



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, 17 September 2009

A love of music keeps you young, says volunteer Bert

Bert is one of those rare kinds of people; firstly because he celebrated his 90th birthday in May of this year and secondly, because he has been volunteering his time as an entertainer for over 20 years; most recently with Baptistcare's Community Visitors Scheme.

The Commonwealth-funded Community Visitors Scheme is a program that matches volunteers to people who live in aged care villages that may not have any regular family or social visitors; thus increasing their social interaction and quality of life.

Bert has been working with Suzanne Maxwell, Baptistcare's Community Visitors Coordinator, for three or four years.

'I asked, when I first started, "can I play music?" as the normal Community Visitors policy is one-on-one visiting. Baptistcare said yes and the rest is history,' says Bert.

Sitting in front of what looks to be his music on a music stand, Bert conjures a constant stream of merry old melodies from his button accordion, which the residents of Geneff Village in Innaloo are enthusiastically enjoying on this occasion.

Upon closer inspection, what was first thought to be the sheet music to each of these old-time favourites, is simply an exhaustive list of song titles that Bert can play from memory. On hand, Bert had 150 songs as part of his repertoire and he even managed a few requests that weren't part of his set list.

When asked where his love of music began, Bert replies that growing up on a farm in Yuna, 40 miles east of Geraldton, in the twenties and early thirties meant that there wasn't a whole lot to do and the local dances were highlights of the social scene.

'My grandfather would also visit for weeks at a time and we'd be thoroughly entertained by him singing, with my mother accompanying him, for hours on end,' says Bert.

'Many of the songs I learnt by heart back then I am still playing now to appreciative audiences.'

Another raft of songs were committed to memory after he enlisted in the army at the age of 21; Bert spent his coming-of-age birthday on the train to the enlistment office.

Since then, and for about 20 years, Bert has been a member of what he describes as a concert party; seven or eight people, accompanied by a pianist, who performed 30-40 concerts a year at various seniors clubs and aged care villages.

Mary's Melody Makers, as they were known, have now ceased performing as a group as their numbers dwindled and interest subsided. But it is blindingly obvious that Bert's love of music will help him keep ditties like Edelweiss, Yankee Doodle Dandy, Pack up your troubles, Irish eyes are smiling and Isle of Capri in the play lists of many.



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At 90 years of age a casual listener may wonder how many more tunes the music man has in him but with his only real health complaint being a bout of tuberculosis back in the forties that has now completely subsided, thanks to the constant exercising of his lungs through singing, you could safely deduce that Bert has several years of concerts yet to give.

For more information about the Community Visitors Scheme you can contact Baptistcare on (08) 9282 8600 or visit www.baptistcare.com.au.

Ends

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