



STAFF PHOTOS BY STEVE SOMERVILLE

The light of the soul

Ann Gage — this year's Music Town Ontario winner — needed to be pushed into the spotlight

BY CINDY WHITE
Special to The Tribune

As Ann Gage pulls into the parking lot of her church, she waves from her red convertible and hops out, immediately apologizing for arriving 10 minutes late.

"It's not okay (to be late)," she said shaking her head and laughing at the same time. "You have things to do and I have things to do."

And with that, we head inside so that Gage can do two things at once — pack up supplies for the parish picnic and answer questions for this interview.

A woman of many hats who has sat in more than a few musical chairs, Gage will receive this year's Music Town Ontario Award for her generous contribution to the musical heritage of Whitchurch-Stouffville.

The award will be presented at the 11th annual Sacred Music Festival at Stouffville United Church June 30.

At 51, her list of musical credits is long and varied but Gage insists she never over-extends herself, preferring to faithfully devote her time to each project she takes on.

"Just showing up is not good enough," she said. "I believe in commitment."

She admits to being a perfectionist, too. "People have said to me, 'Boy are you ever type A.' But I really believe we learn by getting it right."

Gage's talent as a singer, her strong work ethic and her seemingly boundless energy have led her these last 20 years to become involved in Music Mania, the Christ Church Anglican Choir, the Uxbridge Chamber Choir and The Bach to Blues Company, to name just a few.

Yet Gage, who works as an executive assistant with a hi-tech company, says she didn't set out to be so involved in musical perfor-

"I love to sing. Singing is the light of your soul," she said. "But for as long as I can remember I wanted to be a wife and a mother. I didn't have the self-confidence to do anything else."

Doris Harvey, a producer at Music Mania, begs to differ.

"She doesn't come across that way at all. She has talent coming out of her baby fingers."

Harvey has been with Stouffville's long-running annual variety show in some capacity for 22 years and says not only is Gage a talented singer, she's a natural director.

"She expects the best and she gets it."

It was the people at Music Mania who first asked Gage to be involved in the show about 20 years ago even though she had never heard of them and had no training as a singer.

"We all sang in my family. My mother had a beautiful operatic voice while my father was tone deaf, but we all sang all the time."

Gage's parents couldn't afford the singing lessons her school's music teacher recommended so it wasn't until she was encouraged by the Music Maniacs to get formal voice training that she finally pursued it.

After several years with Music Mania she was asked to direct the show, a job she held for three years. "I was surprised when they asked. Just as I am surprised about the award. I'm doing what I love and for me, the reward is in the doing."

"That's the job of a director, to enable the people under your direction to be proud. And seeing people sing to the best of their ability and they're proud, that's thanks (for me)."

Commitment is something Gage feels very strongly about and as a director she expects it from her singers — or else.

"It's a societal thing. People are trying to be all things. I see it in church choirs, at work, in organizations where people say, 'But I'm giving you everything I can give. At some point

you have to say, 'It's not enough. Please join us again when you can give more.'

"I was raised on the philosophy that hard work and having fun are not exclusive to each other. I've realized if you're not having fun anymore it's time to move on."

Two years ago, Gage started The Bach to Blues Company with co-director Wanda Stride to provide an outlet for people looking for mixed, male and female, choral singing.

She will be singing with her company of about 23 members the night she is to receive her award at the Sacred Music Festival. Something from Bach and some blues, of course.

Gage did become a wife and a mother of two children, a daughter now 26 and a son 25.

"I didn't want anyone else raising my children. I remember people saying to me, 'Oh, it's so nice you're able to stay home with your children.' Meanwhile, those same people are off to the Bahamas for a vacation, while my car is held together with rubber bands. I didn't even know what it was like to eat in a restaurant," she said, laughing.

"But it's all about choices."

If life had been different, Gage said, she might have pursued a musical career, but family came first and for that she has no regrets.

"I think my children are proud of me. They see me as a do-er and I see them following in my footsteps," she said.

"They're ripening into good people."

The car Gage now drives was a long-term goal.

"I made a promise to myself that by the time I was 50, I would own a convertible. And I did it. It's used, but I got one."

As for the award ceremony, Gage is a little apprehensive.

"I'm very uncomfortable with awards. I'm sure I will end up in tears."

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