

Our 2008 Brookside Show: An Appreciation

Friday afternoon, four grumpy old men sat around talking in the exhibition hall at Brookside. OK, one of them was not quite into the old man category, and the other three were not really grumpy- maybe glum comes closer. Harlin Turner, Jack Roe, John Lydon and I killed time in a conversation which ranged from retirement benefits through the banalities and otherwise of television and eventually came around to what was on everyone's mind: all of us had heard from varied sources that the local lily season was just about over. We sat there looking at an exhibition hall all primed and ready to go, and there was not a lily to be seen in the horticulture section. Would it be a case of all dressed up and nowhere to go? It happens sometimes: I remember the year years ago when the local bearded iris society had to cancel its show because there were no irises in bloom by show date. Was it our turn this time?

Actually, there were a few lilies in the room, but they were in the hands of the arrangers. Charmane Truesdell was doing something vaguely culinary with some bulbs of 'Black Beauty'; I began to wonder if she was fixing something for an arrangement or something for the judges' luncheon. Delores Felch informed me that this was for what is known as a "Mono-Botanic arrangement". When I heard this, my mind conjured the image of an arrangement made with flowers and herbs all collected in one pasture. I don't think that's what it means.

I fell asleep Friday night trying to come up with a plan B. I had plenty of lilies blooming in my garden, but few if any were of show quality. Most had been blooming for a week or so, and even very careful doctoring would not fool the judges. Still, they were varied and colorful, and in a pinch they could fill bench space as well as the most carefully groomed exhibition stem. That was it: if the benches were bare Saturday morning, I would dash home, randomly cut some stems as filler, and hope for the best.

Eight o'clock Saturday morning found the design team busy at work, but where were the horticulture entries? Finally, a few at a time, they began to trickle in. I kept a careful eye on the clock: by 9:30 A.M. the benches had that "day after a big sale" look: plenty of space between entries and no mass of color. Things were looking grim. My classification responsibilities were under control, so I decided to bolt for home and cut lilies. Twelve minutes later I was in the garden cutting: if it had lots of blooms and lots of color, I cut it. If it had lots of defects, I ignored them. Fifteen minutes later I walked into the exhibition hall with a huge bouquet of cut stems carried upside down like so many freshly shot

ducks or pheasant hanging by the feet. Mary Queitzsch helped me stage them quickly; they went out under a pseudonym, Giovanni-Battista Maccherone. Funny, his handwriting looks just like mine.

While I was gone, Kathleen Hoxie had finally arrived with her education exhibit: more traffic problems. She had gone to the International Show at Sidney, BC the previous weekend, and we wondered if she might be suffering from lily lag. After hearing her talk about the trip, I'm sorry I didn't go.

It was only then that I relaxed a bit, looked around and realized that the exhibition hall now before me was not the one I left only a half hour before. Lots of great stems had arrived and been staged in my absence. Portions of the benches were actually crowded. My gloom lifted: I was happy – we were obviously on our way to having another great show. At this point show Chairman John Lydon and I quickly set up and covered two extra tables to accommodate the expanding ranks of stems.

Those two extra tables became the 'Scheherazade' tables: the six or so stems (remember: these are huge lilies) easily filled the space.

As judging time approached, I took a quick count of entries and came up with a number in the mid-forties. Thirty years ago, a lily show with only forty entries of Asiatic hybrids and martagons would be nothing. But an early July show populated primarily with huge trumpet-oriental hybrids was something else again. Some of these stunning giants have an inflorescence which occupies about sixteen cubic feet of space.

I did some last minute moving, spreading things out as much as the available space allowed, and then gave Ron Chiabotta the signal that classification was ready. He no sooner disappeared to meet with the judges than Rachel and Joe Hollis pop through the door – after a two and a half hour drive from Harrisonburg - with yet more stems. Our cup was overflowing.

The judging went smoothly but it took longer than I would have predicted for forty-some stems and two judging teams.

We're serious about our work, but we're not so serious that the occasional high jinks don't slip in. Mr. Macaroni's lilies were one thing; it was Mary Queitzsch who seems to have had something to do with the entry of a stem (very literally true in this case) from friend or protégée Sally Fibber. I hope everyone had the chance to check out the novice section for Sally's entry: you won't see substance like that in most lily shows. During the judging, I stood by counting the seconds as the judges began to appraise this one. Tricia, who was in on the joke, intervened just in time to be sure the faces were red from mirth and not embarrassment. Mary will have to have a talk with Ms. Fibber; it seems that Sally had entered a chimera with a real lily stem crowned by silk flowers. It was convincing enough in its intended form, but a little accident made it even more so: somehow a bit of true lily pollen had gotten dusted onto the fake anthers of the silk flowers. I hope I'm not giving anyone ideas! Hmm...actually, I hope I am.

Mary had another unexpected contribution to the show: she showed up with some stems of hybrid blackberry lily and a daylily for an impromptu “lilies which are not lilies” display. What a great idea! When I dashed home to cut some filler stems, I quickly cut a zephyr lily, a spider lily and a blood lily to add to Mary’s examples. And someone - was it Tricia? - contributed a calla lily. They made a rather sad, amateurish looking group on the exhibition floor – in fact, they reminded me of what one sees on the last few days of the county fair. But it’s a start, and we ought to give this more thought for future shows. BTW, there is a “lilies which are not lilies” page on our chapter web site.

Sometime during all of this I had the chance to talk for a few minutes to Lanna and Neil Ray who had volunteered to be a clerk, runner team. And a quick chat with Bonnie Mirmak brought in another clerk./runner candidate. After the judging was over I had another chance to talk to a smiling Lanna: she really seems to have enjoyed her clerking experience with its chance to see the “behind the scenes” judging action. By then Bonnie was basking in the glow of two blues in the design section.

The late date of the show brought to the exhibition hall a suite of lilies we don’t see in our mid-June shows. That was the whole intention of our picking such a late date: we wanted the public to see the amazing modern lilies which bloom in early July. And while ‘Scheherazade’ predominated, there were lots of other interesting entries. There were several entries of appealing oriental hybrids including the beautiful ‘Medusa’. There was one *Lilium superbum* from Marianne Casey (I’ve got a clump in my garden which does not yet show color on any of a baker’s dozen stems). Two of Marianne’s entries got a lot of attention from the hybridizers in the group: one was a stem of Art Evans’ ‘Miss Liberty’ (think orange yellow trumpet-aurelian on steroids) and the other was one of Ed Soboczenski’s hybrids. The judges didn’t think much of Marianne’s hybrid of a yellow-flowered form of *Lilium henryi* and *L. rosthornii* ‘Black Heart’, but this single flowered stem really got the juices flowing in those observers who saw potential there.

There were even a couple of tiger lilies. Your classification chair raised some eyebrows by placing these among the Asiatic hybrids rather than among the species. One of them won the award for Best Asiatic. I wonder if some of our late members are turning over in their graves? And I wonder which would have caused the greater grave roiling: to award this stem Best Asiatic or Best Species?

During the judging, Muriel Turner and I had a chance to talk passion flowers. While the serious stuff was transpiring in the exhibition hall, we snuck into the nearby library to indulge this shared interest in a book and some on-line postings. Harlin was not with us...

I took the hosting shift immediately after the show. A couple of copies of *Let’s Grow Lilies* were sold, and I signed up a new member: Gina. Gina and I enthusiastically chatted about winter sowing of seed for about a half hour. This year I had the sense to ask if someone would bring me a doggie bag from the judges’ luncheon. I was well taken care of: I didn’t get home till about 4 P.M., then mom and I sat down to explore the contents of the box and bag of goodies. Dim Sum are still mysterious to me; I have no idea what

we ate, but it was all delicious. The most striking item was a rubbery, greenish-gray golf-ball sized sphere: when cut open, it had a jet black interior of something vaguely sweet: yummy!

I was back on Sunday to re-do the photos of the show: in my haste I had not adjusted for the lighting in the exhibition hall, and all of Saturday's images had a yellowish cast. While there I had a chance to talk to Vicky Bowen and Jeanette Honsa. Vicki and I touch bases every so often, but I had not seen Jeanette in a year or two.

Even the breakdown of the show had its own humor and drama. As usual, at closing time the vultures began to circle for left-over stems. They are getting bolder each year, and we really need to keep them out of the exhibition hall until the show is broken down and the rightful owners of the stems have claimed their lilies. This year I had the dubious pleasure of witnessing just how intense the competition for these stems can be as turkey vultures and black vultures squabbled over the same scraps of bloom. They know how to up the ante: one played the religion card ("I should get them because they're for the church...") while another countered with the artistic altruism card ("I should get them because I'm going to paint them and then give them to my invalid neighbors...") Enough of that, I thought, and ducked out to let them duke it out between themselves. I noticed later that the ecclesiastics left with wealth to make Mammon blush, and the artist was still begging and ingratiating herself the last time I saw her (as she glided across the hall saying "Oh, I'll just take all of these..." and scooped up a couple of pounds of lilies).

When it was all over and I finally got home Sunday evening I was so up about the whole experience. Things had looked so dismal Friday afternoon. I was really proud of the way so many members pulled together to make this another great PLS show. Mary Queitzsch, Marianne Casey and Rob Wagner, Rachel and Joe Hollis, Genie and David Diller all came from great distances, putting in hours of driving (not to mention burning obscenely expensive gas) coming and going to contribute to the success of the show. And everyone gave generously of their time and enthusiasm. And there was plenty of enthusiasm, some of it showing on faces I did not recognize. I apologize to those who were there helping with the show but who are not mentioned here. In particular, I meant to introduce myself to one young lady helping with the judging – but in the general confusion I never did it. I hope everyone else had some of the sense that I did that we had successfully overcome a big challenge. Our general chairman John Lydon has now successfully led us through several strong shows which should give rest to the occasional murmurs that the society is getting too old and is about to fold. No, the society has taken wing in a new and exciting direction, and this year's show was grand proof of that.

And speaking of the age of this group: did we miss our fiftieth anniversary?

We owe many people thanks for the success of our show this year, not least among them Judith Freeman: her 'Scheherazade' saved the day and provided a big block of the color and impact on the show floor.

By the way, Best in Show was one of those stems of 'Scheherazade', and Dave Willmore is King of the Lilies again this year. The Best Novice was awarded to Mrs. R. K. Schiebel. The big awards were attached to familiar names: Vicki Bowen for the best seedling in Section D, Mary Queitzsch for Best Oriental ('Medusa') and Best Asiatic (a tiger lily), and Dave's Best Interdivisional/Best in Show stem. The award certificates themselves were especially handsome this year: who in our group has such nice penmanship?

Thanks and congratulations to all who helped make this happen.

Jim McKenney
July 15, 2008