

A CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS

BY DEBORAH QUAILE
ARTS EDITOR

Concert lovers were recently treated to an evening of Christmas Cheer at the River Run Centre in Guelph, where the Guelph Chamber Choir, conducted by Gerald Neufeld, special orchestral guests Brass Rings, and six local church choirs offered an enchanting night of music.

Musica Viva began in 1980 when the society was formed to encourage the performance of quality music in Guelph and surrounding areas. In her introduction, Lorna Ferguson, Vice President of Musica Viva, stated, "I hope that you will leave with the Christmas spirit burning brightly," and ensured that "... the visions of sugar plums will follow afterwards."

Through music both familiar and new, each of the choirs enchanted the audience with their unique renditions. Many had accompaniments of violin, bells, triangle or flute, enhancing the sweet voices as they filled the Centre with joy.

The carolers slipped through the complexities of the music with ease and practised skill. Some songs were haunting and thought provoking, while others were seasonally uplifting and bright.

The smooth, rich beauty of the Guelph Chamber Choir filled River Run with their outpouring of glorious sound. Conductor Gerald Neufeld was a warm, witty presence to guide the evening's concert. He described how carols originated in the medieval period as songs to dance to, or as processions. Neufeld is a music professor at the University of Western Ontario, where he conducts choirs and teaches conducting. He has been the artistic director of the Guelph Chamber Choir since its inception.

The Guelph Chamber Choir has been an integral part of a strong musical heritage in the Guelph region. In addition

to four concerts each season (sponsored by Musica Viva Guelph), the choir has performed at numerous festivals including the Guelph Spring Festival and the Elora Festival. They've produced two CD's entitled *On Christmas Night* and *Songs of the New World*.

Brass Rings, wrapped in festive mufflers and sporting seasonal pins on their tuxedos, offered an interesting blend of poetry and music in their sessions. The group is comprised of experienced orchestral musicians who collaborate with poets, actors, dancers, stage directors and other musicians to create deeply moving experiences for their audiences. The group members are Garry Page, trumpet; Paul Otway, trumpet; Deborah Stroh Pattison, horn; Thomas Henderson, trombone; and Brent Adams, tuba.

Much praise must also be given to the multi talented accompanist Alison MacNeill, whose conducting and keyboarding were highlights of the evening.

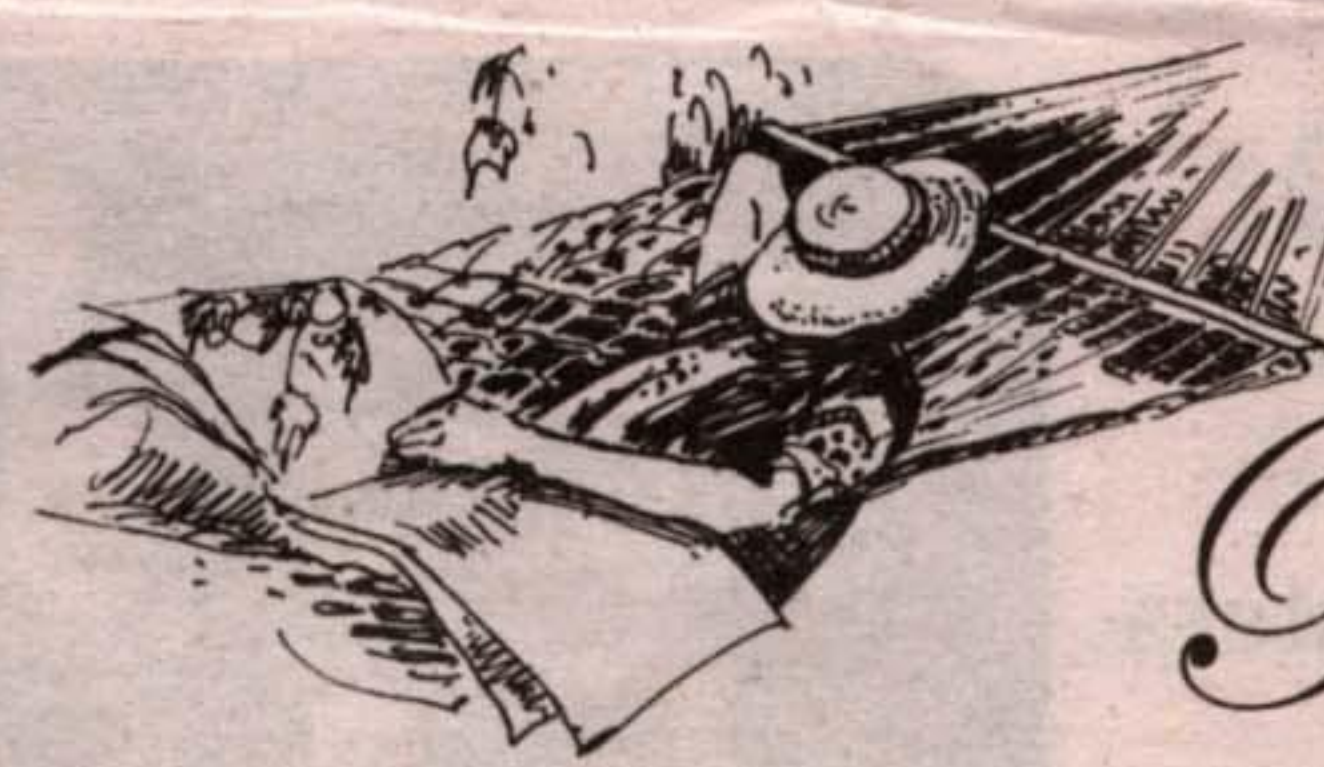
And not to be forgotten were the amusing antics of the Royal City Ambassadors, proving to all that choral singing need not be entirely dignified.

Don't miss Bach's B Minor Mass on Sunday, April 16, 2000, at 3 p.m. in Guelph's Church of Our Lady. The Guelph Chamber Choir, with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, will perform one of Bach's greatest works, which displays the brilliance of the Baroque period. Four talented soloists will join the choir and orchestra in this masterpiece. Call The River Run Centre box office for tickets at (519) 763-3000.



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E-LETTERS

BY DEBORAH QUAILE
ARTS EDITOR

Even nearly 60 years ago, Louise Dickinson Rich lamented the loss of letter writing. I, too, moan the disappearance of a good epistle, the artistic form of expression that offers something of the writer in its pages.

This year we received very few penned sentences on our Christmas cards. Is the world so busy that no one can afford the time for a personal reflection, especially during holidays? There's a whole year's worth of catching up I'd like to do, yet few indulge my cravings.

Each year I write a newsletter and handwrite personal remarks to everyone we know. I take time to relate our most important occurrences - the family vacation, pet hijinks, or what our kids have accomplished - pretty normal stuff. But people look forward to it, and if I don't put a long letter in the mail, I get good-natured complaints!

For some time, I struggled with the concept of email. That may not sound like much of a problem to most career people, but when you leave the fast-track for a couple of babies, and jump back into work in a rural neighbourhood, it seemed more personal to pick the phone. Besides, at

I still think it's too bad that the old-fashioned habit of long letters has fallen into desuetude... I like to know what my friends are thinking and feeling. If too long a time elapses without my checking up on these things, I find that where once was a friend is now a pleasant stranger. When you are writing a letter, you are thinking only of the person who is going to receive it. Nothing else is bidding for a share of your attention... In short, there is no static.

Louise Dickinson Rich
1942

that point, no one I knew had email.

That changed quickly enough, and the resident computer-guru (a.k.a. husband David) had to launch me into the new technology. To tell the truth, I was hooked.

My internal struggle to only send notes with gentle Renoir portraits or Group of Seven landscapes ended. I was freely winging scribbles into cyber space each day.

Unfortunately, I still can't seem to rid myself of the habit of writing lengthy letters. Instead of quick jottings to accelerate to the speed required by business

empires, I find myself settling into my big grey chair and chatting about life as well as business.

That's not the way email is supposed to work. But I can't help it; to me, letters are intimate little conversations to one another, so that's what I tend to write. And perhaps not surprisingly, a few seconds for a line reflecting personality rather than brevity has been well accepted by business contacts.

After email, I even tackled a cell phone, digital camera and a new computer. Electronic writing was the catalyst to move me into the 21st century.

Even with the efficiency of email, we shouldn't give up on letters. They're our windows to the soul, a mingling of feeling and thought that graces the recipient with a slice of yourself. Typing is faster, but the reader doesn't have the pleasure of holding characteristic notepaper covered with your distinctive writing style in the palm of their hand.

During the long nights of winter, it's nice to send a few encouraging words to far-flung friends and relatives.

But won't it be great when I figure out how to make my email more attractive, perhaps with a woodland graphic at the top?

LISTENING TO THE VOICES

BY DEBORAH QUAILE
ARTS EDITOR

I wanted to address some of the issues that are in all our lives," states artist Paul Morin of his new installation, *voices of the first day*, at the Wellington County Museum.

The display incorporates paintings, Aboriginal based music, a medicine wheel and various other pieces of artwork by

the Rockwood artist that point to how his interests in travel, anthropology and mythology combine to provide a fascinating look at all things wild and primitive.

The show also echoes sentiments Morin has heard throughout North, Central and South America as well.

"There's an emotion to the earth - I was thinking of the earth as an earth mother, and that's kind of what I wanted to address."

The show is mixed media, and richly evocative of the natural world. Complimented by a vivid palette, Morin uses torn, shredded fabrics, bark, and many other man-made and found items to add layers and intensify the imagery in his work. Many of the pieces on display are from his children's book *animal dreaming* or his newest illustrations for *At Break of Day*.

Morin also gave a three-screen slide and video show on opening night of the images taken while travelling to research his children's books. With shots that were both primitive and erotic, and layered with sound to

enhance their beauty, Morin showed how he captured the textural reality of the world, with elemental figures of animals, women and men, and the topography of the land.

"The reason I wanted to be an artist was just from the experiences that I had while I was in the forest... usually when I was by myself, when sunlight would hit moss and fill me with a sense of wonder. Certain little moments that I've had on my travels have really inspired me in my paintings, or just in thought, and that's what I hope you get a glimpse of in this video," he emphasized. "I hope [this show] spawns some inspiration of our beautiful earth back to others."

Traditional world cultures interest Morin because they are grounded in the earth, spirit, harmony and wisdom. His tree roots are painted with the four basic colours evident in all native cultures, and become strong symbols, carefully integrated with rocks and moss. Nearby, the soothing trickle of water burbles under stones, and Morin's own design for a medicine wheel that he "dreamed up in a sweat lodge" is centred beneath four cedar poles and balanced over a pool of water. Visitors can gently swish the water with their fingers, causing rippling reflections of the wheel to create magical patterns of light on the ceiling.

"It's a replica of the wheel I took to Australia and gave to an elder there," Morin says. "It represents the four directions, four colours and four races of people. I made it with openings, or doorways for all races to come together in the centre."

voices of the first day is showing at the Wellington County Museum & Archives, Fergus, to February 20, 2000, daily from 1 to 5 p.m. Call (519) 846-0916 for information.

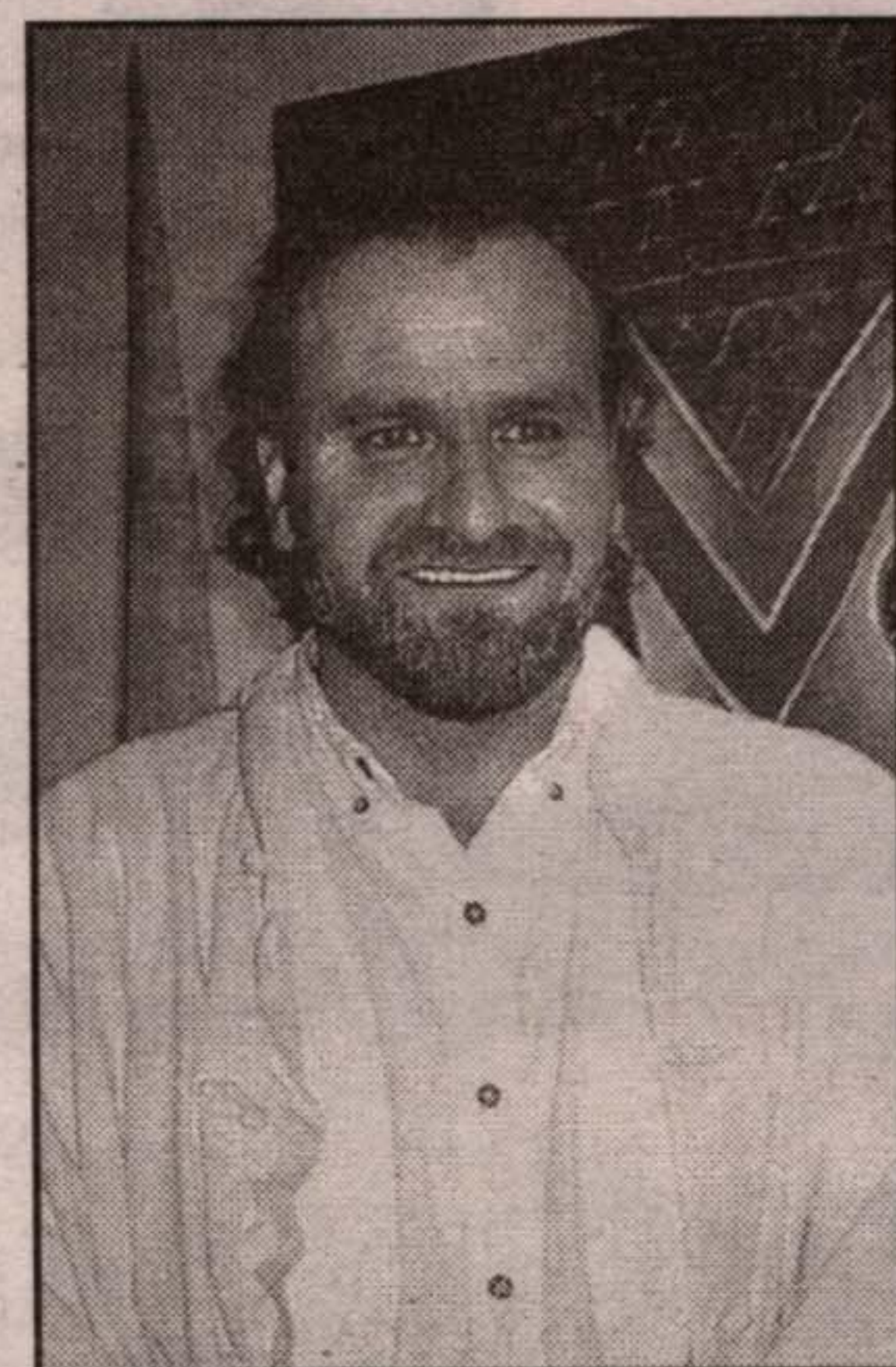


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