

Music is more than a hobby, it's a way of life for Len Rosen

Peel County Biography
Aug. 29-77
MN

By ANGIE MANGIACASALE

If an idea comes to Len Rosen while he's driving, he pulls off the road and writes it down before he can forget it.

Rosen is a writer-composer.

"I don't sit around and wait for an idea to come to me; when it comes it comes," says the Mississauga resident.

Sherry, Rosen's wife, is used to finding Len scribbling down his thoughts at all hours.

"Sometimes, I'll wake up in the middle of the night and hear him quietly working at the piano."

Fractured Fables is Rosen's latest work. A one hour mini-musical, it was recently performed at Hopedale Mall by Oakville's Freeform theatre group.

"It's a collection of traditional fairytales with twisted endings . . . they're twisted to be funny," explains Sherry.

According to Rosen, the vehicle for the musical was the story of Aladdin and the Magic Lamp.

"We use a light bulb instead of a lamp and Aladin, who is just a small boy, doesn't ask for riches but wants to see his favorite fairytales. The Jeanie has been stuck in the bulb a long time and doesn't remember the stories very well and as a result, the endings are very different.

"In Mary Had a Little Lamb, the Jeanie can't remember what a lamb is so he brings in a wolf at first, then ugly ducking and finally a dog."

The humor in Rosen's work is tailored to suit both adults and children.

"We play on visual humor in Cinderella using men to play the fairy

godmother and the step-sisters. At the end, the prince matches the heavy black boot, always referred to as the glass slipper in the musical, with Cinderella."

The Rosen version includes adaptations of Rumpelstiltskin, Rapunzel, Jack and Jill, and Sleeping Beauty. Little Red Riding Hood gets too involved with the wolf and never gets to grandma's house. Apart from writing the script, Rosen wrote a full overture for the musical with one song and occasionally two songs incorporated into each fairytale.

It took him two weeks to write Fractured Fables proving as his wife says, "when he gets the ideas they come quickly."

The show was presented as part of Festival Femina, in salute to women's year 1975, at Hamilton Place.

About eight days before the first performance, the three professional actors who were appearing in the musical appeared on CHCH-TV's Midday program hosted by Dan McLean.

"I was flipping the channels and all of sudden I heard them talking about Len," Sherry says. "I called my mother right away and told her . . . we were the only ones who saw it because we didn't even know about the show at all.

"Seeing the actors talking about how excited they were about the show made me terribly proud and excited . . . I was jumping up and down on the couch."

Although Rosen never saw the program himself, he was pleased with the enthusiasm of the professionals he was working with.

"It's a lot easier to work with professional actors rather than amateurs because pros are sufficiently motivated — it's their full job. Amateurs may not be able to devote their full time and effort."

In 1971 when Rosen first began writing musicals, the songs involved his impressions and views of politics.

"Gloria in Exekelsis Davis is about Premier Davis and the Spadina Expressway, medicare, tuition fees, jobs and it covered quite a bit; the songs did poke fun at the government, but I know they do work hard."

Toilet Paper Paradox is another politically motivated song which is about former Finance Minister Benson's white paper on tax reform.

"In a show called Daffodils, Toilet Paper Paradox was the national anthem."

Rosen's work has progressed out of the political sphere.

"His music has changed quite a bit," says Sherry.

For Theatre Aquarius of Hamilton, Rosen wrote Somebody Loves Me.

"I took different lovers from the different eras and plugged in modern songs for Somebody Loves Me. It had Henry VIII singing the Bacharach tune 'I'll Never Fall in Love Again'; Adam and Eve with 'Tea For Two' and Napoleon and Josephine singing 'I Love Paris.'"

Rosen who works for the Prentice Hall publishing company, would like to have his work published.

"Prentice Hall doesn't publish this sort of work," he explains.

"My destination is Toronto theatre; I have no visions of Broadway.

"It's still a hobby which I enjoy immensely and if it did ever become a profession I'd still do my best."

When his work is performed, Rosen knows what he wants to see.

"If something's not right, I say so because I'm a stickler for what I want. When the idea doesn't come across as I intended, I'll ask the performer to change something he's doing.

"Some of the directors I've worked with, like Rowena Emmett of Theatre Aquarius and Marilyn March who directed Fractured Fables, made excellent suggestions."

Rosen often plays the music in some of the presentations himself.

"I took piano lessons from when I was seven years old until I was 19 but never took it very seriously until I stopped studying it.

"The way I write the scores, most of the time I'm the only one who can read them, but I have written music for a seven-piece band."

Rosen realizes the advantage of being open to all areas of music.

"These days you have to be versatile because you never know when you'll be out of a job.

"I'm willing to write musicals for people if they have a specific idea in mind or not."

The talent of Len Rosen is reflected in the reaction to his musicals.

"The greatest thrill I get is when I hear someone whistling or humming one of my tunes, after they've left the show . . . it's a fantastic feeling."

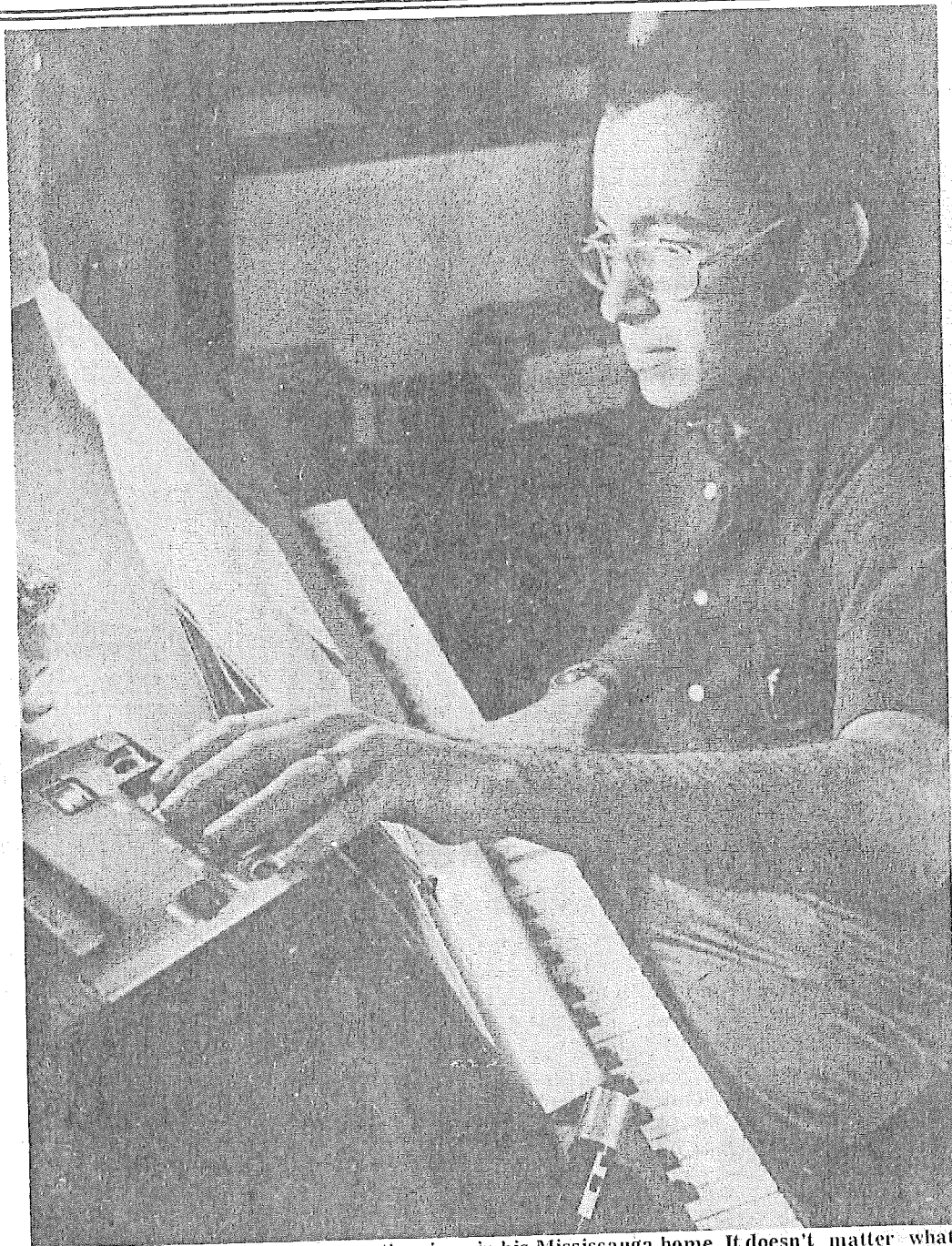
Peel Bios

August 24, 1977

MM

Rosen, Len

1



Len Rosen works out his ideas on the piano in his Mississauga home. It doesn't matter what time it is, if the ideas are there the writer-composer put them on tape and then transcribes them. (Staff photo by Fred Loek)