

**Born in 1976 Masquers Theatre has enriched the lives of thousands of people around the Twin Cities area.**

(The following article originally appeared in the program for Masquers' production of 'Barefoot in the Park' in 1979. It provides an insightful glance into the early days of Masquers Theatre Company.)

During the fall of 1975, several groups of Forest Lake residents began to talk about the idea of community theatre in our area. For some time, people from the communities that make up our constituency area had participated in other theatres, notably the Lake shore Players at White Bear Lake. These conversations and aspirations planted an idea.

The wishes of a few soon became the talk of many at neighborhood coffee meetings. Informal discussion allowed the idea to crystallize and capture the enthusiasm of the community. The feasibility was formally examined at a public meeting held in February of 1976. Public acceptance at this initial meeting gave rise to a Steering Committee of fifteen people, which was later declared the first Board of Directors. At a public meeting in November of 1976, the MASQUERS THEATRE COMPANY was officially established.

Since its inception, the MASQUERS THEATRE COMPANY has embraced the communities of Forest Lake, Chisago City, Lindstrom, Center City, Taylors Falls, Scandia, Marine on St. Croix, Hugo, Wyoming, North Branch, and the surrounding rural areas of Isanti, Chisago, Anoka, and northern Washington Counties. Board representation is also cross-sectional in terms of geographic location, age and occupation.

K. David Hargrove, Forest Lake, was named President and preparations were underway for the first summer season, 1977. A box office was opened in the Forest Lake Church of Christ Educational Annex, season memberships were purchased by 560 citizens and a budget was created from which a dream was translated into reality.

Widespread early interest overcame an austere beginning budget and led to a highly successful first production of Lionel Bart's *Oliver*. The show involved over 300 persons, was directed by Henry Hebert, and was performed at the Forest Lake High School Auditorium.

Three shows were produced that first summer and each show ran five nights. *Every body Loves Opal*, directed by Sharon Cunningham, filled the house with laughter. The first season's last show, *Fiddler on the Roof*, brought every audience to its feet for a fitting finale. Approximately 6,000 persons attended and applauded the fifteen performances of the first summer season. A successful first season compelled the Masquers Board of Directors to make expansion decisions to accommodate rapid growth. The 1978 season membership drive canvassed seven communities yielding 1800 members before May. A warehouse on the west edge of Forest Lake was rented to store an expanding inventory of materials and properties and to provide space for construction.

The following second summer, MASQUERS undertook both *Music Man* and *Camelot* in a single season mixing the two magnificent musicals with Agatha Christie's spine-tingling mystery, *The Mousetrap*. The 3 productions of the second season attracted audiences totaling 7,000 appreciative persons.

This year, Masquers announced its exciting third summer season and the membership grew beyond the 2000 mark. Cultural contributions and special activities reinforced the belief that the theatre is truly an enterprise of and for the people. *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, directed by K. David Hargrove, was performed in six community churches during the Christmas season. The Society of Sound (SOS) entertained numerous civic organizations with their music and choreography. In addition, MASQUERS entered the 1979 Minnesota Community Theatre Festival with Thornton Wilder's one-act, *The Happy Journey to Camden and Trenton*. In an effort to further extend its positive public influence and involvement, MASQUERS created the Children's Theatre Workshop and established center in both Forest Lake and Chisago City. The contributions and growth of MASQUERS THEATRE COMPANY were acknowledged by the Minnesota Arts Board, who awarded the company a grant for the partial funding of technical co-ordination of the 1979 season. Thus, the part-time position of technical coordinator was initiated and Patrick Voelker, Forest Lake, was hired.

We have come of age. The area communities and their theatre are grateful to the School Board of District 831 for the use of the Forest Lake High School auditorium, a spacious and comfortable facility. We thank area businesses and patron's donations reflective of community support.

A nonprofit community Theatre thrives on voluntary involvement; and the growth of MASQUERS is a testimonial to public support. The talent and effort of hundreds of dedicated volunteers have assisted and contributed in making MASQUERS more than one of Minnesota's fastest growing theatres. mature at an early age. MASQUERS THEATRE COMPANY is among Minnesota's best.