

Messenger service wants to say it with a song

By Susan Cowick

There's a knock at your door. You go to the door and a messenger begins crooning bizarre, catchy and maybe even embarrassing lyrics to a familiar melody.

Is there something fishy in Lincoln? No, it just may be one of three Lincoln residents at work in a new singing messenger service originated by Lincolnite Cecilia Lawson.

"I was sitting at work one day wondering what I could do to get out of where I was working," Lawson said. "Suddenly, I thought of a singing telegram service."

Soon she was on the telephone calling her friends. Two of her friends, Mark and Mary Ellen Brown, thought it was a good idea and now work with Lawson at Tune-A-Gram, singing messages for customers.

"I called Mark, who was working at the Journal-Star, for advice on advertising and some help," she said.

Brown said he was going to be out of a job soon so he was glad to help.

Mrs. Brown was baby-sitting for Lawson when the singing idea was born. Soon she too was drafted into working for the singing service.

Writes fast

"Mary began to compose songs for us and joined us because she writes good ones fast," Lawson said.

Before long forms were printed, an answering machine was purchased and an advertisement was printed. The three were in business.

The idea was conceived on Friday and the business started within 10 days, Lawson said.

"Our most popular occasions are birthdays, anniversaries, Mother's Day, Father's Day and Valentine's Day," Brown said.

"We do have requests for others, such as a bon voyage, thank you, good luck, get well and baby congratulations," Mrs. Brown added.

Lawson said only original songs are sung by the singers.

"We make up each song according to the person we sing to. We do offer songs that we have sung before though."

Each has favorite melodies that he or she likes to set new lyrics too.

"I have written six songs to 'Frankie and Johnny.' It is my favorite," Mrs. Brown said.

Brown likes "I've Been Working on the Railroad" tunes, and Lawson likes "Give My Regards to Broadway."

The new singing telegram service did not get off to a smooth start.

Quick costumes

"Our first call for a Tune-A-Gram came at 1:00 and was to be delivered at 3:15. We did not have any costumes, so within two hours Mary Ellen went to three stores to buy T-shirts and a logo to make our outfits. It was for the vice president of Gateway Bank for his birthday. I was very nervous but it was successful," Lawson said.

Brown said his first Tune-A-Gram was delivered at a birthday party. He was photographed and recorded.

"My first was a going away party," Mrs. Brown said. "I thought it would be small and simple but approximately 400 people were there."

Many strange things have happened to

the three singing messengers.

Lawson said that one time she sang to a guy in a grocery store checkout line.

Refused business

"One time we got a request from a man's mistress. She wanted a Tune-A-Gram sent to her lover. We refused because she wanted it delivered in front of his office and we don't do vindictive songs," Brown said.

Lawson said one of the odder requests received was from a man who wanted to send a song asking for a date from his estranged wife.

A Tune-A-Gram costs \$18.50 for one person to deliver and sing. It costs extra for out-of-town deliveries and extra people. Phonegrams also are done.

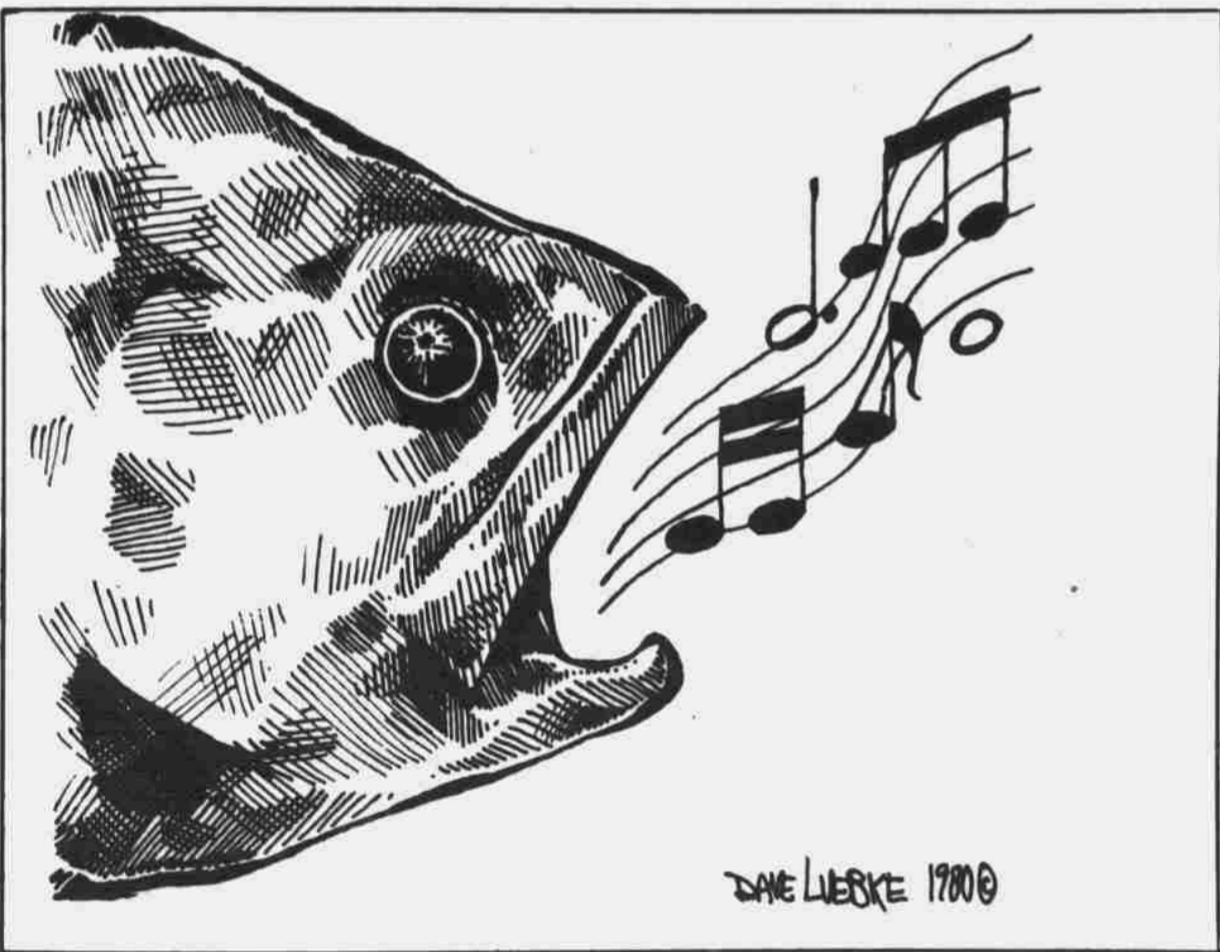
All three enjoy relating unusual circumstances they have encountered in the line of duty as messengers with the singing telegram service. One such experience was embarrassing for Lawson.

"I went to a party and sang two songs. As I was leaving, a guy sitting on a couch asked if we needed any help.

"I asked if he could sing and he sang for me. I was embarrassed when I found out he was Gordon McRae," she said.

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