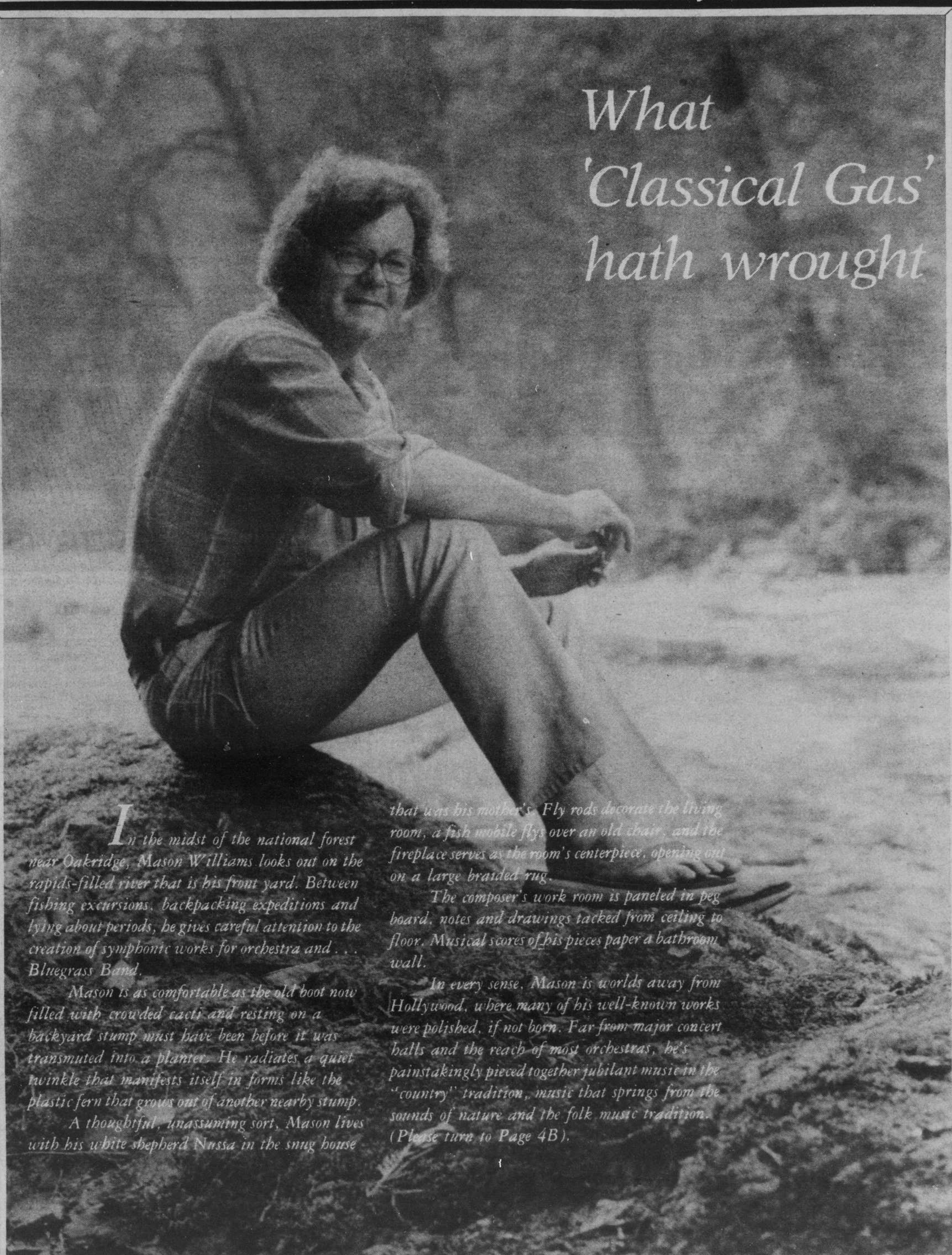


hear and now

Arts and Entertainment

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What 'Classical Gas' hath wrought



*I*n the midst of the national forest near Oakridge, Mason Williams looks out on the rapids-filled river that is his front yard. Between fishing excursions, backpacking expeditions and lying about periods, he gives careful attention to the creation of symphonic works for orchestra and . . . Bluegrass Band.

Mason is as comfortable as the old boot now filled with crowded cacti and resting on a backyard stump must have been before it was transmuted into a planter. He radiates a quiet twinkle that manifests itself in forms like the plastic fern that grows out of another nearby stump.

A thoughtful, unassuming sort, Mason lives with his white shepherd Nussa in the snug house

that was his mother's. Fly rods decorate the living room, a fish mobile flies over an old chair, and the fireplace serves as the room's centerpiece, opening out on a large braided rug.

The composer's work room is paneled in peg board, notes and drawings tacked from ceiling to floor. Musical scores of his pieces paper a bathroom wall.

In every sense, Mason is worlds away from Hollywood, where many of his well-known works were polished, if not born. Far from major concert halls and the reach of most orchestras, he's painstakingly pieced together jubilant music in the "country" tradition, music that springs from the sounds of nature and the folk music tradition. (Please turn to Page 4B).