

By Joan Boram
special writer

WHEN THE Meadow Brook Music Festival opened on July 23, 1964, it was the dream of its founders that it would evolve into a summer arts program similar to Tanglewood. That first year, from July 23 to Aug. 15, there were a total of 12 concerts by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

For the past 10 years, managing director Stuart C. Hyke has been responsible for the dream that is Meadow Brook. "We are trying to broaden the festival so that there is something to appeal to every musical taste," said the ebullient Hyke. "You'd have to be totally indifferent to music not to find something of interest in the current season. There will be more than 70 performances, offering a broad spectrum of talent."

"In terms of classical offerings we do as much or more as we did in the past. We have constituencies. We try never to abandon the people who have supported us through the years, in terms of offering the DSO and guest orchestras. At the same time, we try to attract people who have never come to the festival."

"It's a sort of balancing act: If you're perceived to be too innovative, the traditional audience will feel aban-

doned. At the same time, it's vitally important that we attract newer audiences.

"A Ford Foundation study found that the chances of attracting someone over 30 to a type of entertainment that they have not previously experienced is much more difficult than if you can get them under the age of 30. So it's important to develop interest in attending concerts at a young age.

"IN STARTING THE Children's Concerts, we hoped to get the children coming at about the age of three and above. I'm very excited by the fact that the hottest tickets this season are for Sharon, Lois, & Bram, the stars of TV's "The Elephant Show." "This is our first foray into using national talent for the Children's Concert Series — we also have Bob McGrath, of "Sesame Street." — and I'm extremely pleased with the results. It's a good way to introduce people to the Festival at a young age."

"For many years," he continued, "most of our core audience was 40 and above. The Summer Solid Gold Series has helped bring in a lot of people from 30 to 45, and some contemporary concerts will bring in some as young as their teens. And now, the Children's Concerts will bring them in as young as three years old! We have the gamut pretty well covered."

"It's a challenge to have the right mix of talent," he said. "We try to put acts together that make sense together. We wouldn't put Perry Como and a veteran rock star on the same program. If a specific audience is interested in a particular type of music, we put that type together and build a series."

"Series ticket sales are a very important part of our offering, accounting for about 1/3 of ticket sales. On the whole, we've had a very high batting average, but we've had a few acts (no names, please) that have gone down to very loud or very quiet deaths at the box office."

"We rarely compete with Pine Knob for talent, mainly because of capacity. They can book acts that need a large audience to make a profit; our facility, being smaller, can accommodate a wide range of offerings on a more intimate scale."

It's impossible to discuss outdoor entertainment in Michigan without mentioning the capricious Michigan weather. "Most events take place from mid-June to the end of August. Some weeks there will be performances seven nights a week, with children's programs or matinees some afternoons, so the logistics get pretty intricate. In a more temperate climate, you could have a longer season, but in Michigan you'd really be taking a chance."

"We must all be living right,

though, because we have only been rained out once. It was during a matinee of "Chorus Line" in 1985. It rained so much that summer that I was about to start lining up pairs of animals. During this performance, we had already shut off the electricity because of lightning.

"If you know 'Chorus Line,' you know most of the action takes place on a three-inch white line that runs across the middle of the stage. Where did our roof spring a leak? Right over the white line," he said with a wry grin.

Hyke emphasized that it's impossible to overestimate the importance of volunteers to Meadow Brook's success.

"The whole reason we've been able to exist for 25 seasons is community support: Our volunteers on our executive committee, the Rochester Festival Club, the Festival Women's Committee. While we do an efficient job as possible in supporting ourselves, there's no doubt that, offering cultural entertainment, we'd never be in a position whereby we could sell enough tickets or price them in such a way that we wouldn't lose money."

"We would never have gotten off the ground the first season or persevered throughout the 25 seasons if it weren't for the interest and dedication of the volunteers in the community."

recurring problem



'Periodically, someone will suggest VIP parking, but that's contrary to the spirit of the festival. Only symphony members have special parking spaces. For the rest, it's come one, come all.'

— George Karas, former head of campus planning

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