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RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Flame is an 8-year-old Belgian Tervuren, a breed not commonly used for leader dog work in the U.S.

Flame thinks she's a Sweet Adeline, and maybe she is

By Pat Bordman
staff writer

Any member of any Sweet Adeline chorus is accustomed to singing, competing and being critiqued, but those who belong to Farmington Hills chapter have a critic with them on stage at all times. A four-footed critic. One who is fact has been known to groan when she detects a dissonant sound.

For the past two years the award-winning group has been augmented by Flame, an 8-year-old Belgian Tervuren who belongs to Laura Pappas, one of the members and a lead singer.

Miss Pappas, a Farmington Hills resident who has been blind since birth, is accompanied wherever she goes by her friend, constant companion, assistant, and sometimes pet.

When Miss Pappas became a Sweet Adeline, so, as it turns out, did Flame. She is on stage for all rehearsals, competitions and performances.

She shows her feelings during these times by yawning, moaning or going to sleep.

"SHE'S A musical dog," Miss Pappas said. "She had to go to instrument classes with me all through college."

"She's also the greatest critic on four legs. If we're really bad she'll groan. Not loud enough for the others to hear maybe, but I sure do."

Flame is of a rare breed in the U.S. but one that is used commonly in Europe for leader dog work.

She appears to be a cross between a short German Shepherd and a Collie with a very long body. And she appears to have taken on the best characteristics of both breeds.

According to Miss Pappas, Flame is protective as a Shepherd, but gentle as a Collie and quieter than either. Except during really tough rehearsal periods.

Jim Pollard, director of the barber-shop singers, told an anecdote that is typical of how Flame lets her feelings known.

"I was teaching a tag (end of a song) and it was a very loud part," he said. "As we finished Flame got up, yawned really wide and fell down fast asleep. I had to stop the rehearsal it was so funny."

USUALLY FLAME'S presence is not so noticeable. Since she is trained to watch over Laura and respond to her every movement, the two are usually side by side.

"We are together all the time. She's trained to lead me and to follow the commands I give her. We're a team," Miss Pappas said.

But because of the demands of performing on stage, Flame had to be taught to wait for Laura behind the risers they commonly use to perform. "She's had to acclimate," Miss Pappas said. "She knows that when she is in harness she's responsible for me. So for Sweet Adelines I had to teach her to lay next to, or behind the risers."

"For a while she came running back to me. Risers have steps and she might have been worried watching me go up the steps."

"I couldn't get mad at her because that's what she understood her job to be. But I'm always with somebody when I leave her now and she knows that I'll come back and get her."

POLLARD remembered one Sweet Adeline competition when judges made it known they were unaware that a blind singer, much less a dog, was on stage.

"Before a competition we have to turn in what is called a handicapped sheet to the judges," Pollard explained. "It is a list of all of your problems, such as, if someone has a broken arm in a cast, or other things that might distract the judges from a singer's voice."

"Well we list Laura as a blind singer on that sheet. After one competition the judges came up to me and asked where our blind singer was. They couldn't pick her out."

Pollard followed up his story by saying Miss Pappas is not only excellent singer, but has perfect pitch and is a fast study.

"She is usually the first to learn not only her part, but all the other parts as well. She is also one of the first to learn the choreography," he said.

IT IS NOT only at singing time that her blindness goes largely unnoticed. And the telephone marketing specialist with Cadillac Plastics wants it that way.

"I have not told any customers or branch managers that I am blind," she said. "Once in a while they come in and see me face to face, but otherwise they don't know. I don't want them placing an order with me out of pity."

In addition to a Braille, which many people mistakenly believe is a computer on her desk, Miss Pappas has two other aids in her work.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Laura Pappas sings and Flame settles down for a nap with Farmington Hills Sweet Adelines, who are now in rehearsals for international competition. The 75-member group won the regional championship this

year and when members vie against 32 regional winners in the fall of 1982, Flame will be with them.

'She's the greatest critic on four legs. If we're really bad, she'll groan. Not loud enough for the others to hear, but I sure do.'

— Laura Pappas
Sweet Adeline

"I have a few adaptations that help me in my work," she said. "The company has nine phone lines. I have a light probe that scans the switchboard. When a light is blinking it emits a noise to tell me which line is ringing. If the secretary is away, I can answer the."

"Also, a lot of my work involves figuring square feet and I have to get prices real fast. So I have a talking calculator which gives me the numbers out loud."

THOUGH THERE are numerous noises at work, they are not the ones Miss Pappas has been trained to hear.

A music major at Western University in Kalamazoo, Miss Pappas is a certified kindergarten-through-sixth grade vocal music teacher, following two generations of music teachers in her family.

She had hoped to go into music therapy for a career, but unfortunately graduated at a time when teaching jobs were scarce.

In fact, it took three years of perseverance to land her current position. "I was determined to get something."

Barbershoppers wanted

A few good barbershoppers are still being sought by Farmington Hills Sweet Adelines as the group revs up for international competition.

The group now has a permanent rehearsal home in St. Paul Latvian Evangelical Church, 30623 12 Mile Road,

east of Orchard Lake Road and would like to see its 75-member roster get to 90 before it takes on 32 other regional-winning choruses in the fall of 1982.

Women interested in singing four-part harmony with the group are invited to call Marge Murray, 628-6243.

Flame feels she's a Sweet Adeline now and as far as we're concerned she is one of us," Miss Pappas said.

To prove that Flame truly was one of the girls, the group awarded their musical mascot a trophy and a red ribbon after the chorus took the regional championship title.

And she will be with the barbershoppers, on stage, when members appear in Minnesota in the fall of 1982 vying for the national championship.

"I don't think there are too many dogs that do this sort of thing and finding it relaxing."

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Farmington Hills Sweet Adelines' musical mascot got her music education from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo when she attended classes with her mistress there.

Larry Wilde

Research finds that comedians are made, not born

By Shirlee Iden
staff writer

It's no joke that comedians are made and not born.

Doctors merit praise for saving a life and moms are adored for the curative powers in their chicken soup.

For comedians, it's making people laugh that wins them attention and gives them the necessary pat on the back.

Larry Wilde, stand-up comic and humor writer, believes that comedians are shaped by lives that often are no laughing matter at all.

Author of more than 20 jokebooks, Wilde also has written two serious books about comedy.

"The first book I wrote was serious,"

he said in a Southfield interview. "It's titled 'The Great Comedians Talk About Comedy' and I worked with 16 comics from Woody Allen to Ed Wynn."

"What I discovered was every one of those going into comedy had three things in common: They're members of minorities, they grew up lacking love, and they were born into poverty."

Wilde says he qualifies on all three counts being Jewish, poor, and growing up with an "enormous inferiority complex."

"These are all things that motivate someone to be funny," he contends.

Recently, Wilde's best shot at making people laugh has been through the 22 joke books he's published. The latest is "The Official Doctor's Joke Book" to be published in July by Banham Books.

To wit: "Doctors — It must be wonderful to be one. What other job lets you ask a girl to take her clothes off, look her over at your leisure — then send the bill to her husband?"

AND THEN: What is the difference between an itch and an allergy? — About \$25 a visit."

Doctors are only one target of the Wilde wit. His books have focused on sex, lawyers, politics, cat lovers, dog lovers, religion and ethnic jokes.

"It all started right here in Detroit," Wilde relates. "After the success of my first book on the 16 comedians, I decided to write a semi-autobiographical novel. I submitted it to a publisher. They rejected it flat out but the editor

asked me to write a two-sided book on ethnic humor."

Since he had no Polish or Italian jokes ready, Wilde made up a sign that said "Polish or Italian joke bought for 25 cents each."

"I got some rolls of quarters, took my sign and went over to the UCLA campus and just stood there," he says. "The kids went by and handed me their jokes and I gave them a quarter for each."

"It wasn't any different than when I took a shovel to the cemetery on Veteran's Day at age 10 and got tips for digging holes for people's flowers."

When his Polish jokebook, which flipped to Italian barbs, was published, a group of young people in Detroit bought up large numbers of the books,

called the media and burned the books in a downtown park.

"WE SOLD 26,000 books in a few days because of the media attention," Wilde says. "You just can't plan for that."

Born in Jersey City, New Jersey, Wilde says he was out on the streets by age 8 selling newspapers and songbooks, and dreaming up the shovel-in-the-cemetery scam shortly thereafter.

Part of growing up was years of practice to lose the Eastern dialect. He spent two years in the U.S. Marine Corps, which he didn't find funny at all. Ticking people's funny bones came



Larry Wilde
comic author

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