

Hempstead Liederkrantz Society members will show how seriously they take their singing in concerts this weekend at the Radisson Plaza Hotel, Melville.



German-American Song and Dance

By Karen Kramer

FOR ALFRED SCHAEFFNER, president of the Hempstead Liederkrantz Inc. Singing Society, "singing is everything." He sang as a boy in Gerlachshheim, Germany (where the entire family were also amateur singers), and now for 40 years in America he has been singing with his choral group every week.

"The Germans, they love to sing," says the 73-year-old Schaeffner. "In every town in Germany there's a singing society. When the people went out of Germany they wanted to do the same thing like they did in their homeland, so in New York they started a society."

This weekend, the Hempstead Liederkrantz Society will host singers from 40 choruses, from Virginia to New England, in a mass concert of nearly 800

A chorus of 800 is the focus of a weekend of festivities

voices, topped off on Sunday with an old-country picnic complete with Bavarian folk-dancing.

Songfests of this sort have been going on every three years since 1851, but the weekend's festival will be the first one on Long Island. The concert will include selections from Mozart, Mendelssohn, Schubert and Hoffmann, as well as German folk songs and Broadway show tunes.

Tonight and tomorrow, there will be music at the Radisson Plaza Hotel in Melville, with concerts starting at 6:30, followed by a grand ball at 9 featuring Heinriet, a band from Neckarsulm, Germany. On Sunday at noon there

will be a picnic at Plattdeutsche Park in Franklin Square, with bratwurst, leberkaess (baked meat loaf), sauerkraut and other German fare. There will be singers, a folk-dance troupe, and a performance by a children's chorus from New Jersey. Admission to each event is \$15.

In German, the word "lieder" means songs, and the word "kranz" means circle or society (the term "liederkrantz" is probably most familiar to Americans as a type of mild, ivory-colored cheese invented in the Midwest by a German immigrant). The first German singing society in the United States — the New York Liederkrantz —

was founded around 1850, and at first people met informally in the homes of friends. In the early years the songfests were competitions, but now they're pure performance. The Hempstead society, whose members reside mostly in Nassau County and range in age from 55 to 83, was formed in 1909. Although they consider themselves amateurs and do it for love, they've performed twice at Carnegie Hall, once in '77 and again in '82.

The group has been rehearsing every Wednesday night for the past year in preparation for this weekend's performances. In addition, Schaeffner has been traveling to places such as Philadelphia; Washington; Harper's Ferry, Va., and Plainfield, N.J., overseeing the choral groups to make sure that everyone's in harmony. When the 800 sing-

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Gemütlichkeit!

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ers, from places as far away as Lancaster, Pa., and as close as Islip, come together on stage this weekend, it must appear as if they've been singing together all their lives.

During the rest of the year, the Hempstead Liederkrantz performs at smaller venues and summer outings, but the favorite time for singing seems to be during Fasching, the German version of Carnival. On the Saturday before Ash Wednesday, several clubs get together to celebrate: costumes are worn, singing and dancing go on all night, and German beer flows freely.

"You should see us at Fasching," says Robert Presbrey of Valley Stream, one of the administrators of the group. "We really know how to have a good time. It's good clean fun, and we know how to keep everything safe also."

Although everyone delights in the camaraderie these get-togethers bring, Schaeffner is concerned about their future. "We really don't get many people from Germany anymore," says the retired home improvement contractor. "And the youth, they just want to go to dances and think about soccer. Not just here, but sometimes in Germany too. But as long as we are alive here, we'll hold onto this, we'll continue to do it. It's really a strong part of us."

Bob Hugel, of Queens, agrees. He's what is called the "Vorplattler," or lead dancer, for the Bavarian folk-dance troupe known as Schlierachtaler Stamm (the name refers to its roots in the small Bavarian town of Schlier). Accompanied by an accordionist, Schlierachtaler Stamm, a lively, colorful group based in Franklin Square, will be performing at Plattdeutsche Park on Sunday in full Bavarian costume: the men in black shoes with green and white socks, the leather shorts called *lederhosen*, white shirts and green vests, the women in colorful skirts and aprons.

Both the singers and the dancers are members of the Plattdeutsche Volksfest Verein, a Long Island association of German-American clubs, according to Hugel. He and his parents are also in-

structors for the group. "The singers asked if we could help them with the entertainment," said Hugel, who is a New York City police officer by day. "We dance for them at their functions, and then they help us at ours."

"Our forefathers came here in 1928 and founded the dance group," Hugel said. "They originally came from Bavaria, the southernmost part of Germany. They wanted to continue the traditions from the old country here."

Although both the singers and the dancers are perfectly at home in American culture, the word "tradition" is never far from their lips.

"You could say our motto is 'be true to the good old traditions,'" says dancer Larry Coyne of Roslyn Heights, a native-born American of German ancestry who studied the language and culture in high school. "The traditions go back a couple of hundred years. They can be traced quite comically to the hen and the rooster who do a courtship dance. One thing led to another, and the guys would get together in the Alps and they'd start imitating and slapping their shorts, and these dances developed. That's why if you come to one of our events, you'll see the feathers and you'll see that most of the dances are a courting dance."

"The Bavarian-style dance is the most fun. You know we have a German word which is hard to translate into English. The word is *Gemütlichkeit*. It means chumminess, happiness, happy-go-lucky. It's a term that ties the person to the land and the blood and the culture."

This weekend, when the Schlierachtaler Stamm dance group joins with the Hempstead Liederkrantz Singing Society in a celebration of German culture, there promises to be a strong feeling of — what else? — *Gemütlichkeit*. ■

Karen Kramer is a free-lance writer.



Picnickers at Plattdeutsche Park in Franklin Square on Sunday will be entertained by a lively Bavarian dance group.

THE MUSICAL AGENDA

Here are details of the 45th national "sangerfest," sponsored by the Hempstead Liederkrantz Singing Society:

Tonight: Concert by 70-voice Schwaebischer Chorus, 6:30, \$15. Grand ball, music by Heinriet, 8:30. Radisson Plaza Hotel, LIE North Service Road, Melville.

Tomorrow: Music by Heinriet, 11:30 a.m., free. Mass choral concert, accompanied by Long Island Pops Orchestra, 6:30, \$15. Grand ball, music by Heinriet, 8:30. Radisson Plaza Hotel, LIE North Service Road, Melville.

Sunday: Mayfest picnic, noon-5 p.m., \$15 includes picnic, music, dancing. Plattdeutsche Park Restaurant, 1132 Hempstead Tpke., Franklin Square. ■