Sing, and the World Will Sing with You

By Ron Sokol

"We have a Chapman stick, mandolin, penny whistle, guitar, bass, dulcimer, violin, percussion, flute, banjolele – yes, that's a combination banjo and ukulele – harmonica, and piano. When the *Pennyroyal Players* started in 2004, we were a twosome, Joan Perkins and I, and we kept getting invitations to perform. Today, we have as many as 18 available to play, and we mix and match for each production. We just love playing, we love singing, and we do it to donate money to several charities. These include, just some of them, Ballet California, El Camino College Scholarship Fund, Fisher House Long Beach, Los Cancioneros Music Scholarships, My Phil Epsilon Music Fraternity, and two South Bay animal rescue organizations."

Anne Destabelle is as vibrant as anyone I have ever met. She is a force of nature, I think that's an apt description. Anne is the founder of the *PennyroyalPlayers*, whose primary venue is the South Bay, where Anne has lived for over fifty years. She played piano from a very early age, at one point stopped, moved after college all the way here from the East Coast, worked as, among other things, a social worker, married the inimitable Ray Destabelle after they were together for 18 years, and simply extols the benefits of singing:

"I read the other day about Willie Nelson celebrating his 90th birthday, and he said everyone should sing because singing is going to keep you healthy. It is, and let me tell you, one of the healthiest, best things you can possibly do. Willie Nelson is going strong at 90. I hope to do that too, now at 84. It's not just singing for me, but also playing an instrument, especially the piano. This brings so much joy: hearing others sing, not just me, and collaborating with them to create an environment where people can join in. We do not retain the donations we receive – we give the donations away. I just wish I could teach the world to sing and live in perfect harmony!"

Since 2004, the *Players* have donated over $200,000 to their charities. This year, for the first time, they actually spent a bit of the donations on themselves to finally upgrade their sound system. When I spoke with Anne, she was preparing for a New Year's Eve performance with an excellent violinist at Canterbury, a senior citizens' community in Rancho Palos Verdes. Anne talked about what a lovely setting it is and that there is a temple and a number of churches nearby. She smiled about the location, because clearly she performs to lift people's spirits. Talk about a labor of love. Not surprisingly, the group she founded, *The Pennyroyal Players*, describes themselves as musician philanthropists.

Some of the piano songs Anne particularly enjoys are *Til There Was You, The Nearness of You, Some Enchanted Evening, I Will Be Seeing You, and Some Day My Prince Will Come.* Speaking of a prince, she was with her husband, Ray, for over fifty years. He passed in January of 2025 at the age of 94, still full of humor and mischief. Fortunately, I got to know Ray. He had several unique sayings. One of my favorites was when he handed you a glass of wine: "It was your

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The Pennyroyal Players. Image provided by Ron Sokol.

pleasure to meet me…"

Anne makes quite clear that "Ray is right there over my shoulder." On any given occasion, so too is her daughter, Dawn, who plays flute and also sings. It took Dawn a while to overcome stage fright. Thankfully, she did, I can say here, having heard her sing. Mother and daughter, singing, playing music, raising money with their compatriots for good causes. How's that for a nice touch of goodness?

Anne has been singing first soprano in a chorale group for almost 50 years. This is the *Los Cancioneros Master Chorale*, which began in 1949 in Torrance. The group has grown to over 50 singers. They give three formal concerts each year at the Armstrong Theatre in Torrance. Anne organizes their Small Ensemble, which sings during the holidays under director Allan Petker.

One notable feature of the *Players* is their nine programs, ranging from 30 minutes to an hour, designed to appeal to people of all ages and backgrounds. There is a Patriotic Tribute to America, the Holiday Singalong, the Fiesta with Songs of the South West and Cinco de Mayo, a Suffragette Musical, Enchanted Ireland, Songs of Love and Other Predicaments, which is the actual title, a Romp Through the American Revolution, Piecin' It Together which consists of musical tales of American west settlers, and Songs and Stories of the Life of Stephen Foster.

Over time, the *Pennyroyal Players* have won awards. But I am no longer sure whether this column is about the *Players* or about Anne Destablle. It is challenging to separate one from the other, but when Anne played on New Year's Eve, as mentioned above, it was with someone who is not part of the *Pennyroyal Players*. She was just so thrilled to play, to lift others' spirits once more.

So, then, it may not be too much for Anne to try to get others to sing and to live in harmony. She certainly is not tiring. She is, if anything, more dedicated than ever.

I am guessing that Anne is about five feet two inches tall. Isn't it remarkable what can be packaged in one person, who is shorter than most, not as young as most, and yet who is fiercely determined to better the world through voice and music?

Sing, and the world will sing with you. My voice is not suitable for recording, but singing it shall be. Singing because it's just plain good for you! •

Tribute to America.

Suffragette Musical. Images provided by Ron Sokol.

Holiday Singalong.