

It might be a Long Way to Tipperary, but memories will be close at hand in sing-a-long



By Brock Weir

Brian Sperry was just a child when he lost his parents at the height of the Second World War.

Living in Sheffield, England, both his parents were killed in the Blitz and, after their deaths, he and his brothers and sister were shuttled between orphanages, as so many orphans were during that period, before ultimately finding their feet and a new place to call home.

For many, memories of traumatic events such as these can be triggered by a particular sight, sound and smell. Mr. Sperry is no different.

Songs like 'I'll Be Seeing You', a popular hit of the era, conjure up such images, but they also bring him joy.

It is this joy he hopes to bring to Aurora residents once again this Tuesday as a member of Aurora's Senior Stars.

The Senior Stars will take the stage on Tuesday afternoon at the Aurora Cultural Centre in 'It's A Long Way To Tipperary', the annual community sing-a-long showcasing the rousing tunes of the first half of the 20th century which brought out the best of people both at home and at the Front.

'I'll be Seeing You is one of the very strong emotional songs from that time because these were heart-tugging things when people were separating and going off,' says Mr. Sperry. 'But, the lyrics are good and the melodies are great, and we just like to sing them.'

This year's concert, however, has an added layer of poignancy in that it commemorates the 70th anniversary of D-Day, the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, once dubbed 'the war to end all wars', and the subsequent outbreak of the Second World War, which took place 75 years ago this year.

'We thought we ought to start making a statement,' says Mr. Sperry of the milestone anniversaries.

For him, it is important to stress these are commemorations, not celebrations, and it is equally important to strike the right balance between solemnity and light hearted fun that most of these songs have come to represent for the people who originally sang them.

'The 20th century was one of appalling warfare, which went from the horrors of World War One to the mass slaughter in World War Two, costing 50 million lives and, for the first time, the civilian population came to terms with what happened in that war. It is

a significant century, for want of a better term. Many of the people who come to this event are survivors of it.?

Mr. Sperry counts himself as one such survivor. In addition to losing his parents in the Blitz, his grandfather was severely wounded in the First World War in the Battle of Passchendaele.

Directing the group will be Judy Buchanan. The group started four years ago and has grown from 16 singers initially to 30 expected to take part on Tuesday.

Ms. Buchanan takes great pride in the development of the group, as well as the people who kept the 'home fires burning.?

'Brian has acted as our emcee for the last few years and does an amazing job, and we have an excellent pianist, Joy Gannicott, who accompanies us on the piano,?' she says. 'As the event is based on a British theme, we have a dresscode of red and white, and we borrow a British and Canadian flag for the occasion from the Legion to act as background for us.?

The concert gets underway at 2 p.m. and is open to the general public, particularly anyone who loves to sing along.

Under the guidance of Ms. Buchanan, the Aurora Silver Stars will be preceded in their performance by a procession of the Royal Canadian Legion's Colour Guard to pay tribute to fallen soldiers. The 'Rabble Rousing?' will include performances of Roll Out the Barrel, We'll Meet Again, The Quartermaster's Store and Tipperary.

For more information, call 905-713-1818.