

Life is a cabaret for Brant Men of Song

Brant News

The Brant Men of Song invite people to come to the cabaret for a night of song, food and fun.

The 35-member, four-part harmony, all-male chorus will sing songs from theatrical productions like the Sound of Music, South Pacific, Les Miserables, Brigadoon and Cabaret, as well as some sacred songs, when it hosts the 14th annual Cabaret Dinner fundraiser on Saturday, May 10.

"(The audience) will get a whole range of music from humorous and sentimental, to very poignant, hard-edged songs like Cabaret," chorus historian and baritone Bob MacMillan said. "Songs will range from satirical, to great love songs and songs that will leave people with a touch of nostalgia, like the songs from South Pacific."

The Brant Men of Song formed in 1961 as a 16-member chorus under the direction of Frank Holton. Over the years it went through several directors and became a member of Associated Male Choruses of Ontario.

Today, under the direction of Bill Schatz, the chorus continues to host two major fundraisers each year, Cabaret in the spring and a Christmas concert with its sister choir, the Brant Belle 'A' Dears.

For many, Brant Men of Song is like a brotherhood of sorts, with some men like president and baritone Steve Ross having memberships of over 40 years.

"There's so much fellowship and camaraderie," Ross, said. "It's like a family."

Singing with the group is a source of joy for members, often helping to cure what ails them.

"You can sometimes come in (to a rehearsal) feeling kind of low but when you leave, you are feeling quite high," MacMillan said. "If we weren't singing in harmony we would probably lose a lot of the guys, it's the harmonizing that does it."

Brant Men of Song vice president and first tenor Dave Neely joined the group 20 years ago and today at nearly 60 is still the second youngest member. He would like to see more young men involved with the chorus so that it can continue into the future.

"If you don't bring in younger people, you are doomed to failure," Neely said. "We would love to have some younger people."

Neely gave credit to the success of the all-male Ontario Youth A Capella Chorus, of which 40 of 90 members are from Brantford schools. OYA recently came home with a first place finish in the International Youth Barbershop Chorus Festival in Long Beach, California.

"When you have someone that has the talent like (OYA director Shawn Oakes), it comes out through the kids," Neely said. "We love it that they are doing so well."

Brant Men of Song AMCO representative and second tenor, Paul LeBlanc, said any male with a love of music is invited to join the chorus.

"You just have to love to sing," said LeBlanc, who joined the chorus in 1977. "You have a real bond by being a part of the chorus."

There are times when the men are overcome by the power of four-part harmonizing, especially when singing sacred songs.

"There are some times when it is absolutely electrifying," Ross said. "When we sing When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, it brings tears to my eyes."

Cabaret 2014 will be held at the Polish Hall, 154 Pearl St.

Doors open at 5:30 p.m. with dinner served at 6:30 p.m. and the concert at 7:30 p.m. Tickets cost \$30 and can be purchased by calling Steve Ross at 519-759-3442.



The Brant Men of Song practice their harmonies in this Brant News file photo from 2012.