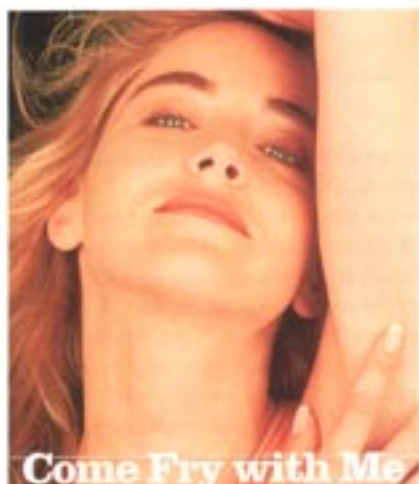


short takes



I never thought I'd live to see a black circus," says clown Danise Payne (left). "I had to be part of it." One of the first black female clowns to appear with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, Payne was performing in England with the famed Gerry Cottle's Circus when she heard about UniverSoul Big Top Circus, the first circus in almost a century to be owned and operated by African Americans. Other black performers have likewise found their way to UniverSoul: From Valencia, Spain, comes Nayakata,

an African-Spanish contortionist. From the U.S. Virgin Islands comes Mecko Jumbie, a group of stilt dancers who move to a reggae beat. And from South Africa come the showstopping Ayak Brothers, the world's only trapeze artists to "catch" with their feet. Cedric "Ricky" Walker, a cofounder of the circus that's also dubbed Cirque du Soul and Hip Hop Under the Big Top, focuses on bringing quality live entertainment to urban African American communities. His 40-member troupe features 14 acts in a 2,000-seat, single-ring setting. Many of the acts are standard circus fare, but their staging is not: The lion tamer takes on the biblical role of Daniel in the lions' den. Jazz, gospel and the blues replace the calliope music. (Traditions like cotton candy remain unchanged.) UniverSoul Big Top debuted in 1994, but this is its first season with a nationwide tour. Stops through November 23 include New York, Baltimore, Washington, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles and Houston. Call 404-766-1988. —Jeff Sanders



The *Sinatra Celebrity Cookbook* contains recipes from Andy Garcia, Beno, Bob Ogle and some 250 other notables. Sharon Stone shares the recipe that gave her a temptress's figure:

POSIME DU JOUR

Walk to the refrigerator.

Open the door.

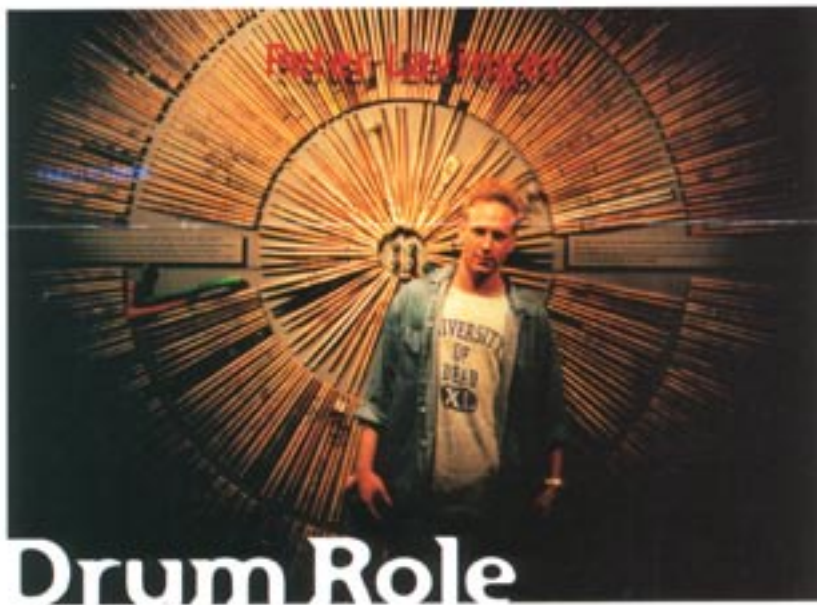
Open the fruit drawer.

Take out an apple.

Eat it.

The book benefits the Barbara Sinatra Children's Center in Racheo Mirage, California, and is available at bookstores everywhere.

BOOKS



Call him the patron saint of drummers, part music fanatic, part historian. New Yorker Peter Lavinger has spent 17 years assembling more than 1,200 drumsticks that once twirled in the hands of drummers playing everything from jazz to rock to ska. Lavinger, 32, has a degree in economics, but these days, he lives for his collection, spending nearly every day cataloging it, authenticating each stick with letters

and signatures from its owner and searching for more. The self-described "concert rat" got his start catching the occasional stick tossed to the crowd from the stage, but his interest didn't turn to passion until he was given a drumstick by family friend David Getz, who'd played with Janis Joplin. "I realized I could make collecting count," Lavinger says, and sure enough, 548 sticks from his collection have landed in a long-term exhibit at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland.

Lavinger sees himself as champion of an underappreciated class of musicians: "They're always hidden behind a drum kit and a bunch of cymbals," he says. "It's nice to give them some credit." This lack of acknowledgment helps explain why his letters soliciting donations of sticks are usually well received. His wish list includes souvenirs from some 10,000 artists, but the biggest hole in his collection is a pair from deceased Who drummer Keith Moon. Lavinger is so meticulous about provenance that his chances of filling that hole are slim. "At this point," he says, "the only people I'd accept them from would be Pete Townshend or Roger Daltrey." —Laura Galloway