

MEADOWBROOK MUSIC FESTIVAL

Memories

AFTER 25 years, memories and Meadow Brook have become synonymous.

Take Plymouth attorney John C. Stewart, for instance.

During the mid-'60s, specifically the summers of 1965, '66 and '67, Stewart recalls having "the great opportunity to live on the campus of Oakland University and study with some of the most outstanding American musicians."

They included James Levine, Lynn Harrell and Istomin, Stern & Rose, and Robert Shaw.

"As a member of the high school choir, I will always remember the thrill of singing the Bach B-minor Mass and the Chichester Psalms by Bernstein. Also, it was a very special privilege to be a student conductor under Robert Shaw."

In fact, Stewart has a picture of himself with Shaw autographed by the noted chorale director.

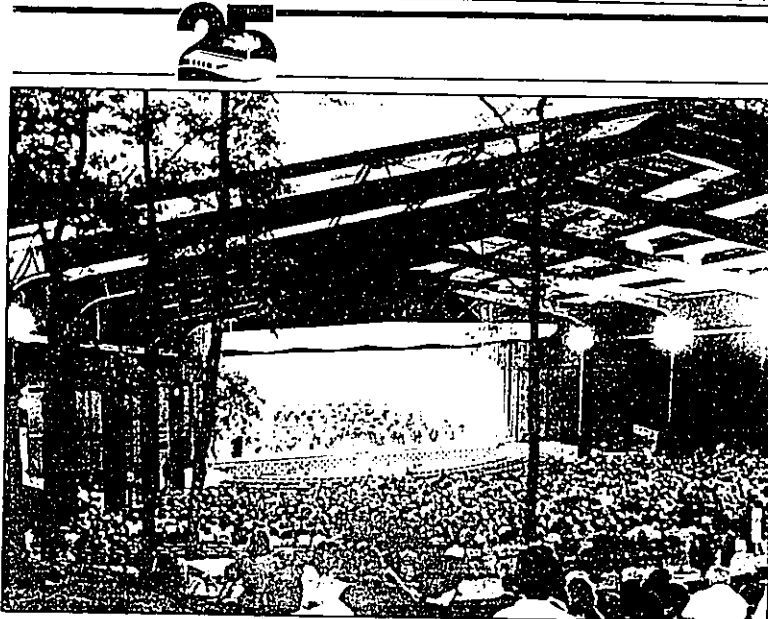
SUSAN MCCARTY of Troy has another remembrance.

"I went to an Andy Williams concert with my friend Barb. Some nostalgic group from before my time warmed up the crowd by inviting us to sing 'Anytime.'"

"I catch on to melodies quickly, so I faked the words and sang along. When the lead singer waved the mike in Barb's face, she clamped shut, so he stuck it in mine. I obliged, and belted out: 'Anytime, I'm too young to know the words.'"

I brought the house down. How many people do you know who sang with Andy at Meadow Brook?

JANE Comstock of Livonia contributes this: "We invited my sister and now deceased father (who I thank for musical appreciation) to a Mathis/Mancini concert. It was a beautiful evening, weatherwise. Both artists were performing at their best. As Johnny was singing 'Heavenly,' I leaned back on elbows to glimpse skyward. And in an awesome flash, a shooting meteor arched its way from right to left over the pavillion. Lawn occupants went wild, much to the bewilderment of under-the-roof patrons. That once-in-a-lifetime thrill quenched many years of wishfully coveting the luxury of up-close, more comfortable seating."



Royal Oak Tribune photo

Things haven't changed all that much at Meadow Brook concerts in the 25 years they've been going on. This is the very first opening night, Thursday, July 23, 1964.

A magical aura all its own

By Cathie Breidenbach
special writer

WITH ITS open-air pavilion, its crescent of trees standing sentinel around the hollow of a hillside, the Meadow Brook Music Festival is made for music and for memories.

The smell of freshly cut grass and the mid-summer-night magic of stars in an open sky make the festival a charmed place.

For the past 24 summers, people have gathered there, and each summer the lore of Meadow Brook grows.

There's a magic about the place and a madcap serendipity that sparks

memories of summer evenings spent in the Baldwin Pavilion or on the hillside under the stars.

Marian Bunt, who worked on ticket committees and women's activities in the festival's early days, remembers, "There were just brambles and woods, and out of it came a gorgeous pavilion."

"The whole thing happened because Woody Varner had a dream and Jim Hicks helped make it come true."

Open-air pavilions were rather new when the Baldwin Pavilion was built, and Bunt said the staff worried about acoustics.

"We all prayed, crossed our fingers and our legs that first night because you don't know how it'll sound until

the first notes come out," she said.

They needn't have worried: Audiences and players alike note the excellent acoustics at Meadow Brook. They're so good that Bunt said, "You can stand in the center of the stage and be heard at the top of the hill without amplification."

ON CONCERT NIGHTS, people with lawn tickets start arriving at six p.m. They lug hefty coolers, bulging picnic baskets and buckets of fried chicken over the rim of the hill and stake out a square of turf with their blankets.

By the time latecomers arrive, the

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Problems were part of growth

By Joan Boram
special writer

THERE IS still an air of the bucolic about Meadow Brook on a May morning, if you face away from the pavilion and look over the spot where the Wilsons' horses used to graze. Aside from the cacophony of birds, and the wind mourning through the pines, there is only the sharp rap-rap-rap of a lone hammer on the structure that will soon be the Meadow Brook Music Festival's new gift shop.

"It's the original grass, but most of the trees have been planted since the festival began," George Karas knows whereof he speaks. In 1957, as he was about to enter graduate school in civil

engineering, and the idea of an Oakland University was still in its earliest stages, he was hired by Mr. and Mrs. Alfred G. Wilson to be the head of campus planning.

Now the site of the Meadow Brook Music Festival, the meadow was the "retirement home" for the Belgians, hackneys and riding horses that the Wilsons showed in competition all over the country. When the horses got old, they were sent here to live out their days. The two barns ("We've spent a \$1.98 to keep them, but they are Meadow Brook.") at the festival entrance, now used to store picnic tables, were once shelters for out-to-pasture show horses.

"I REMEMBER WHEN the Wil-

sons made a trip to Scotland, and brought back some Shetland ponies. They used to come right up to the door of the house where I lived with my wife and three children, and we would give them treats," Karas said.

Eighteen months after Karas joined the staff, Oakland University opened. Mrs. Wilson took a great interest in the university, and was active in its affairs until she died in September 1967.

"One day in 1963, 'Woody' Varner (Durwood B. Varner, first chancellor of Oakland University) called me in and said, 'George, let's build an outdoor festival for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Select a site.'"

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