

Festival seems serene, but calamity can strike

By Elizabeth Roach
special writer

It was a close call last year when the tenor slated to sing in the Meadow Brook Music Festival presentation of Mahler's "Das Lied von der Erde" came down with laryngitis.

It was Saturday morning, and the performance was scheduled for that night, recalled Stuart Hyke, the festival's managing director.

Another tenor was found in New York, and the sorely needed substitute arrived at 4:05 p.m. for a 4 p.m. rehearsal.

Such are the details Hyke and his staff must attend to during Oakland University's 10-week summer cultural series. The festival, with a budget of \$1.5 million, offers more than 50 events for concert-goers in metropolitan Detroit.

Hyke said the festival draws a large part of its attendance from Birmingham, Bloomfield and Rochester.

FESTIVAL STAFFERS must be prepared for bad weather, ill or absent performers, equipment malfunctions and insects.

"Last summer was Michigan's worst mosquito year in history. This year, so far, we've had good luck on that," Hyke said.

Meadow Brook is sprayed four times weekly with a new, stronger solution to take the itch out of those evenings outdoors.

"I never used to be interested in the weather before I came here," said Hyke, now in his third season at Meadow Brook.

Rain can cost a concert 500 to 2,000 in attendance, Hyke said. That's compared to a full house of 7,500.

"We've done some concerts in the driving rain. We go rain or shine. So far we've been pretty lucky. The skies haven't opened up too many times," Hyke said.

In 1978, however, a tornado warning delayed to about 11 p.m. a concert by pop singers England Dan and John Ford Coley, Hyke said.

"Most of the people left and came back," he said. "Those who didn't want

to were just given refunds."

WEATHER ALSO can affect instruments. Humidity can make string instruments go out of tune. Cold weather can crack woodwind instruments and stiffen a brass player's lips.

But Hyke said performers at Meadow Brook aren't usually a problem, since management is careful about who it books.

"We haven't had much trouble with no-shows," he said. "We try to be fairly careful. Everybody has a track record. If somebody's a turkey, the word gets out pretty fast."

Hyke added: "Some years ago, we had a performer arrive drunk. Honestly, you really couldn't tell. We haven't had a problem with a performer being impaired to the point of not being able to perform."

"If that ever happened, we'd sober him up really fast."

MEADOW BROOK seldom has audience problems, Hyke said. Its average patron is about 30 years old. The festival doesn't book heavy-rock acts, which, he said, attract more troublemaking fans in their early 20s.

"We have well-behaved crowds. The facilities are never trashed. We're not interested in that sort of stuff," he said.

"If you want to do a big rock concert, there's a whole list of other concerns to worry about."

Hyke does recall one instance of audience disturbance in 1979. Before a performance, a member of the road crew for the Judy Collins show whis-

per and waved to a woman he knew.

In return, the crewman was punched by a man in the audience, who mistak- only thought the whistle and wave were directed at his own wife.

On the whole, Hyke said, the festival, now in its 18th season, hasn't had many operational problems.

"The whole key to a successful series is advance planning. In this business you hate surprises," he said.



MINDY SAUNDERS/staff photographer

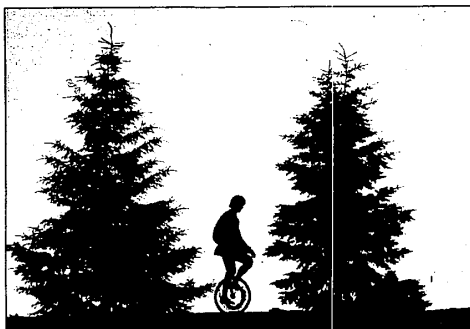
Festival director Stuart Hyke has learned to take bad weather, insects, crowds and ill performers in stride.



ART EMANUEL/staff photographer

Meadow Brook crowds are the least of the music festival staff's worries, according to director Stuart Hyke. He says audiences are usually older and be-

haved than the rock-concert crowds that frequent other outdoor music events.



DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

Meadow Brook's calm outdoors, a setting for performers like this unicyclist at a children's show last summer, belies the bedlam that occasionally breaks out behind the scenes.

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