

Perry Ehrlich

Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance!

Perry Solomon Ehrlich is a music man. A business lawyer with Richmond's Altman Kahn Zack, Perry put himself through the University of Saskatchewan's law school by playing the piano in dinner clubs. He was called to the BC Bar in 1977.

Almost 20 years later in 1995, with music still a passion, Perry imagined and, with the help of the Jewish Community Centre, created "Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance!", an exciting musical theatre summer program for children (aged 9 to 19) who love to sing, dance and perform. Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! began with only one month-long session, but quickly grew to two month-long sessions. This past summer, children from as far away as PEI, Texas and Northern Israel participated in the program. Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! is open to all children, but participants must audition. Perry sees positive self-esteem as one of the great benefits of the program—wallflowers turn into spotlight hams. Mr. Shannon Etkin, Associate Executive Director of the Jewish Community Centre, is very enthusiastic about Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! "Children learn about themselves, and learn about working with one another," he says. Wendy Stuart, a musical director with Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! comments on the physical changes in children on stage: "There's a light behind their eyes when they perform."

Perry is meticulous in ensuring that every child has equal opportunity to shine. It's rumored he uses charts to monitor how many moments of solo time each child has. The musical productions are specially chosen to showcase many stars, rather than focusing on one individual. "Perry believes that all children should have doors open to them and have the opportunity to go through those doors," says Shannon.

In 1994, Perry and Simon Isherwood, a director, actor and teacher, formed "Sound Sensation", a performance choir of 27 girls and boys aged 11 to 19. Wendy describes Sound Sensation as "Not just a standup choir.



Perry Ehrlich with some of the Gotta Sing Gotta Dance participants.

It's somewhere between a choir and a show." Some of the many venues in which Sound Sensation has performed include the Apec '97 dinner, the gala opening of "Sunset Boulevard" and "Ragtime", and the opening of the new Vancouver International Airport. They have also recorded with Charlotte Diamond, a Juno award-winning Canadian children's performer. The audition waiting list for Sound Sensation is two years.

Along with his involvement in Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! and Sound Sensation, Perry also composes. His "One Dream" was recorded by Charlotte Diamond and he composed a theme song for the Sport BC "Athlete of the Year Awards Dinner". A very personal highlight in Perry's musical career was watching his two daughters perform on stage together last summer. "It's wonderful to have something you can work on with your children," says Shannon. "Perry can share something he loves, and see if it captures his children." Shannon hopes the confidence children gain through Gotta Sing! Gotta Dance! will translate into success in other areas. What areas? Well, Perry has been quoted as saying "In every good lawyer, there's an actor." ☞

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