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Lifestyles Publications

- Feature Story
- Current News
- Sports
- Births & Babies
- Archives
- Classifieds
- Viewpoints

Fun & Favourites

- Horoscopes
- Recipes
- Lotteries
- TV Listings

Feature Story

Bienfait woman loves her music

By David Willberg



Bienfait's Rose Walliser recently performed with the Regina Mandolin Orchestra at the Bienfait Weldon School. Her first experience with the mandolin came when she was 11.

The Regina Mandolin Orchestra's performance at Bienfait Weldon School on May 24 provided an opportunity for one of the orchestra's members to play in her hometown.

Rose Walliser has been a member of the orchestra for a few years, first as a student and now as a regular performer. She said she loves the instrument and the orchestra, and she enjoyed the opportunity to play in Bienfait.

"We performed about 16 or 17 numbers," said Walliser. "We played all different kinds of music. We did polkas and waltzes. We did Celtic music." About 150 people turned out for the concert. Walliser said many of the people in attendance were friends or family from Estevan and Bienfait.

Walliser's introduction to the mandolin - a teardrop or oval-shaped stringed instrument with a sound hole, or sound holes, of varying shapes - came at an early age. At the encouragement of a friend, she joined a music and dance group in Bienfait that was affiliated with the Canadian Ukrainian Youth Federation (CUYF).

Three people in the CUYF played the violin; the other instrumentalists played the mandolin.

She believes it was about 1939 when she hooked up with the CUYF. Walliser was 11 years old at the time.

Walliser eventually got married and started a family. She and her husband operated a service station in Bienfait. Between work and family commitments, there was little time for the mandolin, so the only chances she had to play for the next 60 years came when she accompanied her husband, who played guitar and accordion.

When her husband passed away a few years ago, Walliser decided to start playing the mandolin again.

"I decided I'd do something instead of sitting around and feeling sorry for myself," said Walliser. "And that something was playing the mandolin, and making new friends, and getting out. And I'm enjoying it very much."

The mandolin is a fun, unique instrument, she said. It's not that well-known, she said, outside of possibly the blue grass genre. Walliser loves the sound it makes, and the use of tremolo - rapid picking of one or more pairs of strings to create a sustained note or chords.

"I've never known another instrument," she said. "I'd never be able to play a piano."

Walliser joined the Regina Mandolin Orchestra a few years ago at the encouragement of orchestra director Yvonne Redant. Walliser had attended some of the orchestra's concerts with her daughter.

"She (Redant) said 'you're enjoying it (the concerts),' and I told her I was, and that I'd played years ago," said Walliser. "Later on I showed them a picture (from when she played with the CUYF). So they invited me to join them."

Walliser joined a study group for the Regina Mandolin Orchestra for two years, and then she was invited to be a full-fledged member of the orchestra. She has been part of the orchestra for the last two years. She remains a part of a seniors' study group.

The people in the orchestra are very nice, she said. Even if she makes a mistake, they're very gracious and friendly.

"They inspire me with their warmth and their friendliness," said Walliser. "We're all just good friends."

Walliser believes she is the orchestra's oldest member. For her 80th birthday this year, members of her study group purchased a gift certificate for next year's orchestra fees that will keep Walliser a part of the group for another season.

They perform several times a year at retirement homes, festivals, and at other venues and events.

The Regina Mandolin Orchestra's 43 members make it the largest mandolin group in Western Canada. Toronto is the only city in Canada with a mandolin orchestra as large as Regina's.

Everybody in the orchestra lives in or around Regina, she said, except for Walliser and a woman from Swift Current who has been part of the orchestra since its inception 20 years ago. Practices are every Saturday, except during holidays, at the Wascana Centre in Regina.

[top](#)

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