

Orangeville Music Festival to host scholarship fundraiser

By Constance Scrafield

Seventeen years ago, Lynne Smith was asked by Rob Hennig, then Musical Director of Westminster United Church, to set up a music festival that would encompass the community and encourage young people in their pursuit of performance art.

The idea was to engage adjudicators from outside the community to come and comment on the performances which adjudication resulted in the presentation of small scholarships at the season's end Gala in May.

Two years later, Smith took charge of the Orangeville District Music Festival (www.odmf.ca) from Hennig, making the organizing committee entirely volunteer.

"The festival is non-profit and non competitive," Smith said. "I am the 'face' of the committee, the registrar, which is the only title in the committee. The festival is open to anyone who wishes to perform and get feedback on their performance."

There has been a very wide array of performers, all sorts of musicians and singers, including a handbell choir.

"One year, someone read poetry and because it's lyrical, we allowed it," Smith said.

The performances are divided into classes which are made up after all the applications are in. Applicants all pay a fee to participate in the festival and it is also supported by sponsors. Scotiabank matches funds raised and Insta-Plus Printing offers support in kind.

"Our biggest cost is the adjudicator and over the years, there have been some people adjudicating for us who are just amazing,"

Smith explained. "Usually, we only have one adjudicator but, this year, there are two. One is a vocal expert."

Up until now, the festival has been pretty well self-sufficient, but as it grows in reputation, so the numbers of applicants increase and the classes expand.

The initial format for the festival remains the same as when its original plan was laid out. Musicians of all kinds are welcome to register. Each one will perform and receive critical comment, both positive and constructive. This offers the chance for each to learn more about his or her own presentation, its strengths and weaknesses.

The issue of how the scholarships are presented is an interesting one.

They are not given "necessarily to the higher grade" it could be to someone who's quite talented, just to encourage them," Smith said. "Scholarships are there to encourage them to continue their studies. But we are getting more entries and so many more who are coming to us if they can just get over that hump at the grade four level."

Two participants from each class are then asked to take part in the gala in May. Of those two, one will receive a scholarship and the other is the runner-up, as it were. However, with a somewhat different philosophy about the scholarships, the better performer is not automatically the recipient of the scholarship. The person who actually receives is the person, also very talented, but perhaps in greater need of that extra push to continue in the arts. Hence, the hook upon which this festival may be said to be non competitive.

"We have the Most Promising Musician Award," Smith advised.

So, in order to sustain the increase in registrations, which brings increased costs, and in order to augment the scholarships, a fundraising concert for the festival is being held this Sunday (Oct. 27) at Westminster United Church.

"We were overwhelmed by the community performers who are coming to participate," Smith said. "Leisa Way and Bruce Lei (and many of the best known performers in the region) are coming to perform at this concert."

The concert starts at 7:30 pm. Count on two hours of the best entertainment in the region.

The church is at 247 Broadway in Orangeville.

Tickets at \$20 for adults and \$10 for those under 12 years old are available at BookLore, Aardvark Music, Broadway Music, Westminster United and Scotiabank. For a great concert and to support this festival which supports and encourages musicians to stick with their dreams, be sure to catch this show.