

# The tradition of Music Mania continues in 1995

A rousing chorus of Another Opening, Another Show from the 1962 production of Music Mania introduced memories of 35 years of top-notch entertainment, song, dance and comedy to the Whitechurch-Stouffville Historical Society's March meeting at Parkview Village last Wednesday.

"The music has always been the backbone of the show," says Lorne Bowdway. Lorne and his wife Marion showed photos, video clips, scrapbooks and played audio tapes of some of the musical highlights of the past 35 years.

The Bowdways are well-known lifetime residents of Stouffville, and have been associated with Music Mania since its beginnings in 1960. Lorne recently retired after many years as principal of Summitview Public School.

"The seed was sown in the late '50s," remembers Lorne. "The members of the United Church Couples Club met every month and entertainment often consisted of plays and skits. These skits became more and more competitive and popular and eventually led to the idea that a variety show could be put on for the local community."

Peggy Toppin was the producer of the first show in 1960. It was a blackface minstrel show featuring a chorus of singers directed by Ron Mercer, Bud Sanderson as the interlocutor (MC), dancers, soloists and the "end men" who were in charge of the comedy routines.

"The comedy was limited to jokes and limericks," laughs Lorne.

"Roses are red, violets are blue, lilies are white, and I oughta know I took them from the clothesline!" he quotes, waving a pair of Lilly's unmentionables aloft. This particular item from Lilly's underwear drawer was featured in

many shows, finally being officially retired in 1985. The budget for costumes for that first show was \$25. Costumes for this year's show will cost \$1,500 to \$2,000. Kay Dowswell was an innovative costume manager in 1961, painting fabrics with stripes, flowers and fluorescent paint for the first blacklight production.

In 1963, social conscience suggested that blackface minstrel shows implied racial overtones and no show was produced. It was decided to look at a different format and the following year the first Music Mania presented A Trip Around the World. Jerry Waite, who was the musical director, pianist, and bandleader for 17 years, would not allow any taped music. The Beatles were at the top of the charts and Beethoven music, Stouffville-style, was featured extensively in the show.

The first shows were especially popular with the high school students, as the principal was part of the cast. "All the kids came to see what the principal was up to that year," remembers Marion. Comedy evolved from the one-liner jokes and limericks of the early years to skits and poking fun at local news stories, community figures and the town council of the day, a tradition which still continues.

Pantomime was introduced in 1967 with the comedy trio of John Foulds, Don Petrie and Frank Mellon. Their memorable military hospital skit, which resulted in Don Petrie suspended by one leg from the rafters of the stage, brought the house down in the anniversary show of 1985.

The hilarious fan dance of 1985, featuring Don McNair, Don Huxtable and Lorne Bowdway, had a surprise ending on the Saturday night performance when Lorne's

glamorous wig slipped gradually over his eyes. The first shows saw 30 chorus members who were on stage at all times. Now the chorus boasts 70 singers, all members of the community who love to sing. Their repertoire includes golden oldies, love songs, inspirational songs, rock 'n' roll, anything goes," says Lorne. The movement of the chorus around the stage is arranged by a chorus choreographer.

In 1989, a group of line dancers from Parkview Village were guest artists. Many members of the audience were able to recognize themselves on Lorne's video clip. "Almost 400 people have been a part of Music Mania during the past 35 years, not only on stage, but behind the scenes too. Mary Ann Watson was a competent head of the makeup committee in the early years creating clowns and bears.

Now it takes almost two hours to apply makeup to the up to 100 people in the show. Hairdressers are ready backstage to freshen hairdos, and stage hands make sure scenery and props are in the right place at the right time.

Lloyd Jennings was the first tech in charge of sound and lighting. Ivan Harris took over from him and has made sure Music Mania has looked and sounded good for the past 34 years, often borrowing microphones, spotlights and special effects from CBC. Cables and lighting have to be placed in the SDSS gym for each rehearsal and removed again in time for school the next day - a huge undertaking.

Seniors and guests with special needs are always invited to the dress rehearsals, making sure that there is adequate space for wheelchairs. The event is made more memorable by the homemade cookies served by the cast after every show. Proceeds from Music Mania are donated to a local charity. Last year's recipient was Mobility Transit.

After the last show, the cast have a Sunday clean-up party. All the sound and lighting equipment, cables, props, stage addition and scenery have to be removed and stored until the next year. "100 per cent of our volunteers show up to help make the clean-up job easy," says Lorne.

"Music Mania is family oriented, fun to produce and displays local talent, often resulting in long-lasting friendships within the community," say Lorne and Marion Bowdway.

The 1995 Music Mania, To Be Continued, will run April 27 to 29, sponsored as usual by the Stouffville United Church Couples Club.

Don't miss this 35-year-old tradition of local entertainment and musical variety. Tickets will be on sale soon.



Music Mania historians, Marion and Lorne Bowdway detailed the life of the annual event.

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