

## THIN TOWN

**Milwaukee Video Postcard:** If Milwaukee's fairy godmother had conjured up the most appealing image of this city, chances are it wouldn't look too different from Karen Schoenung's four-minute "video postcard." A snappy soundtrack, an annoying intermittent graphic and lightning-fast shots of local icons give you a portrait of Milwaukee that looks so... perfect: There's racial harmony, of course, and no one is fat in the land of beer and brats. An additional 15 minutes of blank footage lets you add custom footage of your choice, to mail off to out-of-towners. If you love this city, warts and all, it's sterile, but as promotional *uber-hype*, it's a masterpiece. About \$10 at Webster's, Audubon Court Books Ltd. and Marquette University's Book Marq. (Amy Waldman)

## BETTER BUTTER

**Nikki's Butter Cookies:** Wisconsin cows adorn the boxes of goodies sold by former model Nikki Taylor, signifying the 41 percent butter content of her rich, crisp cookies. Taylor sells plain butter, pecan, amaretto, English toffee and chocolate chip cookies (heavier on butter than chocolate), but her real inspiration came when she flavored a batch of cookies with Key lime juice. Awarded the equivalent of an Oscar for edibles by the National Association of the Specialty Food



Nikki's Cookies: 41 percent butter!

Trade last year, Nikki's Key Lime Butter Cookies (as well as the other flavors) sell for \$3 to \$6 for a 6.2-ounce box at Larry's Brown Deer Market, Sendik's and V. Richard's. (Lucy Saunders)

## REALLY BIG SHOW

**Die Walkure** (November 13-17): One could nuzzle about the Florentine Opera's production of this massive, mythic Wagner masterpiece: It was the kind of old-style grand opera where you concentrated on the vocal emoting because the physical acting was so stodgy and mannered. But what spectacular sets! And especially, what singing! Particularly memorable were Gary Bachlund as Siegmund and Johanna Meier as Brünnhilde, but the entire cast was strong and the whole production captured the atmosphere and power of this awesome, four-hour



UWM's new sculpture: 30 percent cement.

opera. Credit general director Dennis Hanthorn, who's been (thankfully) broadening the Florentine's repertoire, for taking on such a daunting work. (Bruce Murphy)

## JAZZ ON WRY

Despite the tongue-in-cheek name, don't write off **The Moes** as just a joke. Singer Billy Staffaroni (also frontman for the rock band Big Bang) teams up with promising saxophonist Jason Todd (from the defunct Wild Kingdom) and fine young jazz musicians Ricky Germanson (piano), Mike Schlick (drums) and Jeff Hammond (bass) to offer an entertaining survey course in '50s jazz. Wearing baggy pleated trousers and bright neckties, The Moes not only outdress contemporary lounge lizards, but cover better tunes. Although Staffaroni is a limited vocalist, his gruff phrasing can be effective on some songs, and the instrumentalists generally are strong. The Moes perform every Thursday at The Estate (2423 N. Murray Ave.), drawing an unusual mixture of beboppers and alternative rockers. (Dave Lührssen)

## PILE OF SMILES

**"Happy-Go-Luckies of Nature and Technology":** Yes, that's actually the title of the new sculpture installed near the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's recently completed Lapham Hall. Guido Brink's artwork is certainly better than its title. The bright-red, good-natured abstract piece feels somewhat representational, becoming a moving presence in the wind: Its almost-human figures seem to dance, a mirror-like circle spins and little arrows and balls bounce in the breeze. But the sculpture's dominant

image is its outsized cement pedestal, which takes up nearly one-third of its height. The whole thing ends up feeling rather cheap and attenuated, with a made-to-order cheeriness that doesn't stick in the mind – or the heart. (B.M.)

## COZY CAFE

**Webster's** (2532 E. Oklahoma Ave.): As no great fans of the original East Side bookstore and cafe, we entered the second installment with some leers. Refreshingly, however, this is Webster's on a *much* cozier scale – sans the irritating staff but with fewer bookshelves (the new location incorporates an adjacent flower and gift shop). Though the selection isn't much to speak of (some books for kids and gardeners, classics, fiction and non-fiction, magazines and greeting cards) and the baked goods we sampled were stale, we appreciated the store's unpretentious, browser-friendly atmosphere. Bay View's quieter version of Webster's is a suitable spot to sip cappuccino and peacefully peruse a book. (Ann Christenson)

## FAMILY VALUES

**Pleasant Dreams** (November 4-15): Theatre X veteran John Schneider's revised version of his 1982 script is not quite a complete play, more a playlet. The interludes of live music by pianist Connie Grauer, while atmospheric, slowed the drama's momentum. And Jim Matson's funky set seemed wrong for the suburban setting it aims to suggest. But Schneider's darkly humorous dialogue has bite and his chilling vision of an American family boasts some vibrant characters: the sadistic older brother (played by John Kishline), his long-suffering wife (Flora Coker) and self-pitying asthmatic sibling (Rip Tenor) – all brilliantly performed. Such razor-sharp, contemporary characterizations are what continue to make Theatre X a unique Milwaukee asset. (B.M.)



The Florentine's *Die Walkure*: 100 percent grand opera.