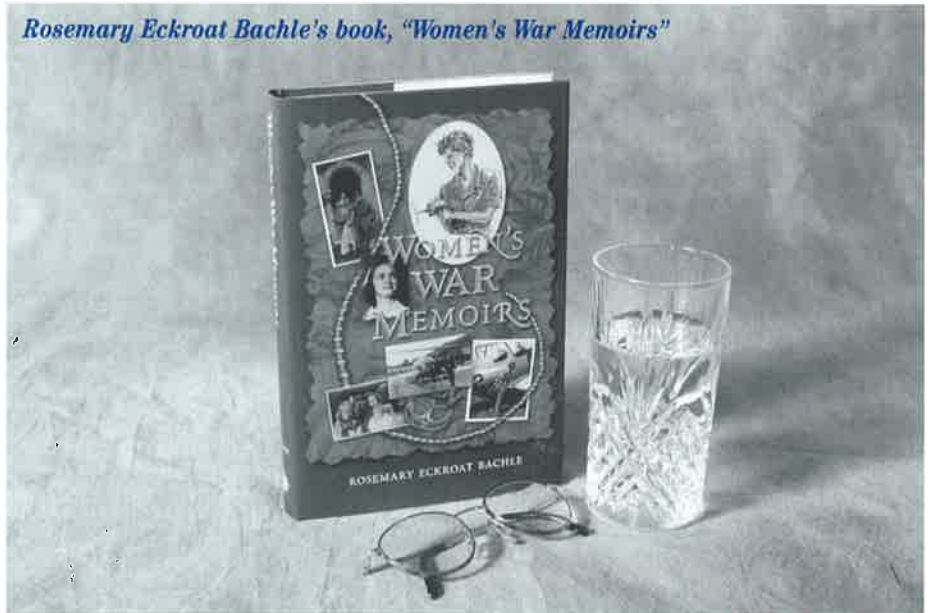
Thus the idea for "Women's War Memoirs" was born. She began soliciting names of women who served in World War II and women who were affected on the home front, eventually collecting the names and stories of more women than she was able to include in the book.

"Writing this book, I have made more friends than I ever would have imagined," she said. "The whole thing has been a beautiful travel for me."

"Women's War Memoirs" is entered in the competition for the Center for the Books Award, recognition for a book written by an Oklahoman about Oklahomans which will be awarded in March.

Bachle is a published poet and author of a narrative love story entitled "Pour the Wine." Her advice on journal writing is featured in a textbook, "Write From the Start, Process and

Rosemary Eckroat Bachle's book, "Women's War Memoirs"



Practice," by Mary Ann Peters.

She is a member of the Oriental Brushwork Society of America, Pen Women of America in both Arts and Letters, Oklahoma City Writers, Oklahoma Writers Federation Inc., the Poetry Society of Oklahoma and the OCU Societies, among others. She belongs to several social clubs and sings in the choir at Christ the King Church in Oklahoma City.

A realtor for more than 40 years, she is the owner of Bachle Realty in Oklahoma City and a member of the Oklahoma City Metropolitan Board of Realtors and the National Association of Realtors. She was one of the first women to earn the coveted Certified Residential Broker Degree in Real Estate in Oklahoma.

Along with her husband, Leonard, she also owns Bachle Fireplace Equipment, a third-generation family business in Oklahoma City. In addition to six children, they have 13 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.