

## **If You Build It, They Will Come (and Dance and Sing and Juggle . . .)**

February 20, 2007

Posted by: Marilyn Clint

I was running late on Monday, January 29, which is all too often the case these days. I hate being late, just like I hate circling around and around in a parking garage looking for an available spot. But on this particular day, that's exactly where I was. So when I got to the auditions for 'Vaudeville Rose,' I expected they would already be 'off and singing.'

When I walked into the Queen Marie Ballroom on the mezzanine level of the Embassy Suites, there was a lot of activity, but no performing just yet. I passed about a dozen ladies in bright, flapper-style tap-dancing outfits in the foyer, plus a pair of folks in tuxes and a couple photographers from the local media. And out in the center of the ballroom itself, hotel staffers were busily building a dance floor, something we hadn't thought of when we first booked the room. Everything else was ready to go: Two tables were set up, along with a semicircle of chairs, a cd player nearby and several 'judges' already in place, including Jan Pollock, the president of the Portland Rose Society; Sue Bunday, Rose Festival board member and chairman of the Centennial Exposition (where 'Vaudeville Rose' will be featured); and Paul Jacobs, one of our most dedicated non-elected volunteers.

Our Talent Mastermind, Angel Ocasio (or Angel Impresario, as I like to think of him), was making like a helicopter, hovering everywhere at once. Judging forms were already laid out on the tables.

All I had to do was sit down and get ready to smile!

And that's exactly what I did for the next six hours. I smiled . . . and nodded . . . and rocked out . . . got teary-eyed a couple times (of course) . . . and laughed so hard once that I actually snorted.

This was not like a whacky American Idol audition. These performers were earnest and eager, and they were as diverse in their talents as we had hoped when we first conceived of the idea. We wanted to emulate the Vaudeville shows of the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, with jugglers and magicians and singers, dancers and actors. Our press release had even called for sword-swallowers.

And we had it all, even the sword-swallower!

As usual, it was a learning opportunity for me. I grew up with variety shows, but my appreciation of Vaudeville came strictly from some of my favorite stars whose careers got started on one of the two major Vaudeville circuits. The list of well-known Vaudeville performers is a Who's Who of American entertainers, including names like Charlie Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, W.C. Fields and Jimmy Durante. I was less familiar with their work than with Harry Houdini, Abbott and Costello and Bob Hope, to name a few.

But whether I knew it or not, some of my childhood idols had come from Vaudeville. 'Ted Healey and His Racketeers,' for instance, became 'Ted Healey and His Stooges' – finally

famous as the Three Stooges. My sister Charlie and I grew up loving the Stooges and watching their movies on Saturday afternoons. When we 'played Stooges,' she was Moe and I was Larry; we nyuk-ed it up endlessly with our next door neighbor, Dorothy, who had to settle with Shemp or Curly or Joe, whomever she preferred being on any given day. It never occurred to me that this was a good deal for Dorothy, since my Larry didn't have to take near as much abuse from Moe as her chosen Stooge did. In fact, Moe and Larry always ended up running the show in our neighborhood, for at least as long as our love of the Stooges lasted. I don't remember just how long that was, but America's fascination with the trio was definitely enduring. All in all, more than 600 Stooges films and shorts were made. And as I write this, the Spike Network is running an all-day Three Stooges marathon.

In 1931 and 1932, the iconic Bob Hope (then a relatively unknown hooper and stand-up comedian) played The Palace in the heart of New York City's theater district -- the ultimate venue for a Vaudevillian. Broadway talent scouts and agents were known to show up on Mondays to watch the matinee and shop for exciting newcomers, and Hope himself ended up on Broadway in a long-running musical starring Ruby Keeler, 'The Sidewalks of New York.' That same year, The Palace was turned into a movie-house, marking what's been called the official end of Vaudeville.

Thirty-five years later, Bob Hope -- then 64 years young and one of the world's best-known performers -- played the Memorial Coliseum during the Rose Festival. He was so popular in Portland, he was invited back as the Rose Festival headliner in 1969!

Did we see any Bob Hopes or Three Stooges on that Monday in January? We certainly saw a lot of talented folks, and I learned even more about the depth of entertainment offerings in this community. Portland definitely has something for everyone when it comes to live performances, including a heck of a lot of excellent jugglers. Did you know that Reed College hosts jugglers every Wednesday evening at the Sports Center in S.E. Portland?

I had no idea.

If this Centennial is teaching me anything, it's to be a better juggler. Maybe I'll head over to Reed College one of these Wednesdays.

And anyone interested in seeing the acts chosen from our auditions in January should plan on attending the Centennial Exposition on Sunday, June 10. Amazing floral-covered parade floats, choice vintage automobiles, Rose Festival memorabilia and static memories will be complemented by the talents of some of Portland's gamest and most gifted performers. For more information, check out this website.