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< Life lesson

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When 'Gang Shows' were all the rage

ARTHUR FRYER

'We are riding along on the crest of the wave and the world is ours', is the finale song of Scout Gang Shows around the world.

For the cast of nearly 80 Hawera Scouts that great song brought to an end another successful Gang Show season performed for their families and friends in the Hawera Community Centre.

In the 1970s, '80s and '90s Scouting was strongly supported in South Taranaki both in town and country districts so when Paul Harris and Clive Berry suggested that a Ralf Reader Gang Show be put on more than 70 boys volunteered to be the first cast.

Their leaders and mums and dads were pleased to make the props, dress the cast and paint scenery so in the winter of 1973 there were rehearsals for skits, songs and dancing, paint being applied to scenery and stitching of costumes all over town.

Scout Gang Shows were first performed in Great Britain in 1932 by scouts raising money for a

swimming pool at a scout camping venue but the mixture of concert party type entertainment by scouts was so popular that its music and items were quickly copied throughout the country.

Ralf Reader, a successful show producer and a lifetime scout, thought of the idea, wrote and directed much of the music and lyrics for the first annual shows.

The name comes from one of the earliest rehearsals when Reader asked the scout troops in the hall if everybody was present and a boy called back, "The gang's all here!"

From then on it was the Gang Show.

There were to be 14 Gang Shows produced in Hawera over 28 years, each with a different script and songs.

Paul Harris, the producer, John Hall, stage manager, and several

others were always be back stage setting up the scene changes for all the 14 seasons every two years.

Many other helpers worked alongside Bob Warner, John Betts and Derek Baker at stage lighting. Numerous dads were rostered to

be scene shifters.

One year it was decided by the committee to hire a revolving stage to speed up scene changes.

This proved to be a test of the back stage workers mettle.

When turned too quickly by the crew on the ropes the waiting cast was thrown off the revolve by the centrifugal force and too slowly the momentum was lost.

The right gentle pull was found and it was right on the night and all succeeding nights.

The revolving stage was not used on succeeding years.

Many of the scouts proved to be very good singers and their talents were displayed in solos or duets.

The efforts by the conductors, Harry Farrington, Alan Tozer and Charles Pittams were almost herculean in their efforts to assure the show of quality singing.

Jill Hooper was able to teach dance steps and movement to young men whose best steps were on the sports field

One year Harris said "Let's take the show to New Plymouth and go on stage at the opera houses."

All the props were loaded on to covered trucks and the cast transported to the big stage in New Plymouth.

It was the end of the Hawera season and the whole company were well supported by New Plymouth scouts and families.

Many other Scout Groups in New Zealand including the Patea Scout group, have produced Gang Shows using the classic scripts and music from the past 80 years.

Takapuna, Auckland, Palmerston North, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin Scouts still present Gang Shows regularly

continuing the great tradition begun by the talented Ralf Reader.



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Gan Shows, such as this one put on by the New Plymouth St Joseph's Scout group in 2006 have a proud tradition in scouting history.



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◀ **Life lesson:**

Georgetown Scout Group members Briana Sansom (13) and Ryan Sansom (12) are cut free from a car by Invercargill firefighters using the “jaws of life” in a training session last month. Briana and Ryan were both covered in durable plastic sheeting as a safety precaution. Georgetown Scout Group leader Kathryn Sansom, who organised the outing for the Georgetown Cubs, said all the children found the experience amazing.

Photo: Supplied