

# Pipers Fill the Sound Gap

By Robert Terpstra Washington Post Staff Writer

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MIKE AND JEAN McHALE have been married only since December, but they have 21 children. Which isn't bad, considering they had 22 before they were married.

For the last two school years, the McHales have been spending about half their evenings on the road, unpaid, with a bunch of kids who specialize in raising money with their singing voices.

The kids are all between 12 and 15. Separately they are blond, brunette, male, female, tall, short, fat, thin. Together, they're enthusiastic hand-clapping, foot-stomping, guitar-plucking mini-minstrels, singing songs like "This Land is My Land" and "Rock My Soul."

They are called The Peppermint Pipers and were chosen from 140 students who auditioned this year at Benjamin Stoddert Junior High School in Marlow Heights, Md. Jean McHale

is their music teacher. In addition to evening and weekend performances, they put in two and sometimes three rehearsals a week. They come on like professionals.

"I may be biased, but I think the kids could make it commercially," says McHale. "It's not so much musical talent—it's spirit."

When Jean McHale raises her clear voice three times above the shouting in the school room, the kids respond well to the quiet authority of husband Mike, an electronics components salesman during working hours.

After Friday and Saturday night performances, when the hour isn't too late, the kids, the McHales and assorted parents retire to Shakey's Pizza Parlor in Suitland (corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Silver Hill Road). Lead singer Ronnie Duncan or guitarist Timmy Allwine sits atop the piano—part of the ritual now—Mrs. McHale plays and the group forms around to sing the mushrooms off the pizza.

This is the second year the McHales have taken students from Stoddert and turned them into mini-minstrels. This year's group—about half left over from last year—has a repertoire of about 20 tunes, several of them more than a little reminiscent of Christy Minstrel arrangements.

The Pipers perform wherever they can, for whatever they can get. Their aim right now is to make enough money to spend time this summer at a place called Coney Island in Cincinnati. Last year's group made \$4000 in a month to pay their way to a singing engagement at HemisFair. Coney Island will probably pay the present group's room and board for a week or two and the group will earn enough to pay travel expenses.

The Pipers are a "You've got to see it to believe it" sort of conglomeration. I saw them on a Saturday night at the Miss Southern Maryland Beauty Pageant, held at Prince George's Community College, Largo. I arrived to find them shaking the stage with a jumping version of "Everybody Loves Saturday Night." They were followed by a pageant contestant singing "I Believe."



By Linda Wheeler—The Washington Post

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# Mini-Minstrels Group Rockin' Round Oxon Hill

Mothers fluttered in the wings as the girls raced off stage, shaken or ecstatic depending on how well their performances went over, or how well they thought they had. Other girls wrung their hands in the wings, waiting to go on.

Meanwhile the Pipers joked, danced, watched, did everything but worry. When it was their turn to go on again they gabbed and goofed until the curtain opened, then bolted into song.

Ronnie Duncan, blond and 14, charmed the audience cracking jokes, then led the group into its theme song, "Have Fun."

Gary Bostic, 13, look-alike of Sidney Poitier, shares

the honors with comedian Duncan.

Between numbers, bouncy Judy Goheens, also 14, filled the air in on how things were going to be after the pageant at Shakey's:

"One time we went up there and they wouldn't let us go home. The manager has invited us to the opening of a new Shakey's."

The Pipers are in the process of cutting a record which they hope will help get them to Coney Island.

The group will probably perform all summer long before giving way to next year's group. The ninth graders will go on to high school and the rest will stay with the Pipers.

Mr. and Mrs. McHale are beginning to show some fraying around the edges, but are looking forward to the summer.

The Pipers are in agreement on the most important singing engagement they have had. It was last Dec. 28 —at the church wedding of Mr. and Mrs. McHale.