

## Nurturing Musicians: Planting the OMTA "Garden"

The familiar and seasoned advice to "bloom where you are planted" can be multiplied into a garden of musical abundance through intentional connection and professional sharing. Such is the case for the teachers and students who are active in the Lincoln County District of OMTA (local branch of Oregon Music Teachers Association). Since its first seeds were planted in the mid- 1980s, a handful of music teachers in and near the Newport have banded together to share teaching tips, listen to experts in the field, and provide performance opportunities for their students. Teachers and students alike have experienced increased motivation and commitment to excellence through these activities.

*The seed is planted:* Nestled on the coast in an isolated, rural setting in the 80s, piano teachers in Lincoln County worked independently. Other than an occasional Community Concert artist, they had no organized contact with professional musicians. Reading an announcement in the Oregonian about the 1986 MTNA Convention (Music Teachers National Association) in Portland, Oregon, a young music teacher from Newport became excited. Soon Sarah Barker Ball was mingling in the crowd, pumping attendees for information, and sensing that professional connection could transform music education in Lincoln County.

*The garden grows:* The next step was to find like-minded musicians who might share the dream. Some phone calls proved successful, and a nucleus of three gathered to discuss possibilities. Sarah started attending nearby OMTA meetings (Benton County) to learn more, and generous mentors (Joan Gathercoal and her twin sister Jean Proctor, Julia Franz, Dorothy Fahlman and others) began to make visits to the coast. The network was established and maintained with the goal of attracting a required number of six members to form an official District. Monthly meetings were held for the next several years. By 1988, the Newport Performing Arts Center opened and transformed what it meant to be a musician on the coast. Lorin Hollander was the first internationally-known artist to play in the new hall. He made a special point of gathering music students and teachers on the stage to talk with them personally. He thanked music teachers in for their dedication to this important work and assured us that our efforts could help transform the world into a more compassionate place.

*The first fruits are harvested:* Although not yet officially formed, with special allowance made by the state board, the group started sponsoring events for students. In the spring of 1988, Mary Hulme served as adjudicator and advisor in the first local OMTA Syllabus Exams. The next year, members developed and realized the first annual Ribbon Festival. These two events created a balance between the rigorous requirements of the syllabus program, and the relaxed, festive and non-competitive Ribbon Festival. Responding to the new stimulation, as if by magic, six teachers were finally assembled who wanted to join OMTA. They were Mark Lambert (Vice President),

Jerryann Olson (Secretary), Regina Bumstead (Treasurer), Chris Hilton (Program Chair), Marian Brown (associate member), and Sarah Barker Ball (President). In 1989, another member joined who is still active today: Cherylann Buckley.

*The garden is fertilized:* Over the next several years, the group expanded membership and developed events. Workshops were held to hone teaching skills, utilizing the knowledge of nearby experts. Pedagogical videos were shared at meetings on the coast, from the OMTA lending library. These included "Developing Musical Fingers" by Frances Clark, "Getting in Tune with Personality Types," and a video that featured Van Cliburn. In addition, Lincoln County teachers travelled to participate in OMTA conventions and workshops throughout the state. A highlight was hearing Laurette Goldberg, noted Bach scholar, who spoke at PSU in the fall of 1991.

*Transplants are welcomed:* Gradually growing in number, Lincoln County OMTA began to attract newcomers to the area. Jess Smith, newly retired director of Brooklyn Conservatory of Music moved to the coast in 1991, immediately becoming active in the group. His presence brought a whole new dimension and reservoir of knowledge and experience to the coast. Shortly thereafter, in the mid-90s we were graced by an influx of eager teachers: Mary Lee Scoville, Jessica Treon, Rita Warton, Cheryl Kraft Wade, and Suzanne Brown all moved to the area bringing strong academic backgrounds and years of teaching experience. With their additional help we have sponsored two OMTA state conventions and several adjudicator trainings. They also brought in new ideas such as "Spotlight on the Teachers" concert, a biannual event that raises money for a student scholarship fund.

*Pruning and re-shaping musicians:* Lincoln County OMTA was among the first to tackle the Junior Bach Festival, in 1992. Our first and only truly competitive ongoing event, it features adjudication and selection of winners. They are advanced to regional and state levels, dramatically raising performance standards for students and teachers. The Bach Festival, Ensemble Festival and Composition Festival offer students opportunities to hear and associate with musical peers from other Districts. The collegial support and stimulation provided by OMTA have touched the lives of many young people. A number of them have continued to study music at the college level. Some are now composers, teachers, performers, and church musicians, while others play for enjoyment. The past few years have seen an influx of more new members (Don Jenkins, Tony Holly, Jeannine Jordan, Krista Johnson), and unfortunate passing of one (Suzanne Brown) ...time moves on but the synergy of association through OMTA continues to enable a bounty of music-making, personal support and professional growth.

Sarah Barker Ball

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