



THE GOSPEL SINGERS enjoy practicing at 3:30 p.m. on Sundays at the Decatur County Good Samaritan Center. They are (from left) Lois Carlson, Edla Olson, Phil Erickson, Myrna Jones, Ron Temple, Mary Ann Amack and

Melanie Anderson. Mr. Temple directs the group, which is available for programs in the area.

— Herald staff photos by Kimberly Davis



BACKING UP THE SINGERS with accompaniment were Edla Olson, pianist, (above) and Myrna Jones, organist (below). Both also join in singing out the old gospel songs.

Gospel Singers combine talents

By MARY LOU OLSON

When the Gospel Singers meet to practice at the Decatur County Good Samaritan Center, it brings together a group with uncommon musical talent.

And some pretty good ears.

The three women who accompany the group, Edla Olson on the piano, Myrna Jones as organist and Lois Carlson on the harmonica, all play strictly "by ear."

Director Ron Temple of Norcatour said he first had the idea for a gospel group after realizing what it meant to his mother, the late Marguerite Temple, who enjoyed musical programs when she lived at Cedar Living Center.

"Although she really didn't recognize me most of the time," he recalled, "she would tap her foot when the hymns were sung and even joined in singing Christmas carols during the holiday season."

Mr. Temple and his daughter, Suzanne Cahoj of Atwood, who also sings with the group, said they both have fond memories of singing around the piano as his grandmother, the late Blanche Temple, played the piano at the farm and now Mrs. Cahoj said that this group is using the same song books.

"I had a year of piano lessons when I was 9 years old," Mr. Temple said. "Then I was given a choice by my mother — to continue with piano lessons or drive the tractor. I chose the tractor, but I think I made the wrong choice. However, I do have a knack for knowing what sounds good."

He said he feels that the talent in this group takes the audience back in time when old-fashioned gospel music was sung at family picnics, in church and community events.

Mrs. Olson, 90, now a resident at Good Samaritan, still plays beautifully "all over the keyboard."

The former Edla Nelson, she was born on a farm in Rawlins County. She said she always loved to sing and was brought up singing hymns and old Swedish fun songs.

"We had a pump organ, and my mother and sisters played it," she said. "When I was 4 years old, I accompanied my parents and grandfather to see my uncle's family. I had never seen a piano before, and my cousin, also named Edla, was 8 and was taking piano lessons. I tried to play the melody of her lessons with one finger and after we went home, my father said he would buy me a piano, 'if I wanted one.' He didn't have to ask twice.

"This started my 'ear' for music, and I loved to play and copy my sisters when they played. Our family always had a singing party when we had company, and I sang bass with my dad since I liked harmony; mother sang alto; and my sisters and



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brothers would sing the melody."

Later, when she taught in country schools, Mrs. Olson said, she enjoyed teaching her pupils to sing. She later led the 4-H chorus and was pianist at Enne Lutheran, Herndon Covenant and Faith Lutheran churches.

"However, the most fun I ever had was playing organ and piano duets with Doris Shoemaker at the Oberlin United Methodist Church," she said.

Mrs. Carlson said that when she was about 6, she often heard her father, Walter Rezner, play the harmonica and jig to the tune, "The Irish Wash Woman." Although she thought it was interesting, she did not pursue playing the harmonica since she felt it was a "man's" instrument.

However, when she was 8, she developed an intense pain in her left leg, which was diagnosed by Dr. Wayne Brewster as osteomyelitis and required many operations.

"When I was in Kansas City at Bell Memorial Hospital (now K.U. Medical Center) for an operation on my leg," she recalled, "I was flat on my back with a cast from my toes to my chest for several weeks. At the time, Edith Anderson was our school teacher and she sent me a package with gifts and I was to open one each day. In one of the packages was a small mouth harp, and since I had nothing else to do, I tried playing it. After a lot of trial and error, I finally played a tune sounding like "Listen to the Mocking Bird."

She said she later bought better harmonicas and now enjoys playing with compact discs and cassettes which Cheryl Metcalf made for her. She said that mostly she enjoys the "oldies" with tune and rhythm.

Myrna Jones, who often played music at Cedar Living Center when Mrs. Temple was a resident, and Ron Temple were instrumental in starting the gospel group.

She said that though she took music lessons in Clayton when she was about 7, her teacher moved before she really learned how to read notes. Her father worked for the railroad and they moved to Nebraska when she was 11.

"On my 12th birthday, my folks bought me an old upright piano, and I learned to play hymns by listening to our radio," she said. "When we moved back to Clayton, my mother asked a friend if she would teach me to play, but after she heard me play 'The Old Rugged Cross,' the woman said that it would only confuse me since I had learned to play by ear."

Phil Erickson, one of the soloists with the group, said he, too, had been involved with music since childhood.

"I began music training as a kid with piano lessons, which I hated," he said, "so I quit. But later, I wanted to learn to sing like Willard Noren, so I took vocal lessons in high school. I also sang in the chorus, glee club, small ensembles, which, along with my solos, brought home several gold medals from state contests."

He said that his interest in music has continued throughout his life, and he has sung in church choirs wherever he lived and is a member of the Prairie Statesmen's Barbershop Quartet in McCook.

"I joined the Gospel Singers simply because I love to sing," he said. Among others who sing with the group are Melanie Anderson, Mary Ann Amack, Margaret McEvoy, Tina Perrin and Linda Fox.

The group performed for the Seeds of Hope Telethon earlier this year, and when they closed their program at the Mini Sapa activities at the Last Indian Raid Museum with "God Bless America" this fall, Mr. Temple said he didn't think there was a dry eye in the crowd.

The director said that anyone interested in music is welcome to join them when they practice at 3:30 p.m. each Sunday at the Good Samaritan Center.

The group is available for programs and will be performing at Christmas parties at Cedar Living Center and the Last Indian Raid Museum. Anyone interested in having them perform should call Mr. Temple at (785) 693-4360 or contact any of the members.