

Reeling in musicians gone adrift

By **ANDY LEVY-AJZENKOPF**
Staff Reporter

Back in 2000, Resa Kochberg had a “eureka!” moment which led to her giving the gift of music back to her community.

Equipped with a bachelor of music education degree majoring in flute from the University of Toronto, the former music instructor for the Scarborough Board of Education and private piano teacher, had just returned to the world of music after taking time off to raise her children.

Once reconnected to the world of notes and staves, Kochberg realized that there were potentially many others out there who had abandoned their instruments due to life circumstances and who now longed to return to the playing that once gave them so much joy.

So she founded the Resa’s Pieces Concert Band to help them “return to playing band instruments that they hadn’t touched for years,” Kochberg told The CJN in a recent interview.

The band derives its membership from amateur applicants who are then vetted by Kochberg, the major qualifications being an ability to read music and keep up with rehearsals, she said.

Now in its eighth year, Resa’s Pieces has been functioning as a voluntary endeavour, playing just a few shows a year to community organizations around town and asking a moderate membership fee from its participants.

Kochberg said this year she applied for nonprofit status for the band after forming a full board of directors on its behalf.

After seeing a surge in applications in recent years – the band has grown to 33 members from the original 16 – Kochberg was feeling slightly overwhelmed by her multiple roles as band leader, planner and organizer, so she enlisted the help of an eager band-mate, Ruth Fishman, who is now the band’s president as well as its clarinetist.

“We really gear for Jewish audiences,” Kochberg said, citing staple song choices as Shalom Aleichem, the theme from Fiddler on the Roof, Hatikvah and others as the band’s meat and potatoes.

Other tunes include selections of Disney songs, movie themes, Broadway



The Resa’s Pieces band in action

[Photo courtesy Resa Kochberg]

tunes and classical music.

For years, the band has played to sell-out audiences at venues around Toronto such as the Leah Posluns Theatre and various shuls, said Kochberg.

She credits Resa’s Pieces’ success to the passion of the band members, all of whom are dedicated to playing the best music they can while making friends and having fun with the music.

“It’s exhilarating,” Fishman said. “It’s the best night of my week. We have [musicians] from every age, from 25 to 89... and we’re all a bunch of kids at heart.”

Kochberg concurred, adding: “Music stimulates your brain and I think people get into a different headspace [while playing]. We work as a group towards a common goal.”

Resa’s Pieces holds weekly rehearsals at York Mills Collegiate in the run-up to their concerts.

Kochberg is on sabbatical this year to study conducting and flute at the Univer-

sity of Toronto and the Royal Conservatory “to up my skills,” she said.

Over the next year, the band will play three times, with their first concert scheduled this Sunday, 1 p.m., at the Beth Tzedec Synagogue for a Chanukah-themed performance.

This year has also seen a splinter group branch out from the main band. Klez-Connection, a small ensemble dedicated to klezmer music will play this year’s annual closing concert with Resa’s Pieces at the Leah Posluns Theatre on June 2, 2009.

Fishman, who has been with Resa’s Pieces since its inception, called the band’s

yearly closing concert at the theatre “magical” and Kochberg said her reward for the hours of rehearsals is just “seeing the smiles on everyone’s faces and seeing a sense of accomplishment” in her musicians.

“As long as they’re proud of what they’ve done, it’s just great. And the audience really feels it,” she said, adding that most of the Resa’s Pieces players have children who come out to see their parents put on the show.

“They come and they kvell,” she said.

Kochberg jokingly called it “payback” for all the times the parents have gone out to support their offspring.

Though any instrumentalist is “welcome to apply”, the band currently has positions vacant for a percussionist, baritone, oboist, trombonist, clarinetist and French horn, she said.

For more information about Resa’s Pieces, contact membership@resaspieces.org.