

# Speed singers race to finish

Durham Savoyards host Patter-Off

BY ADAM RODMAN  
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Talking too much usually isn't considered a virtue.

But Sunday evening, at the Durham Savoyards first Patter-Off at the ArtsCenter in Carrboro, theater fans gathered in a competition to celebrate the obscure art of singing really, really fast.

"It's a fun, relaxed event with a lot of audience participation," says Chris Newlon, a Savoyard and the main organizer of the event.

"There's a lot of tongue-in-cheek stuff."

The Savoyards are a citizen theater company based in Durham that produces a Gilbert and Sullivan play each year.

As such, the competition mainly featured the works of that dynamic duo, opening with the famous "I Am the Very Model of a Modern

Major-General."

Among the other acts performed were "The mid-19th century equivalent of the Village People's 'In the Navy,'" says Savoyard Bruce Conner, and Tom Lehrer's "The Elements," which is the tune of the "Modern Major-General" song sung with elements of the periodic table.

The patter found its beginnings in the Middle Ages, the word coming from the mechanical mumbling of the Lord's Prayer, which begins with "Pater noster" in Latin.

The patter-song developed in subsequent centuries, culminating in Gilbert and Sullivan's famous musicals of the 1800s and finding modern versions in the works of Cole Porter and Tom Lehrer.

Sunday's competition for best

patter was won by the Felder family, performing, "My Eyes are Fully Open" from Gilbert and Sullivan's "Ruddigore."

Mary, 12, and Ben, 9, sang with their father, Kenny, spitting out syllables at breakneck speeds while the audience joined in with the chorus.

They said practicing for their winning performance wasn't without troubles.

"My tongue kept going to the right of my mouth when I wanted it to go to the left," Ben says.

Pattering is a challenge for even the most experienced speed singer.

Balance is the essential element, says performer Ray Ubinger, a Savoyard since 1998.

"It's a challenge not singing too fast or too slow," he says. "As soon as you drop one syllable, you're completely lost."

And the often obscure lyrics of typical patter songs, skewering

everything from 19th-century politicians to locomotive carriages, require special memorization.

"You've got to get it so you don't think about it," Conner says.

The evening ended with a speed pattering contest, with contestants blabbering so fast that the piano accompaniment could only bang chords to keep up.

Pattering is a fairly humorous pastime, Newlon says, and organizers tried to have the Patter-Off reflect that.

"What's nice about Gilbert and Sullivan is that Sullivan was a really serious composer, but Gilbert's lyrics were the really neat comic part," he says.

"If a performer can pull that out, it really lends itself to this type of parody."

The actors themselves lent to the comedy of the night, playing an international panel of judges and an official scorekeeper



DTH/ANGELA STRADER

Daryn O'Shea, the official rule keeper at the Patter-Off, sounds the gong at the end of an act in the production put on by the Durham Savoyards.

from the International Pattering Association.

"In the future, we might find parody is much more important to the Patter-Off," Newlon says.

He says he has high hopes for the future of the competition.

"It's the kind of event that gets a reputation," he says.

Now try singing that one five times fast.

Contact the Features Editor at [features@unc.edu](mailto:features@unc.edu).

# Trading Post to get new friends

Four businesses grace old space

BY ALEXA DIXON  
STAFF WRITER

Downtown Carrboro's Trading Post, an antique furniture store, is squeezing in to make room for some new neighbors.

Once home to a dry cleaner, the 14,000-square-foot building located at 106 S. Greensboro St. has housed the Trading Post since 1973.

New building owners Runyon Woods, Johnny Morris and David Jessee have made several renovations to the building and have made room for four new businesses.

Construction began the summer of 2005, and the first new business, a hydroponics garden store called the Fifth Season, moved in last week.

The Fifth Season Gardening Co., which specializes in high-tech and organic gardening, moved to Carrboro from Durham on Feb. 19 when the Trading Post moved into the new section of the building.

Fifth Season store manager Melissa Crouch said that the business been busy with the move but that it is pleased with the new location.

In a few months, co-owner and photographer David Jessee will move his photography and color consulting business from his Pittsboro house.

The Furniture Lab, a furniture design firm, is slated to move in from Durham by June 1.

The owners hope to add a restaurant at the left of the building during the summer, but Morris said they still are working out the lease agreement.

Morris said the restaurant will be a locally owned and managed business and should feature outdoor seating.

Woods added that it should be a combination wine bar, wine retailer and restaurant.

Trading Post owner Richard Moody said he is excited about the changes despite his business space being reduced.

"We are occupying about 3,000 square feet," Moody said.

"The main thing we have to do is be a little more picky on what we buy because we have less space."

Moody added that he thinks more businesses in the building will draw more traffic.

He said he is pleased with the renovations that have changed his space.

"It's good our space has been renovated," Moody said.

"It's like night and day."

Woods said he wants the Trading Post building to be another feature that draws people to Carrboro.

Morris, owner of Morris Commercial, said that the project is a solid restoration of an old building and that he expects it to be a worthwhile addition to downtown Carrboro.

"I think it will simply add more activity to downtown Carrboro. It will be a great addition and a great fit for Carrboro," he said.

"It re-energizes that building and that location."



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