



The 18 girls who make up Our Lady of Mercy High School's Mercyaires wear their black pants and vests with striking red blouses when they sing "Hey There, Good Times," the number they've chosen to open their act of competition in Johnny Mann's Great American Choral Festival in Lansing this weekend.



In a medley called "For Ladies Only," Mary Pat Lafferty (at left) from Redford, Linda Kurzeja from Farmington Hills and Rosemarie Binig from Detroit sing songs made famous by female singing groups.

The Mercyaires sing and dance their way to national finals

By Loraine McClish
Staff writer

The Mercyaires, a select group of singers, dancers and musicians from Mercy High School, are revving up now for national competition when they face other regional group winners in Johnny Mann's Great American Choral Festival.

The 18 teens that make up the Mercyaires took the regional first-place award in the early spring competition, staged in Plymouth, in the choreographed youth category.

Larry Teevens, director of the group he has called "my girls" since he formed the Mercyaires 21 years ago, was not surprised with that win. And neither will he be surprised if they walk away with the \$10,000 first prize after the May 27-28 festival in Ann Arbor.

"This is the best possible time for them to be performing in competition. They have been working together since September and by spring they are at their absolute best. My girls have a mandatory 12 hours of rehearsal a week and have already given about 50 shows this year," Teevens said.

"By spring they are seasoned and polished performers and give their most professional shows."

TEEVENS CAN expect about 100 students to audition for the Mercyaires every September. By October, the ones who have made it are ready for their first show, generally at a Mercy High assembly.

The criteria is high. To be chosen, the girl must already be a member of the senior glee club. She has to have a high enough grade average to be able to meet the rigorous calendar of rehearsals and performances because so many of the shows they give are during the school day.

And she must have parental consent for that schedule.

Beyond that Teevens, who stages the auditions with the Mercyaires' choreographer and pianist, chooses the year's group because of "their sparkle, their bounce, their glitter," he said.

"They have got to have the showmanship that makes for a professional show."

Teevens has adhered to a strict regimen of professionalism since the inception of the Mercyaires that is carried into churches, institutions, schools, parks, rehabilitation centers, nursing homes, private homes and country clubs.

A great many of the shows are benefits, made possible by the groups who ask for a show and "pay whatever they can," Teevens said.

THE 1982-83 Mercyaires are Amy Bobington, Lenore Benoit, Linda Kurzeja, Mary Koss and Karen Wenette, all residents of Farmington Hills.

Kerri Bacsayi lives in Northville. Rosemarie Binig, Denise Nowak and Wanda Walker are from Detroit.

Laura Culbertson and Sarah Hackett are both residents of Orchard Lake. Dana Drew is from Bloomfield Hills. Joan Darnell from Southfield.

Mary Pat Lafferty and Maggie McGuire are Redford Township residents. Diane Moore is from Birmingham and Lisa Morgan from West Bloomfield. Kim Stewart comes from Garden City.

They will travel in their own bus, "with a great deal of equipment," Teevens said, to Ann Arbor's Power Center for the Performing Arts on the campus of the University of Michigan for the weekend of competition.

As regional winners, they have been invited to attend two "Sweat Your Heart Out" workshops before adjudication of the choreographed youth groups.

The Mercyaires will be judged Friday afternoon.

The girls' competitors are the Priest River Show Choir from Idaho; "Touch of Class" from Ohio; The West Covina High School Chamber Singers from California; the New Heritage Singers from Lynchburg, Va.; and the Castles Choral from California.

THE WINNER chosen from these groups, all judged Friday afternoon, will be expected to perform that night in the "Show of Champions."

The format for Saturday is the same for college, university and adult choreographed and non-choreographed groups.

Host for the entire festival is the Plymouth Community Chorus.

This is the second year for Johnny Mann's Great American Choral Festival which was established with the motto "Bringing America together through music."

Tickets for the day of judging and the "Show of Champions" are \$7 for each day and may be purchased in the Ann Arbor Chamber of Commerce office during regular working hours prior to the festival dates. On Friday and Saturday, tickets may be purchased at the U-M box office.

Teevens says he already knows what he's going to do with the \$10,000 prize money.

"I've got the perfect spot in the school that will beautifully convert into a small 100-seat theatre," he said.



Drum and piano player for the group are Mary Koss from Farmington Hills and Dana Drew from Bloomfield Hills. But all of the musicians have counterparts so they can switch with one another to be up front dancing.

Memorial Day Sale.

PATIO & FURNITURE CASUALS

36534 Van Dyke • Sterling Hgts.
Brentwood Plaza • bet. 15-16 Mile Rd.
979-5500
Mon., Thurs. 9-6
Tues., Wed., Sat. 10-6 Sun. 12-6

Staff photos by Randy Borst



The trio above is made up of Lenore Benoit (at left) from Farmington Hills, who is also a drummer; Maggie McGuire from Redford, who also plays bass; and Wanda Walker of Detroit. At left is bass player Lisa Morgan, who lives in West Bloomfield.