

The many Enchanted Evenings of Bud and Stella Switzer



By Brock Weir

‘If music be the food of love, play on,’ are words Orsino lived by in Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night; but while it might be a philosophy shared by Aurora’s Bud and Stella Switzer, the music of Rogers and Hammerstein have presented them with a veritable smorgasbord.

For decades, the long-time sweethearts have been united by a love of dance and music, and it is this love that they have been working diligently to share with Aurorans through their work with the Aurora Seniors’ Centre.

Bud and Stella are active members of Aurora Seniors’ Centre’s ‘Evergreen Choir’, which is gearing up for another season next month on Wednesday, September 10. Lead by Dr. Richard Heinzle, the choir is active in the community well beyond the confines of the Seniors’ Centre itself, boasting over 40 members.

‘Bud used to say that we should join a choir but we were always busy,’ explains Stella. ‘When we came up to Aurora and he wasn’t working anymore, by accident we ran into a member of the Seniors’ Centre and he mentioned the choir.’

After that, there was no turning back.

‘I used to sing around the house ? no words, just humming,’ says Bud.

Adds Stella: ‘He would sing for sound and I always sang for words.’

So, there you have it ? a dynamic, complementary combination!

Bud got his first taste of singing as a child growing up in Hamilton, primarily through choirs at school and church. At that point he was a boy soprano. After moving to Toronto, he continued singing at church but, in his words, ‘never anything special.’

‘I always liked to sing,’ he says. ‘When I was a kid, I would sit on the verandah and I found I could imitate a fellow called Bobby Breen. When Hallowe’en came along, in order to get candy, I had to sing for the neighbours!’

Singing, however, ultimately had to take a back seat. After graduating high school, his parents split, and he had to start making money to support his mother and two brothers. After finding a job working in shipping and receiving in warehousing, he was

looking for a way to blow off some steam, when he eventually spotted his cousins dancing a jitterbug at a party.

"I thought I would love to do that," says Bud. "I went to a dance school and enrolled as a student. At one point, they had dance competitions and I figured I would pick the best dancer in the school and I latched onto Stella!"

"Bud went to Arthur Murray's in Hamilton and then he came to Toronto and joined Arthur Murray there," continues Stella. "I was working for the CNR in Toronto and used to pass Arthur Murray's every day. I had a girlfriend who used to take me out dancing, which I hated, so I eventually went into Arthur Murray's and that's where we met."

In the intervening decades, Stella and Bud have become a solid unit, encouraging each other along their respective creative paths, whether it has been dancing, singing, or painting. Together, they became medal dancing students, dancing teachers, and eventually North American champions throughout the Arthur Murray network. He also takes particular pride in the fact Stella was able to go back to school in her 60s, earning her Masters Degree in French.

While Stella continues to dance, a spine injury has led to Bud largely hanging up his dancing shoes. From there, he has zeroed back in on his love of singing, taking part in Chartwell's Senior Stars competition on a whim, eventually placing third from across Canada in a performance of what has become his signature song "Some Enchanted Evening" from South Pacific.

"With singing, I get satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment," says Bud. "When someone comes over and says you did well, or a song gets a standing ovation, that is a real thrill and that can sort of turn you on!"

And this feeling has spilled over into the Evergreen Choir.

"The Seniors' Centre has been a real blessing to us," he says. "We moved here from Scarborough and we weren't too happy with our situation there. When we moved up here, we didn't know anyone. My daughter eventually moved up here about five minutes away, had two children, so now we babysit the two grandchildren, the two dogs, and we feel a part of the whole community. The choir is fun, but many of the songs are songs we have never heard before and are a real challenge to us."

If you would like to take up the challenge, the Evergreen Choir meets Wednesday, September 10 beginning at 1.45 p.m. at the Aurora Seniors' Centre. Membership is \$20 for Aurora residents and \$25 for non-residents. For more information, call 905-726-4767. Bud Switzer's artwork is currently on display in the Skylight Gallery at Aurora Town Hall through August 29, alongside fellow Seniors' Centre members Marlene Ash and Ron Lorenz.