



# OREGON ARTSWATCH

## OREGON'S ARTS & CULTURE NEWS

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### COAST

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## Helping the bands play on

**The Music is Instrumental program pays for mentors, online instruction, choir – even valve oil – to keep music education alive in Lincoln County schools**

November 5, 2020 // [COAST](#), [ED](#), [FAMILY](#), [OREGON](#) // [Lori Tobias](#)

When students in Lincoln City report for band practice, they frequently find themselves under the guidance of what might seem some unlikely tutors.

There's G.W. "Sandy" Schaefer, a professor emeritus of music from the Nebraska State College System, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, and California State University Fresno. Also, Forrest Fisher, former music director for the Lake Oswego School District and member of the Lincoln Pops Orchestra. And Greg Burton, a former bassist with the Oregon and San Diego symphonies and soloist at Symphonisches Orchester Berlin.

Not a bad line-up for a small coastal town.

Students can thank the nonprofit [Music is Instrumental](#) for providing funds to pay for the "expert music technicians" — composed largely of retirees and grad students — who function as mentors to about 340 young musicians. The nonprofit, in turn, can thank grant programs offered through the [Lincoln County Cultural Coalition](#).

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### THE ART OF LEARNING: An Occasional Series

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"Music has become so important for these kids," said Mark Sanders, director of the Music is Instrumental board. "Some of these kids don't belong to groups; they are not necessarily popular; they may have some sort of impairment. Music has enabled these kids to feel they are part of something bigger than themselves. Kids involved with music excelled in their testing scores, came to school more often. They became part of a group, so that enhanced their self-esteem."

The program that would become Music is Instrumental got its start in 2014 with a 3-year grant through the [Oregon Community Foundation](#) aimed at bringing music education back into Lincoln City schools. Organizers bought sheet music and instruments and created a library where students could check out instruments.

Another grant permitted the group to continue two more years, Sanders said. "With that project ending, we realized how many lives we'd changed through the five years we were going. Five of us decided we can't let music go away from our schools again."

So, in 2018, the nonprofit Music is Instrumental was born and that year earned a grant

for \$1,300 from the Mark Sponenburgh Memorial Trust, also administered through the Lincoln County Cultural Coalition. The grant provided an important cornerstone for the future of the foundation, paying the salaries of the music technicians. Another grant through the cultural coalition provided funding for the choir program.

“The initial stages of learning a musical instrument can be frustrating without individual attention,” said Christine Tell, board director for operations for Music is Instrumental. That’s where the music technicians come in, supporting the work of Lincoln County School District music teachers.

“For example,” Tell said, “individual students receive instruction on how to hold the instrument and produce sound. The technician may take a small group of students in sectionals, e.g. percussion, and work on needed skills. He/she may work with soloists before an upcoming performance. They also assist the classroom teacher with performance assessments throughout the year to determine an individual student’s progress.”



*Zac Will consults via Zoom with expert technician Alyssa Tanksley. She is a graduate of Taft 7-12 in Lincoln City as well as having a degree in music education from Portland State University. Photo courtesy: Music Is Instrumental*

Zac Will, a junior at Taft 7-12, started playing with the band in seventh grade, initially as a percussionist. When the bass player graduated and there was no one to replace her, he decided to learn bass. He began working with the music technicians as a freshman. He now plays with the Taft Jazz Band.

“They help the jazz band rehearse or take musicians aside and really work with them,” Will said. “I think they’re a really good resource to have. Your development is supposed to happen outside rehearsal, but a lot of kids don’t have the outside resources to make that happen. With these experts coming to help and all the connections they bring, it opens up opportunities for everybody.”

Music is particularly suited to a mentorship style of teaching, said Schaefer, who is in his fourth year as a tech and is known to the students as Dr. S. “It’s great that I get to work with them and share music and build music abilities,” he said.

Schaefer remembers two years ago when a combo he worked with played a couple of tunes at Salishan during the [Siletz Bay Music Festival](#). “The bar manager came over and said, ‘Wow, they are really great. Can they play weekends?’ They did a great job and felt terrific about themselves.”

Recently, Music is Instrumental was able to enhance online learning for students through membership to [SmartMusic](#), a provider of web-based music education tools. The membership was funded in part by a grant from a COVID-relief fund.

“We realized besides Zoom meetings and Google classroom, there had to be something else, a better way for teachers to interact with students and their instruments,” Sanders said. “It’s an amazing program, used globally, and it allows students to log into Chrome books, and they are able to access the rest of the students that they’ll be rehearsing or performing with, and it gives real-time feedback on their particular performance.”

Sanders also plans to apply for grants from the cultural coalition this year. If received, the Sponenburgh grant again will be used for music technicians. The program currently contracts with three technicians, down from seven pre-pandemic. “Last year, we had a budget of just over \$19,000 for music technicians. That’s a lot of experience, a lot of time with students,” he said.

Another application to the cultural coalition, if granted, would fund care of the students’ instruments. “With the students having their instruments at home,” Sanders said, “we could see an increased need for, for example, valve oil, trombone slide cream, reeds for different instruments, and those requests are just starting to come in from a few of



*Zac Will, a junior at Taft 7-12, plays with the Taft Jazz Band and says having the expert music technicians available “opens up opportunities for everybody.” Photo courtesy: Music Is Instrumental*

the schools.”

The [Lincoln County Cultural Coalition](#) is accepting applications for its fiscal 2021 grant cycle. The deadline is Nov. 15.

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*This story is supported in part by a grant from the Oregon Cultural Trust, investing in Oregon’s arts, humanities and heritage, and the Lincoln County Cultural Coalition.*



*In February, the Taft Jazz Band made its last performance before going online due to the pandemic shutdown. Photo courtesy: Music Is Instrumental*

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The show must go on.



Give today

This advertisement features a photograph of a young child in the foreground, looking intently at a stage performance. In the background, other audience members are visible, some with their hands raised. The text 'The show must go on.' is positioned at the top left. A circular logo for 'Oregon Children's Theatre' is located in the middle left, and a blue button with the text 'Give today' is at the bottom left.

a-wol  
dance collective  
serial without limits

NOW OFFERING  
**ONLINE CLASSES**

STREAM TODAY AT [AWOLDANCE.ORG](http://AWOLDANCE.ORG)



The advertisement is split into two main sections. The top section has a dark blue background with the text 'a-wol dance collective serial without limits' in white. The bottom section has a white background with the text 'NOW OFFERING ONLINE CLASSES' in large, bold, black letters, and 'STREAM TODAY AT AWOLDANCE.ORG' in smaller black letters below it. On the right side, there is a photograph of a female dancer in a blue crop top and maroon leggings, captured in a dynamic, mid-air pose.

Are You Dance Curious?  
[dancewirepdx.org](http://dancewirepdx.org)



The advertisement features a light grey background with a white silhouette of a dancer in a dynamic pose. A large teal circle is positioned on the right side, containing the text 'Are You Dance Curious?' in a black, sans-serif font. Below this text, the website address 'dancewirepdx.org' is written in a smaller, teal font.



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