

Festival seeks to encourage young musicians



Three on a piano: Lily Vance, Makayla Mills, and Mackenzie Slater perform "Pop Goes The Weasel" (originally a drinking song) at the North Hastings Music Festival. TONY PEARSON Special to This Week

By Tony Pearson

The North Hastings Music Festival is a well-established spring tradition; it has been an annual event in Bancroft since 1958. To put that in a musical history framework, Perry Como, Guy Lombardo, Andy Williams, Pat Boone, Ricky Nelson, and The Chipmunks were among that year's hit parade chart-toppers.

As the Festival closes in on its 60th year, it remains true to its original principles. Rather than a competition, the event offers a supportive environment for local amateur musicians and music students to perform. After their performances, they receive an oral and written assessment from a professional musician.

One of the adjudicators this year is Cameron Streicher, a pianist, piano teacher, singer, and choral director living in Kitchener. He graduated from Wilfrid Laurier University with a double degree in music education and music theory, and a number of honours, including the President's Award and the gold medal for music. Streicher teaches piano and music theory at the university; he also leads and performs in a number of choral groups.

When he gives feedback to the musicians, in the words of an old song, he always "accentuates the positive," keeping criticism constructive rather than destructive. "I want their performances to be positive experiences," he explains. He also gives hands-on instruction at the piano.

"You have to keep age and ability in mind when you're making comments," he adds. With older and more experienced youth, he looks at technique as well as interpretation and phrasing. "With the younger ones," he says, "you don't go note-for-note, but look at their overall performance - whether they got the main idea." He always finds things to praise and commend in each musician.

This is his first year at the Bancroft festival. He has found that the senior students have strong technique. "I was very impressed with both the piano playing and the singing. And I was impressed that a number performed their own compositions."

The Festival concludes this week with the gala "Festival of Stars."