

Finding joy in music

Older residents benefit from cranking up the karaoke machine

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Every other Thursday afternoon, S.P. Holladay Manor maintenance man Bob Branham cranks up the karaoke machine in the community room of the senior housing apartment complex on South Sumter Street and kicks out some karaoke jams: country first, then gospel.

Shedding his maintenance man title for a few hours every other week comes easy for the able-voiced Branham, and as master of ceremonies — "or whatever," he said — he is front and center in entertaining the geriatric set at this independent-living apartment complex.

"They love anything they get together for," said Gloria Teseniar, complex manager. "And they love the music."

They might not realize it, but what they are doing most likely has positive benefits on their health and wellness.



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Maintenance man Bob Branham serves as the master of ceremonies of karaoke at S.P. Holladay Manor entertains the group recently.

In a 1999 article titled "It's Never Too Late to Learn to Make Music," Dr. Alicia Ann Clair, director of music therapy at the University of Kansas, and Karl Bruhn, presidential adviser to the American Music Therapy Association, posit that making music promotes physical and psychological well-being for older adults.

"The fact is that the capacity to learn music remains viable throughout life and research indicates clearly that older adults retain their musical abilities. Furthermore, these abilities often remain strong through the seventh, eighth and ninth decades," Clair and Bruhn wrote.

Researchers, they said, believe that above the sheer pleasure and enjoyment of learning to make music, participating in supportive, socially enjoyable music classes provides the opportunity for social interaction in a non-threatening environment. With the benefits of boredom relief, personal productivity increases, as well as a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, and overall positive emotional responses.

With ham biscuits, red velvet cake and iced tea on tap, the community room at S.P. Holladay Manor was packed last Thursday, with hands clapping and folks singing along.

"I'm enjoying the crowd we got today. All of you — lookin' great," the upbeat Branham said, midway through the country classic "Signed, Sealed and Delivered."



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From left, Moses Smith sings "Since I Lay My Burden Down" while Peggy Goins, Lucille Baker and Shirley McElveen look on recently. BELOW: Maintenance man Bob Branham serves as the master of ceremonies of karaoke at S.P. Holladay Manor entertains the group recently.

"Peggy's gonna sing, aren't ya?" Branham asked resident Peggy Goins.

"You kiddin' me?" she shot back, laughing.

Moses Smith said he really enjoys the karaoke. "I'm going to try and sing a hymn," he said, and that he did, giving his rendition of "Since I Lay My Burden Down" to the roomful of fellow residents clapping with him.

Lucille Baker was doubtful she was going to sing.

"We'll see," she said. "He's gotta get the gospel going before I get up there. That's what most of 'em like."

Branham is popular in his own right and drew some non-residents that just came out to hear him sing.

Steve Tedder, his wife, Tommie, and his parents, Mary and Tom Tedder, go to the same church as Branham, and Steve Tedder said that's why they showed up.

"He's a great fella," he said. "An exceptional man."

Vernice Lowery has lived at S.P. Holladay Manor for about 4½ years, she said, and sang a song she wrote 20 years ago for the enthusiastic and receptive audience.

Lowery has three boys, she told the crowd, and always wanted a girl, so when her granddaughter Valynda Lassiter was born, she immediately wrote a song.

"The first time I looked at her, this song ("Valynda") came out of my heart," she said.

Lowery said she doesn't always sing during the karaoke sessions, but she does enjoy it periodically.

"I like it when the people clap their hands. I must have done something," she said, smiling.



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Vernice Lowery sings "Valynda," a song she wrote 20 years ago for her granddaughter, for her fellow residents recently.

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