

MIDDLEGROUND

...carillon

Barbara Burklo



We Santa Cruz area people are all too inclined to take certain elements for granted.

Like sunshine, fresh air, blooming flowers — and the twice daily burst of beautiful carillon music emanating from up top of the Civic Auditorium.

Yesterday I talked to the sweet little lady who years ago volunteered to play the city's new carillon organ. Her name is Sylvia McDonough, and she's been involved, ever since.

In 1963, Santa Cruzan Harold Timberlake contributed the carillon in honor of his aunt, Mrs. Smith Tiffany, also a local resident.

A notice, asking for volunteer organists to audition, was placed in The Sentinel.

Sylvia, who had moved to Santa Cruz from Pocatello, Idaho, where she served as a church organist, was sure many other organists would flock to audition, so she decided not to try. But when another plea appeared in the paper, she offered her services and was given the job.

At first, she played three or four times a week, alternating with the automatic playing device that is somewhat like a giant music box with music rolls that activate metal prongs.

Now, she plays infrequently, but chooses her theme music with considerable care.

"On rainy days, I play 'happy rainy' music," she says, "and on holidays, like Christmas and the Fourth of July, I play special selections."

Highlight of her experience was some years ago, when she was asked to play for a wedding.

"A couple who worked for the city had met out by the fountain at City Hall," she recalls. "They asked me if I would play the carillon for their wedding..of course they had to ask permission. The ceremony was by the fountain, and I played for the entire service — while a man with a walkie-talkie gave me signals!"

Another milestone was when she cooked up a plan to use a "Round the World in 80 Days" theme. For 80 days she played programs of international music - a real treat for her listeners.

Because the automatic equipment is in need of some new rolls, her personal selections offer more variety.

Problem is, Sylvia says, there is never any feedback. She has no idea who, if anyone, is listening!

"I used to have a lot of requests," she says, somewhat wistfully, "but people have lost interest, I guess."

I assured her I appreciate the concerts, and that there must be thousands of others who enjoy the noontime and 5 p.m. music, too.



Sylvia McDonough

She let me play the little organ (with the outside speakers turned off, naturally.)

But she warned me not to play too fast or with a lot of chords, because this can cause the instrument to jam up. It needs rest in between numbers.

One Fourth of July, the Red Cross asked that bells peal all across the country at a specific four-minute interval. Sylvia played a continuous combination of chime and patriotic music — and blew out a fuse.

The carillon doesn't play on Sundays because it might interfere with local church services.

Like most blessings, the carillon does have a shadow.

The contract signed by the city and the donor reads that if it isn't played twice a day, six days a week, it can be reclaimed.

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Light refreshments will be served

WEIGHT