

Eversole is back with the choir as guardian Angel

By **SUSAN B. KETCHUM**
Staff Writer

It was 25 years ago that Charles Eversole first stood on a stage with the Singing Angels.

He was a freshman at Richmond Heights High School and had just heard about the group. Since then, he has taken every advantage of opportunities to spread the word about it.

On Wednesday, when the

Singing Angels perform in his home town for the first summer concert in the park, Eversole will also be there, this time as music director.

"I have a real emotional attachment to the group," he said.

He performed with the Angels until he graduated, in 1982, and still counts his fellow performers as some of his closest friends. For a long time, he also kept up with an English pen pal

he met on a performing tour to England and Wales, and another from a tour in Mexico. During his four years, the group also went to Berlin, Rome and Vienna.

"The original motto when Bill Boehm founded the group 40 years ago was 'democracy in action through music.' Even though that's changed, the focus hasn't," Eversole said. "When a kid learns about life, about how to act and how to be, that's at least as important as the music."

His experiences with the group, as well as in musical and stage productions in high school where he was valedictorian, led him to earn degrees in music from the University of Michigan and Baldwin-Wallace Conservatory of Music. But he also credits his years with the Angels with helping prepare him for his 6½ years living in New York City, where he served as musical director for more than 40 productions.

"We learned to perform on the stage of the Allen Theater or the mud pit at the Geauga County Fair. Each show ends up being different, and you learn to think on your feet," he said.

In New York, he conducted such shows as "A Grand Night for Singing" and toured with "The Who's Tommy" for nearly a year. He also taught at New York University and workshops for developing new composers and lyricists for Broadway musicals. Then he came back home, to Richmond Heights and to the Singing Angels.

"I didn't get tired of living in New York, I got tired from living in New York. It was relentless and exciting, but it wore me out," he said.

He had served as assistant director of the Angels training chorus, which includes children ages 8-14. So when he returned, it felt like coming home to conduct the performing chorus,

made up of 180 kids ages 10-18. He still writes or arranges much of the music they perform, including a version of the "William Tell Orchestra" in which the singers are the orchestra, which they will perform in Richmond Heights.

"We have a ratio of four-to-one girls to boys, so we can't use traditional four-part arrangements. I know their voices, and I can do something specifically for these kids. I enjoy that," he said.

He is also attempting to find new performance opportunities that will expand people's opinions of the group, such as singing during the last two holiday seasons with the Pennsylvania Ballet's production of "The Nutcracker."

"People are beginning to realize we don't only do pop, but we can also do classical. We want the kids to realize that's something they are capable of doing."



Charles Eversole

In addition to directing the vocal group, he teaches music and coaches voice at Cuyahoga Community College West. One of his earliest students was another Richmond Heights valedictorian, Jennifer Gambatese, who has gone on to perform in several Broadway shows, including "Rent" and "Hairspray," and will star next winter in "All Shook Up."

"It's funny, whenever I watch the Tony Awards, I see someone performing that I have worked with," he said.

He is also hoping his stage career might pick up, now that he is over 40. He has performed at community theaters all over the city, but admitted he hasn't been easy to cast.

"My singing voice sounded like the leading man, but I looked like the comic part," he said with a laugh. "Maybe I'm growing into the parts."

His real dream, however, is to develop a cabaret venue in the area where he could present local performers. And, he is back living in Richmond Heights, helping out his parents, and looking forward to seeing many of his old friends and neighbors turn out to see the Singing Angels.

"This is the first time for me to do something back here," he said. "It's so good to be able to return."