

Manawatu Free Kindergarten Association Annual Talents Shows: 1958-1972

By Kerry Bethell,

Kerry Bethell is a historian who enjoys discovering new Manawatū stories.

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In 1971, Milverton Kindergarten sent a notice to the Manawatu Free Kindergarten Association (MKA) Mothers' Clubs calling for mothers to participate in the upcoming annual Talents show.

Talents is a show produced each year by the combined efforts of the kindergartens in the city and outlying districts. The mothers for each kindergarten organise and rehearse an item to be presented in the show, always a very successful and popular venture. As in the past, Milverton Kindergarten would like you to put forward an item this year, and we would ask all mothers to think about participating.

Similar notices circulated through the MKA to widen the call to its kindergarten families. As a voluntary association, the MKA's two parents clubs, the Mothers' club and the Fathers' club, fundraised for the benefit of local children and families. Although Government now provided some funding in support of kindergarten work being carried out, kindergarten associations were still dependent on fund raising for new buildings and associated costs. The annual Talents show that began in 1958, was a critical fund raising opportunity and a popular cause. These annual productions became an important social get-together for the community.

One that many mothers embraced. The lure of the Talents was the annual opportunity it provided them to perform: one that served to nurture their personal growth, to have fun and to build friendships. Retired MKA Head teacher Barbara Rowe, explained to me recently, how as a teacher, rather than 'taking over' she quietly supported mothers to become involved. She saw the benefits of the Talents as giving mothers a chance "to take a break away from the daily routine to share, to work with others, to develop creative skills, and to participate on stage, in a brief time of fun and gaiety." Mothers were enticed by this encouragement to "come along and have some fun" even, "if you feel you have no acting experiences to offer, you will be surprised to find you have!"

Like all events of this kind, the planning was time consuming, starting three to five months prior to the event. Ten musical items were to be presented, with the time for each set at 13 minutes. Mothers from each kindergarten designed the items, styled the wardrobes and spent many hours in rehearsal. They welcomed the support of kindergarten fathers especially in building props and backdrops, and for helping with childcare duties in their absence.

The Talents were held variously in Palmerston North's Concert Chamber, in the old Opera House and later in the Regent Theatre. A dress rehearsal took place first followed by the show itself. Some years, two or three evening performances took place to a packed audience along with a matinee on Saturday. Individual kindergartens were allocated specific tasks including: Dress rehearsal, Newspaper advertising, Tickets and Bookings, Poster and programmes, Display centre and window displays. Ushers and door sales and Helpers worked back stage.

In 1959 the combined Talents evening took place on Tuesday, the 29th of September in the Council Chamber in Palmerston North with nine Mothers Clubs taking part. In her report, MKA's President Mrs Mary Swainson commented on the evening as being

a most interesting and entertaining evening and the standard of performance was very high. ... Again we had a grand finale at the end and this was followed by supper to which about 300 stayed. My grateful thanks to those who helped prepare, serve and clear this away. Behind scenes we had a team of eight willing fathers who did our scene shifting for us. My grateful thanks go to all those who helped make this such a wonderful success.

The annual Talents continued to entertain and to amuse throughout the 1960s, presenting items widely different in character including songs and dances, skits and plays. One item even included a live sheep on stage. Much was made of topical themes and the use of old and modern popular numbers.


However in July 1971, the Talents Committee meeting reported that the MKA had called for the committee "to give serious consideration to decide whether the Talents show should continue." After extensive consideration, the feeling amongst the committee was that the whole thing had become too big, and gone well beyond the original idea.

Shortly after, the then show's producer, Mr Humphries, announced his intention to stand down from his eleven year role, citing it involved too much work. He stated it "would be a shame to see it dropped as he thought the mothers had a lot of fun and did really enjoy it." After considerable discussion, a majority of the delegates agreed that the annual Talents should continue, and suggestions were made to simplify its organisation.

However, in February 22, 1972, the MFKA decided that the Talents should go into recess. One of the concerns raised being that local committees were giving too much time to the Talents, and therefore had less time for other fundraising activities. A month later, the Talents Committee at their meeting on March 22 expressed its disappointment with the decision, but agreed the matter had been fully considered.

With Talents now relegated to the past, the memories of it live on. As a kindergarten parent involved in Talents, Marion Cairncross recalls her joy of performing. "What memories! Our

skit was about ten minutes long and I remember we sang 'Surrey with a fringe on top' and 'I'm just a girl who can't say no'. It was a lot of work but so much fun, and always worth it."



Manawatu Free Kindergarten Association
COMBINED MOTHER'S CLUB
Talent Evening

CONCERT CHAMBER - PALMERSTON NORTH
September 16th, 1958 at 8 p.m.

ADULTS 3/- CHILDREN 1/6

BOOKING AT COLLINSON AND CUNNINGHAME'S



MILVERTON 1953



Italian Street scene, Dannevirke Kindergarten 1960





HOKOWHITU. 1955



WEST END 1959





at
The OPERA HOUSE

PA. MERSTON NORTH

September 16-17 - 1961

8 p.m.

KINDERGARTEN

COMBINED MOTHER'S

CLUB

TALENTS EVENING

Book was at Collinson & Cunningham

Adults 7/-

Children 2/-



'The Belle's of St Roslyn' Roslyn Kindergarten Mothers Club 1960



'At the village fair' Levin Kindergarten 1960



'The Cancana' Feilding Kindergarten Mothers Club in rehearsal 1960