

# HOUR

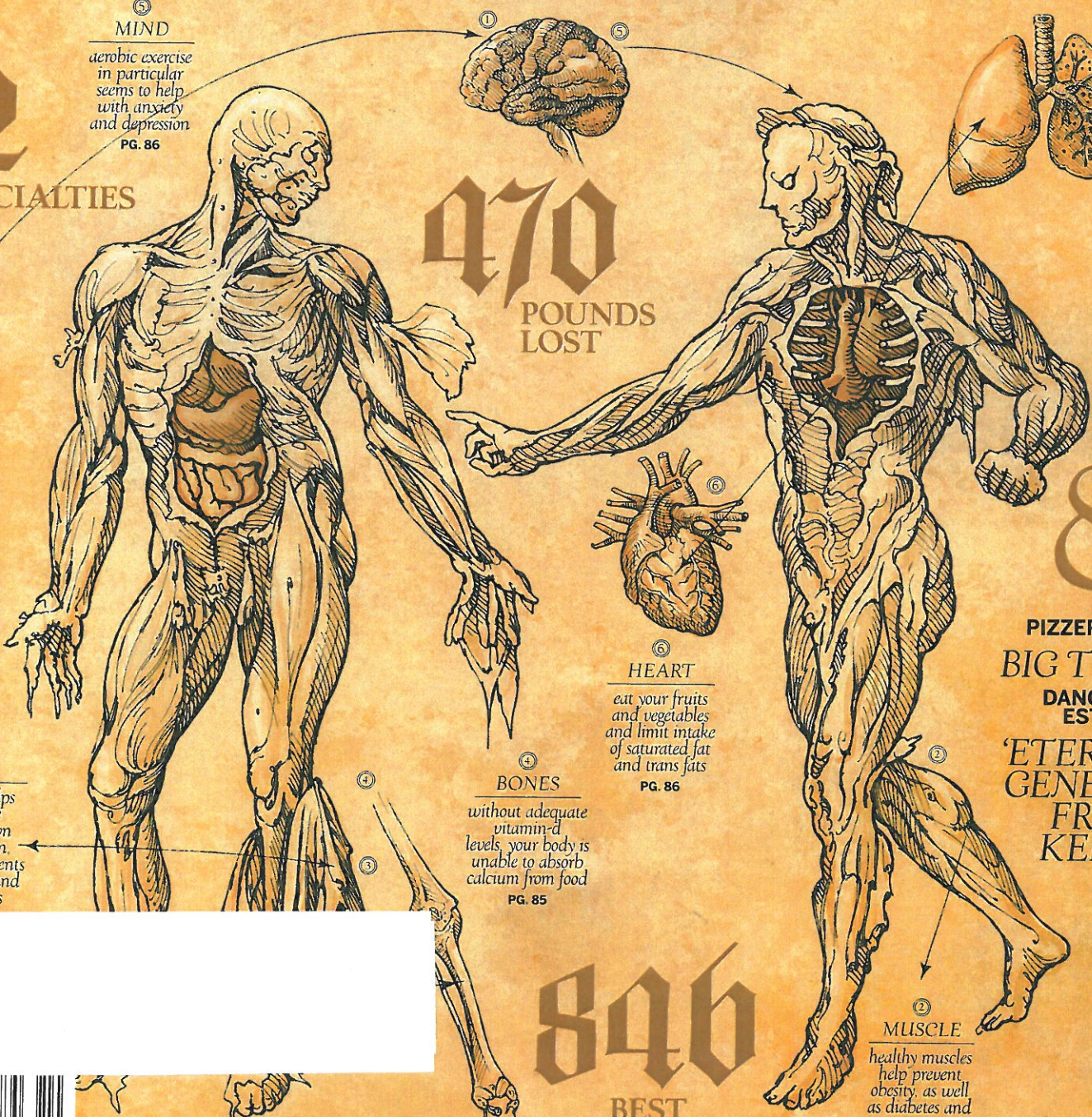
DETROIT

92  
SPECIALTIES

**1**  
BRAIN  
if you do the things that keep your heart healthy, you keep your brain healthy  
PG. 84

**5**  
MIND  
aerobic exercise in particular seems to help with anxiety and depression  
PG. 86

470  
POUNDS LOST



**3**  
SKIN  
retin-a helps slow the breakdown of collagen, which prevents fine lines and wrinkles  
PG. 8

**4**  
BONES  
without adequate vitamin-d levels, your body is unable to absorb calcium from food  
PG. 85

**6**  
HEART  
eat your fruits and vegetables and limit intake of saturated fat and trans fats  
PG. 86

**2**  
MUSCLE  
healthy muscles help prevent obesity, as well as diabetes and osteoporosis  
PG. 84

REVIEW:  
PIZZERIA BIGA  
BIG TREES  
DANGERS OF ESTROGEN  
'ETERNAL GENERAL'  
FRANK KELLEY

846  
BEST PHYSICIANS

\$3.95 OCT  
HOURDE1





# Glowing Concern

Ron Harwood's business is lighting, but his interest in music shines brightly, too // By Jim McFarlin // Photograph by Cybelle Codish

**R**on Harwood has the lighting controls to London's new Wembley Stadium, England's national football shrine, sitting on the desk in his office.

His office is in Farmington Hills.

Through the brilliance of MediamorFX, his trademarked, Web-based lighting and special-effects program adapted for use by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Harwood and his homegrown company, Illuminating Concepts, can maintain a watchful eye on some of the world's most recognizable locations. Celebrating its 30th anniversary next year, Illuminating Concepts (IC) specializes in "immersion experiences" as lighting designer for Walt Disney World in Orlando, the China National Film Museum in Beijing, Godiva and Nike-town retail chains, locally for Comerica Park, the Fox Theatre, and Greenfield Village, and most recently for Las Vegas' spectacular \$9-billion MGM City Center, the largest single private development in American history.

It's no shock, then, that Harwood and his quiet 40-person suburban operation may be the most sought-after, accomplished lighting-and-sound designers on the planet. "Just one job at a time, one customer at a time," says Harwood, 63. "It's like your dad used to tell you: If you do a good job, keep your head down and try to deliver at least what the client expects (if not more), chances are they'll ask you to do more work for them."

Yet one senses that the success of IC merely lights the way for Harwood's true passion: music. An ethnomusicology student at Wayne State University and longtime manager for the late Detroit blues immortal Sippie Wallace, Harwood is founder of the American Music Research Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preservation and documentation of American music forms, particularly blues, jazz, and boogie-woogie. The foundation hosts the Motor City Blues & Boogie Woogie Festival, slated for a 12th annual staging at the Max M. Fisher Music Center Oct. 1-2; Harwood intertwines live performances with interviews of music legends, then edits them into specials for public-television stations nationwide. Additionally, he's working on a book about the history of black music through the prism of his experiences with Wallace.

Detroit born and brought up near Seven Mile and Evergreen, Harwood says his earliest memories include his mother playing Fats Waller for him on the family's 78 rpm phonograph. "She loved boogie-woogie, loved music, and I absorbed it from her," he says. He started dancing at 6, became semi-professional at 10, "a real hooper," and had the chance to spend a summer in a chorus line on Broadway.

While Harwood was at Mumford High School, a record store at Northland Center became his second home. On one 1965 visit, the proprietor showed him a copy of a blues newsletter with Sippie Wal-

lace on the cover, promoting an interview the editor had with her in Detroit. "We were astonished," he recalls. When a call to the editor elicited profanities, Harwood grabbed a copy of the Detroit directory.

"I just started peeling through the phone book, and I think luck was with me," Harwood says. "I thought, 'Oh my God, there's pages of Wallaces in Detroit!' So I just started calling everybody I thought was female." Even when he finally found the right number, it took multiple calls to get Sippie to the phone. "For a white kid to be talking to a black person about their history is very strange," he acknowledges. "They must have looked at me like I was with the FBI."

After months of conversations, Harwood wangled an invitation to visit the semi-retired Wallace at her home. "She played gospel music on the piano," he remembers. "Most people think of Sippie as an old lady with a lot of personality, but her voice was flawless when I first met her. I had tears streaming down my face." That began a 22-year partnership of touring and recording until Wallace's death in 1986. In the '70s, a young Bonnie Raitt, who performed a Wallace song on her debut album, asked her manager to give his Detroit friend Harwood a call. "Bonnie wanted to know if Sippie was still alive," Harwood says. "I told him, 'Yeah, and her manager and I are very close.'"

Raitt assisted Wallace in landing a deal with Atlantic Records, and her comeback LP, the Ann Arbor-produced *Sippie*, was nominated for a 1983 Grammy. As the two toured together, Harwood hung out at the light board, lobbying to get the best possible stage exposure for his artist. "So you can kind of see, this is not a leap at all for me," says Harwood. "My grandfather was an electrical contractor and I worked with him in my teens. I had a fascination for lights, knew a lot about lighting design. Unlike being an electrical contractor, when you're a lighting designer you usually don't wait to get paid, [clients] almost always say 'thank you,' they'll give you more work, and you can win awards. I thought, 'Geez, this is better.'"

Harwood's latest patented innovation is Intellistreets, a wireless, programmable digital urban infrastructure that combines LED lighting, PA-quality sound, and multimedia information through ultra-modern streetlights. He began developing the concept after he and his wife, Shelly, experienced close calls with their two children: their son, Benjamin, enrolled at Columbia University in New York the week before 9/11, and their daughter, Britt, narrowly missed boarding one of the London Underground trains that exploded in 2005. "I said to my staff, 'We've been making money, making people happy, but we've got to help make people safe, too,'" Harwood says.

Yet, predictably, the system has some entertainment applications, too, and Harwood is confident Intellistreets will power Detroit streets someday soon. "I've been pitching Mayor Bing on 'Motown Fridays,' 'R&B Saturdays' and the DSO on Sundays," he says. "Everybody sees the value in it." ■



> Ron Harwood plays guitar for blues singer Sippie Wallace in the 1970s.



