

## North Hastings music festival impresses



OLM Grade 3 choir in full voice. TONY PEARSON Special to This Week

### By Tony Pearson

The North Hastings Music Festival, now nearly 60 years old, traditionally ends with a 'Festival of Stars', featuring performances by all the award winners. This year, it lived up to its billing, as the audience applauded time and again. Sometimes it was for the bravery of young musicians just starting out, who essayed pieces beyond the difficulty level you'd expect of newbies. Sometimes it was for a new interpretation of an old classic. And sometimes, it was just because the performance was dazzling.

Music programs in schools may be under threat, but not in Bancroft. Award winners included the York River Grade 5 band, Our Lady of Mercy Grade 3 choir, and the North Hastings High stage band.

The emphasis was on piano and voice, but other instruments came to play as well. Liam Ferguson attacked with his slide trombone, Fay Williams and Melissa Elliott took us 'Over The Rainbow' on flute, Annika Dale bewitched the audience on clarinet, Sam Riedl gave a new shade to the old folk tune 'Rakes of Mallow' on electric guitar, and Jessica and Sally Ritter took anyone of Irish ancestry back to their roots with their tin whistles. Mathiew Childs showed why he won the instrumental award of excellence when he wailed out with his tenor sax.

When it came to guitar, there was a range of experience. Young Solana Nordholt impressed with her performance of her own composition 'By Love', showing a writing ability which belied her youth. At the other end of the spectrum, Margaret Dearborn showed that age is no barrier to learning. Having taken up the guitar in her 'mature years,' she won the guitar award of excellence with the Edith Piaf classic 'Vie en rose,'

The evening's highest honour, the Keynote Musicianship Award, went to Gabriel Petric, for his masterful piano rendition of the first movement Hayden's Sonata in E Minor.

Special guest artist Adam Holmberg showed how the festival can launch a performer. A former Festival winner, Holmberg - a graduate of North Hastings High School - went on to a decade-long career as a singer, dancer, and actor on Disney Cruise Lines. He showed the audience why he was successful, as he sang numbers from 'Cats', 'Hercules' (his Disney audition number), 'Les Miserables,' and 'Frozen.'

Arguably the star of the evening was Jewelian Rodrigues, winner of the vocal award of excellence. She brought the audience to its feet in a standing ovation for her performance of the Andrew Lloyd Webber number 'Think of Me', from 'Phantom of the Opera.' Afterward, Festival president Valerie Switzer underlined how the event offered musicians of all ages and at all stages a chance to develop their skills. Switzer's association with the Festival goes back three decades, to when she was a young student performer. Now a teacher of piano, she has put in ten years on the organizing committee. In a sense, the wheel came full circle on Thursday, as her son Cody received an award for his piano ensemble work.

'All the students and all their parents take away some very important lessons from the Festival,' Switzer proclaimed. She noted how the event has gradually de-emphasized its competitive dimension to focus more on education. 'Everyone gets the experience of

performing, and receives professional critique ? mostly positive ? from truly qualified adjudicators.?

?Most important, everyone left happy and pleased with themselves,? she concluded. ?And the community is the richer.?