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Ottawa*Watch* 250: The Hill was alive ...

By Lloyd Mackey

Ed Fast is the only MP5 member still in federal politics. Mark Warawa passed away in June, 2019. Chuck Strahl, Randy Kamp and Kevin Sorensen all left undefeated at the end of the Harper governance period or later. Chuck's son, Mark, succeeded him filling the Chilliwack-Hope seat.

I had looked forward to hearing MP5 sing, and was not disappointed.

MP5 is a southern gospel-style quartet whose members, as it happens, are also members of parliament; thus the eye-catching name. They are: Ed Fast (pianist), Indian Affairs minister Chuck Strahl, parliamentary secretary (environment) Mark Warawa, Randy Kamp and Kevin Sorensen.

They keep popping up together by popular demand and, so far, I had missed every performance. They had even been referred to obliquely by Rick Mercer on the CBC, when he did a playful profile of Strahl, a couple of years ago.

Then came the Concert on the Hill, on Monday, November 30. And there they were, in dark suits and Christmasy-green fluorescent ties.

Concert on the Hill is put on each year by the Parliamentary Spouses Association, led, this year, by Valorie (spouse of Stockwell) Day and Ann (wife of Noel) Kinsella. Day's spouse is international trade minister and Ann's, speaker of the Senate.

Close to 500 people turned out for the noon hour concert, held in famous and soon-to-be-renovated Room 200, the ballroom in the ancient West Block. It was about as faith-based as one could expect of a parliamentary-sanctioned event, using the Christmas occasion to spread fellowship and good cheer.

Defense Minister Peter MacKay and General Walter Natynczyk were on hand to receive the \$18,000 cheque for the support of special needs for military families – raised in large part from the association's draw. Top prize in that draw was a return flight for two anywhere in Air Canada's world.

But the event had the side-effect of revealing how much musical talent there is in and around parliament.

A choir made up of the House of Commons pages started us off with *O Canada* and *Winter Wonderland*.

The parliamentary spouses' choir added *Ding Dong Merrily on High* and *Away in a Manger*. A piano serenade *Embraceable You*, followed, with Andre Sebastien Savioie, spouse of Senator Andree Champagne, at the keyboard.

Drawing a standing ovation were the Senate Pages, who rendered Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah*. The singing pages were bolstered by pianist Jonathan Yantzi, guitarist Michael Molzan, flutist Hannah Wylie and violinist Peter Doherty.

Maurice Montpetit, who most of us recognize as a dignified Commons security guard, sang self-accompanied on guitar, *Sonne ta cloche (Ring the bells)*.

A small selection of NDP MPs were in fine form, even without the promised attendance of their leader, Jack Layton. Alex Atamanenko from B.C.'s ranch country, belted out a rendition of *Blue Christmas*. Halifax's Megan Leslie did a sultry *Santa Baby*. Caucus staffer Rob Sutherland accompanied.

The *Singing Senators*, Elizabeth Hubley, Jean Lapointe, Pierette Ringuette and Bill Rompkey, were accompanied by Tommy Banks. Their number was *The Three Bells/Les Trois Cloches* – likely best remember by the lines that go:

All the chapel bells were ringing, 'twas a great day in his life
For the songs that they were singing was for Jimmy and his wife
And the little congregation prayed for guidance from above
Lead us not into temptation bless oh Lord this celebration
May their lives be filled with love

It was a nice Quebecois Catholic cultural complement to the firmly Bible-belt-based numbers that were to follow from the aforementioned MP5. The latter rendered us the bouncy *Feeling Mighty Fine* and the haunting *Mary's Little Boy*. Sorensen carried the latter as a solo. He is a fine and strong tenor.

Altogether, it was a good way to spend a noon hour, and an excellent Ottawa-style way to embark on the season of Advent.

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