

A Christmas Concert

December 18, 2011

The Christmas Holidays: a time of homecomings, a time for joy and love, and an opportunity for families to spend time together. A time for people to reflect on charity and the joys of giving and giving back, a time for white gifts and a time for replenishing food banks.

It's also a time for Christmas concerts, as all across our beautiful country elementary teachers and elementary students put the results of months of hard work on to the stage for all to enjoy.

Christmas Concerts: a gift for all to share, and a gift for you to unwrap and enjoy. And here, another gift that will broaden your enjoyment, as it broadens your understanding. A sharing of the little details from one concert in particular, because one concert is, in a small way, every concert. Details that you may have missed, so swept up were you with the happy, joyful expressions on the faces of the children.

Neilburg Composite School. Thursday, December 15th, 7:00 PM: a presentation of 'A Peter Pan Christmas', in the works since Halloween and onstage for the first time.

You know, (because you were there), that all of the actors and actresses and singers and dancers did a marvelous job. The play was superb, and the Nativity scene that followed the play was enchanting. The grade 1/ 2 class has a musical talent that is not often seen in children of that age, and the musical prelude to the play, presented by the kindergarten class, was happy and special, and impossibly cute.

They performed two numbers, the kindergarten class. They 'Rocked Around the Christmas Tree' with big star-shaped sunglasses and guitars, and then they returned as happy little bushy tailed reindeer to enchant everyone with the 'Santa Hokey Pokey' bopping around and putting their antlers in, and taking their antlers out and so on.

But there are so many things that you don't know.

You don't know that kindergarten children who danced with abandon in the rehearsals (1 month of daily practice) will, when the curtain opens to reveal 300 plus people in the audience, freeze up solid.

Or that in anticipation of this freeze-up (because they've seen it before), no less than 5 adults backstage and out of sight of the audience, will begin to dance and gyrate like maniacs in the hope of inspiring the stage-frightened little sprogs to do the same.

And it works. *Most of them* start to dance and play their little mock guitars. One little girl completely abandons any pretense of strumming the guitar to wave wildly at her parents with her picking hand. '*Most of them*' because all that some children can do is stare, speechless and

dumbfounded because nothing in their wildest little dreams has prepared them for the spectacle of those maniacal gyrating adults.

You don't know that before the curtain opens, when the teacher's back is turned, one little guy will leave his appointed place on stage, crawl over and stick his head out of the curtain to be greeted by waves of laughter. Then, as the teacher tries to slide him back into place he will become as totally limp and unresponsive as a sack of potatoes. And about 3 seconds after being returned to his place (i.e. as soon as the teacher's back is turned) he will stick his head out of the curtains again to be rewarded with a bigger wave of laughter.

You are probably unaware that long before the play reaches the stage, the developing sense of what is and what is not appropriate apparel will cause these happy young people to revolt against the wearing of bushy reindeer tails ('you put your bushy tail in, you put your bushy tail out') because "they look silly, teacher!" Or that the revolt will continue until young Ramsay Flicek, in a spirit of compromise and diplomacy, persuades the teacher to wear one too.

You didn't know that Marilyn O., costume mistress, is responsible for arranging costumes for 12 rock stars, 12 reindeer, 3 Wise Men, a Joseph, a Mary, several angels and shepherds, 2 Tinker Bells, 3 Peter Pans, 2 Smees, 2 Capt. Hooks, 2 Wendys, Johns and Michaels, 1 crocodile, 2 garbage trucks (yes, you read that correctly), 8 elves, 1 Santa, 8 additional reindeer, 6 snow fairies, various toys, 4 pirates, 1 Sasquatch, and a PTERODACTYL. Picture this: "So children, which one of you would like to be a flying, flesh-eating dinosaur in the Christmas Concert this year?"

You had no idea that teachers and E.A.s will marshal up to 20 scared, excited, distracted, 'can't stop shaking kids' with swords, antlers, dinosaur wings and croc heads, all of whom have to stay quiet in the backstage entrance, a space in the gym equipment room that can comfortably hold 4 people. Or that 30 seconds before she had to go on stage, an alert student noticed that TINKER BELL WAS MISSING. (She was found, 20 seconds later, visiting with her parents in the audience).

And you assuredly were unaware that when the grade 6 students playing the lead roles became aware that the final scene was to conclude with Peter Pan and Wendy blowing kisses to one another, they went on strike. Absolutely refused to perform if anything that even remotely resembled a kiss was involved.

So they took out that kiss. And life was good.

Until one teacher with a wicked sense of humour convinced Wyatt Marshall (playing Peter Pan) that the results of blowing the biggest, fattest kiss possible towards two unsuspecting girls, in front of the 300 strong audience could be really, really spectacular. And they were. One went literally weak at the knees and sank towards the floor. The other had this 'I Can't Believe HE DID THAT' eye-rolling 'get-me-out-of-here' moment.

You also probably were unaware that the 6 'English-as-a-second-language' students pronounced their lines clearly and perfectly, that there were kids (thank you Clayton Schmidt) who cheerfully

took on a second major role at the last minute when illness prevented another actor from performing, or that D.J. Becotte, a young grade 5 boy coping with autism, who didn't speak for the first two years of school, took on the role of MC, and did an absolutely fantastic job.

Some of the best gifts at Christmas are the ones we barely recognize as gifts.

From all of us, staff and students of the Northwest School Division, Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, and the very best in the New Year to you and yours!



Top left: Sara Williams, Right: Frank Siemens, Eduard Borja
Bottom Left: Gus Wightman and Kailee Johnston Right: Zcharles Diamoano

