Con Brio

Oregon Music Teachers' Association, Inc.
Eugene District

Affiliated with the Music Teachers' National Association, Inc.

President's Message, April 2020

Hello everybody,

I am wondering how you are all doing. I am hoping that you are healthy, and if your health is affected, I hope you have the needed care. A friend of mine is a nurse, and this is amazing to witness her dedication and loyalty to her Hippocratic Oath. We are so thankful to all those who work in the healthcare profession!

Our music teaching is left mostly with two options: create virtual or audio studios, or apply for unemployment. Interestingly, so far it seems that the first option has been opted by many teachers! Yes, it is possible to teach online. It's new for some of us, but with some effort and creativity, we can keep passing on our passion for music. In this Con Brio, Neil Patton is sharing some of his experience with online teaching. Thanks, Neil!

As you probably all assume, all the physical OMTA events planned for our Spring 2020 have been cancelled. **Now, this does not mean that nothing has happened, or is happening. Far from that.**

As a convincing example, the District Composition Celebration took place online on Friday April 3rd. Be sure to read Paul Safar's report of that event in this Con Brio. Thanks Paul and Margaret !

Also, Carol White, our syllabus chair, is writing about what you can do if you have students ready for Syllabus Examinations. You will see that several options are proposed. Thanks, Carol!

We have been thinking that maybe we could have an online recital with teachers performing instead of the teacher's showcase at Unity of the Valley. We may not be able to raise money, but wouldn't that be a great way to be together? Also, we are thinking about online auditions for the Nellie Tholen Scholarship. Both subjects will be discussed during our April monthly meeting.

Speaking of monthly meetings, for sure they are going to happen! They will be online, through the Zoom platform. The link and password will be sent through the email list. For those of you who are not familiar with Zoom, please call me or email me, and I can help. It is easy.

You can read the new agenda for this coming April meeting in the following pages. I hope many of you will join. As tragic as the COVID-19 pandemic is, this is a time of possibilities, because we are called to a change, individually, and as a society. We are all called to use our imagination and creativity.

I know this may sound unprofessional, but I want to say "Much much love to all of you, much much positive energy, " and I really hope to see you ALL in one week, at 9:00am online!

Genevieve Mason,
Eugene District OMTA President

OMTA Eugene Treasurer's Report

Account Activity
March 1, 2020
through
March 31, 2020

Checking Account

Date	Description	Debit	Credit	Balance
March 1, 2020	Beginning Balance			$ 2,367.36
March 18, 2020	Baroque Festival		$ 17.00	
March 18, 2020	Composition Fest.		$ 140.00	
March 31, 2020	Ending Balance			$ 2,524.36

Savings Account

Date	Description	Debit	Credit	Balance
February 29, 2020	Beginning Balance			$ 11,390.01
February 29, 2020	Interest		$ 0.45	
March 31, 2020	Interest		$ 0.48	
March 31, 2020	Ending Balance			$ 11,390.94

Certificate of Deposit

Date	Description	Debit	Credit	Balance
March 31, 2020	Balance			$ 2,388.49

Treasurer _____ *Cheri Ann Richardson* _____

The deadline for submitting articles and announcements for the May 2020 issue of Con Brio is Sunday, May 3, 2020.

Send your news and announcements to district members between regular issues of Con Brio!
Simply submit the news item or announcement as usual, indicating you would like it sent immediately. It will be formatted and sent via email to all members.

Eugene Spring Syllabus, 2020

With the cancellation of Spring Syllabus this year, we all have students who have been working hard on their Syllabus theory and repertoire, only to see Syllabus and District recital events disappear along with so many other activities and parts of our normal, pre-COVID19 life.

Heidi Evans, State Syllabus Chair, is working on accommodating Level X students with a video Syllabus evaluation. These video exams are tentatively scheduled to take place the weekend of May 16 & 17. Heidi and the Chair for this special project are working with getting a list of Adjudicators who can do these video exams. More information will be coming from the State as Heidi and the Chair work out some of the logistics with Adjudicators. Registration and fees for Level X students will be through this new chair and event being worked out.

As for our many Level I - IX students, Heidi writes:
   "Many of you (and others) have asked about the possibility of having another online event for the students Levels 7-9. My inbox is completely swamped. I hear your questions and care deeply about these students. My current plan is to encourage teachers to test the students themselves for this year only, and let it count towards the Level X awards. Some students may wait until the fall, but we don't have enough room for everyone in the fall, and most students would be better served by going onto the next level as planned".

Some of you have already emailed me regarding contacting one of our local Adjudicators or any of the State Syllabus Adjudicators and arranging Syllabus video exams so your students may have closure on their Syllabus studies and preparation this year. For this year and because of these circumstances, you may make arrangements with an Adjudicator to have your students do video exams. These video exams could be held on any day(s) agreeable to you, your students and the Adjudicator. The most efficient way would be to contact the Adjudicator, see what video platforms (FaceTime, Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc.) they have available and then work out a schedule and give the adjudicator a list of your students and emails or phone numbers so the Adjudicator can phone in at the scheduled time.

Payment should be worked out between you and the Adjudicator for any Level I - IX exams (Syllabus Level fee amounts are available on State website).   None of these unofficial exams will go through Leggerio. I will not be scheduling for you and as I understand, payments will not go through District or State for these Levels. Keep record of students who participate in these video exams for Trophy points and towards Level X awards.

If you have any questions, please email me (carolsstudio1@mac.com)

May we all continue to find beauty and joy in our music each day, in our students and teaching as we all learn, adapt and continue to grow, in our families and friends.

Musically,
Carol

Carol White, NCTM
Piano Studio
541-953-2307
carolsstudio1@mac.com

OMTA-Eugene
Teacher
SHOWCASE

the fourth annual
Beverly Soule Memorial
Scholarship Fundraiser Recital
CANCELLED

Due to continuing State COVID-19 restrictions, the *Teacher Showcase Recital*, scheduled for May 16, has been cancelled. Possible alternatives may be considered and discussed at the **April 13 Eugene District meeting**. I will forward any information as it becomes available.

Wyatt Burger

westlanepiano@cvcable.net

Student Composition Celebration
remote recital via Zoom
Friday April 3rd at 5:30 pm

Each of the five years or so (after taking over the chair from Ellen McQuilken), I have enjoyed putting together the Composition Celebration every April. We normally present the recital at Unity of the Valley Church. This year, of course, with the corona virus pandemic, that was not an option. Rather than cancel the event altogether, however, the teachers involved decided to try the recital remotely with the video conferencing platform Zoom.

To be honest, both being a bit of a tech phobe and having a week adjusting to the new online teaching world, I had rather low expectations for this attempt. Don't get me wrong, I was excited for it as I look forward every year to hearing our students (this year we had 15 entries age 8 to 80!) present their wonderful compositions. But I thought it would somehow be a bit cumbersome to function well online. I was wrong! I was more than pleasantly surprised. We kept it simple. No big group activity this year. No lecture with slide show. The students played their compositions with poise and feeling. As always, it's a pleasure to hear their personalities come out in the music. Many thanks to this years adjudicator, composer and mezzo-soprano Lisa Neher of Portland, who gave very specific and constructive comments (via private comment sheets). Also, a big thank you to Nick Rieser, Alexis Gibbons, Laura DuBois, Katie Caulley and Genevieve Mason for working with their students on the compositions. And thank you to Margaret Gowen who is helping to co chair the event for the future. We obviously hope that we will get back to regular live recitals soon but it's comforting to know we can feel this connected online as well.

Paul Safar
Event Chair

Agenda for the Eugene District OMTA April meeting

When: Monday April 13, 2020
What time : 9:00-11:30 am
Where: Online with the Zoom platform

We won't have a presentation for this meeting but we call on member participation!

At 9:00, instead of our coffee-tea-chat time, we have something else planned:
- Genevieve will begin with proposing some tips to make an online exchange smooth and comfortable. It includes some hands signal protocol, and some Zoom features.
- After that, we will take time for each of us to check-in. Each present member will be invited to take 2 or 3 minutes to briefly share their experience in our current life situation. Are you attempting to teach remotely ? Are all your students aboard, or have some decided they do not wish remote lessons ? How are you feeling ? These are some of the areas you might consider sharing.

At 9:45, our business meeting will begin promptly after sharing our situations.
- First up, we will review past events and discuss future ones.
- Next, we will discuss electing a new board: who will continue and what positions do we need to fill ?

Around 10:30, we would like to propose a time to share tips about managing teaching online.
- Please think about one or possibly two things that you have found that work and can help other teachers--and why--and be prepared to share. You may wish to prepare a small paragraph beforehand

See you all there!

Janet Pollack, *Eugene OMTA Vice President*
Genevieve Mason, *Eugene OMTA President*

Some Tech Tips for Teaching Online Lessons
Neil Patton

Welcome to the New World! With COVID-19 and orders to stay at home, our teaching studios have been turned upside down. Some of us have jumped into online teaching with both feet, while others might be stumped as to where to even begin. I hope I can help a bit with some of what I've learned these past few weeks.

Number One: Communicating well with your families will really help ease fears about this new approach. Give clear written instructions to them for how to set up their online lessons, and they will be more likely to come your way in making it all happen, rather than quitting till this all blows over.

I will let you all figure out how best to actually TEACH online. We all have different approaches and philosophies. I'm hoping to at least point you in some directions to help you make some basic decisions for what to use and how to use it, and maybe even what to buy if you feel you need it.

Internet Basics:
You can get up and running with some bare essentials, if that's all you have. A good internet connection is absolutely a must. Without that, nothing can get done, no matter what else you buy or connect. A recent Steinway webinar said a 20Mbps upload (how fast your device SENDS info up to the Internet) and download speed (how fast your device gets info FROM the Internet) is essential. While that would be awesome, it's not necessarily what we have at home.

I am using CenturyLink's 30Mbps DSL service (which has a 1.5 Mbps upload speed). While it has been spotty at times, I have had almost no failures, and that's with my whole family home working and studying on the Internet these past few weeks. However, anything slower than that will make your lessons choppy or might make them grind to a halt. You will have to see what is available where you live. Get the best that you can afford.

If possible, and if you are using a laptop or desktop computer, try to plug into your modem with an Ethernet cable, rather then using your house WiFi. This will provide a much more stable and fast connection to your Internet.

And let's get this out of the way: There will ALWAYS be a lag ("latency") between your house and theirs, and vice versa. No matter how fast your Internet connection is, you will not be able to clap or sing along with your student, nor play duets live in your lessons. You can get creative with exchanging recordings and such, but this is the sad truth. We have to find creative ways to introduce some new concepts to our kiddos.

Equipment Basics
(Full Disclosure: I am an Apple guy, so my experience has been limited to their products. However, I'll try to stick with principles that can help everyone.)

   Minimum: A smart phone. (Not ideal simply because of screen size, but any port in a storm, right?)

Better: An iPad or Android tablet. Bigger screen, more features to take advantage of.

NOTE: You will need something/somewhere to mount your phone or tablet so that the student can see your face and hands, which means it will need to stand vertically in some way. This can be tricky, and may require some creative use of tape. I fortunately have a camera tripod and a mount for either iPad or smart phone. My first week of online lessons used this method, and I got a lot done that way. These can be found relatively inexpensively at Fred Meyer or Walmart. Amazon takes a month to get orders out now, so I don't recommend them for a while.

Possibly Better: Desktop computer with a webcam (and an external microphone if your webcam does not include one). Pros: Your screen can be as big as you want, and there are more options for features in your software. Cons: Not very flexible when placing it in your studio. Definitely not my first choice for convenience.

Best: Laptop computer with built in camera and microphone. Same advantages as a desktop, but also more flexible when arranging your virtual studio.

Important note: When I refer to "laptops", I am not referring to Chromebooks or Netbooks. I really do not recommend using these devices for your lessons if you can help it. My students who are using these have terrible audio, and almost all of my failed lessons so far have happened when someone is using a Chromebook. They simply don't seem to have the processing power to handle streaming audio and video.

Bonus Equipment:
(All optional, but nice to have if you can get them.)

Microphones: Having an external microphone (one that is not built into your device) can greatly improve the quality of the sound your student hears from you. There are mics that can plug into the USB port of your computer, and even ones that can connect to tablets and smart phones. Large condenser microphones can add a nice full sound to your studio. You will need to do some research to find what will work with YOUR equipment. Google is your friend.

Webcam or extra smart phone: Having an external webcam or smart phone, in addition to the main one your student sees you through, can allow you to add additional views of the piano, such as overhead, looking straight down at the keys. **This will (I believe) only work with laptops and desktop computers**. More on this later.

Bluetooth Keyboard and Mouse: If you are using a laptop, sometimes it needs to be a bit out of arm's reach to fit you in the picture for your student. A wireless (bluetooth) computer keyboard and mouse can allow you to type and trigger functions without having to halfway stand up to reach the darn computer.

An additional iPad or digital interface tablet: Having an extra iPad with a stylus, or something like a Wacom tablet can really augment your studio by allowing you to draw on a virtual whiteboard during lessons. The function buttons on a Wacom tablet can also be programmed allow you to quickly switch between camera views. This is expensive, and a bit complicated (for the Wacom option) but can be a huge asset.

Setup: Where do I put everything?

As I said before, it helps for your student to at least be able to see your face and hands at the keyboard, without you having to stoop and ruin your back and neck in the process. It might take some time experimenting to find the sweet spot for this. Keep in mind that setting your device too close to your piano/instrument can cause distortion (crackling sound) in your microphone. Our pianos can really put out a lot of sound, and even my wife's flute students need to stand a bit away from their devices to avoid audio distortion. The same applies to your students. Help them know where to put their device, if they have any flexibility. If you have to choose, choose to see their hands.

In addition, now's a good time to rethink where you keep everything in you studio: metronomes, books, pencils/pens, assignment sheets, printer, etc. I was wasting a lot of time getting up and looking for stuff during lessons because I kept everything where it usually lived in the good old days of teaching in person. My office is currently a mess, but I'm working on it.

Software: What app are you "meeting" in?

I have only worked with Apple's FaceTime, Microsoft's Skype, and Zoom. There are other options out there (Google Duo is quite popular, but I have not tried it).

Facetime and Skype:

My first week of lessons were primarily on FaceTime and Skype using an iPad only. These worked well, and actually seemed to use less WiFi bandwidth than Zoom. They are simple to use, and most people have them already installed on all their devices. FaceTime comes free on all Apple devices, but only works on Apple devices. Skype (Downloadable but also free) works on Apple, Windows and Android products.

Apple users can use their Apple account as their contact for FaceTime (FT), usually their email or mobile phone number. If my student is using FT, I simply need their contact info, and I dial them up like a phone call from inside FT on my device. They answer, and you start your lesson.

In Skype, you must set up an account (free) with Microsoft, as will your student. Again, exchange contact info from your accounts, and then you can call one another from within the app. I found navigating Skype a bit more difficult than FT. The button layout is not as intuitive. Take some time and explore the app, and maybe watch some recent YouTube tutorials.

Audio on these platforms is generally not very good. Here is why: These apps are designed almost exclusively for voice conferencing, not music. So, they are designed to actually try to make music *disappear*, thinking that it must be in the background and needs to be erased so the voices can be heard over it. Thus pianos and other instruments sound like they are underwater, or even metallic and just plain awful. I have not found a way around this. If any of you have, please chime in.

Pro tip I am just now discovering: If both parties can wear headphones, instead of using the built in speakers on their devices, audio improves DRAMATICALLY. Keep this in mind as you try things out with students.

One thing to note: On laptops, Facetime and Skype can switch to additional cameras, and also alternative microphones and speakers, allowing that overhead keyboard view I mentioned before. You will need an external webcam for this feature.

Zoom:
Enter Zoom. It is easy to use, like the others, but with some additional pro features that caught my attention. Zoom is free for one-on-one lessons. If your meetings include three or more people, free meetings can only last up to 40 minutes. $14.99 per month and you can ignore the time limit.

I did not like Zoom at first, mostly because its built in audio was the worst of the three (in my opinion). However, I discovered a hidden feature that goes a long way to fix the audio problem I described above. You can tell the app to *turn off* the feature that squished the music away, using audio directly from your device's microphone.

Three problems:

1. This feature is only available on laptops and computers (not Chromebooks). Mobile devices like smart phones and tablets do not have this feature yet, though I have heard rumors that Zoom may be adding it soon.
2. Both users must have this feature enabled on their end of the call to make it work both ways. This has been time consuming, but has been very worth it.
3. Not all laptops are created equal. If my students are using a Windows machine, this feature helps, but does not always fix bad audio. Consistently, the best audio has been coming from Apple laptops.

At the end of this article, I will include instructions for how to enable original sound in your laptop or computer.

Headphones help with Zoom, as well!

What Else I Like About Zoom

Camera switching: I can quickly change camera views with a simple keystroke (laptop).

Screen Sharing: I can use this feature to switch cameras, but also to show the desktop of my computer (laptop). For example, I can have my lesson parents send in a picture of the week's theory homework. I can then open it as a PDF in an app like PDF Professional (Mac) where I can point to the page using my mouse (or even annotate it using my mouse or my Wacom tablet). The same goes for new music that the student is learning. I can scan the music and display it on my computer desktop and point to tricky passages and help with counting (though not live while they are playing).

Another screen sharing feature in the laptop version of Zoom allows you to show the screen from another connected iPhone or iPad. This can be done with a wired device through USB, or through Apple's wireless Airplay feature. So, with a stylus, you could use an iPad as a whiteboard, which leads me to…

The Whiteboard: I love this feature, and it is even available in the tablet version of the app. I've used a connected iPad, and now a Wacom tablet to draw out new concepts for students. Very helpful and flexible, and all your drawings are saved at the end of the meeting so you can refer to them or send them to students later.

Recording: There is also a recording feature in Zoom that records both video and an additional audio-only track. Great for sending to students later for review. I even used this feature to create an entire video explaining 8th notes that I then posted on YouTube. I was able to use both cameras and the whiteboard to create a flexible class session that the students can review at home. (It's an unlisted video, but here's the secret link: https://youtu.be/KyxX3DIAagw)

Scheduled Meetings: Once you have a registered account with Zoom, you can schedule meetings for all your students. I scheduled repeating lessons through the remainder of the school year with all of my students. They then have the same link that they click for every lesson. They are then responsible to show up at their lesson time. When I wrap up one lesson, I can then click my link to open the next lesson, and wait for them. I allow them to "arrive" before the lesson time, but I always enable a "waiting room". This allows me to control when they enter the meeting. Once I start the meeting, Zoom will then alert me that they are waiting for me to admit them. This also keeps others from crashing your meeting, as you have control as to who can enter.

Chat: There is also a built in chat feature in both computer and mobile versions of the app. I have not tried this yet, but I could potentially type out assignments in this window, and then copy/paste into a doc to email to parents.

Final Note: I do encourage my families to keep FT or Skype ready to go in case we have trouble with Zoom. In one lesson we were having bandwidth issues in Zoom, and so we quickly switched to FT, and all the troubles went away. I couldn't use all the extra features, but the lesson was saved!

There's so much more to share and learn right now, but I'll stop there. Maybe some of you can chime in for future editions of Con Brio with some of your ideas and experiences. Let me know.

Good luck! I can try to answer questions, but my schedule has doubled in busy-ness since this all started, so I may not be able to field all questions that may come up. Remember that there is a wealth of info online, and multiple FaceBook groups discussing these things daily. That's where I got a lot of this info, besides just messing around with the apps at home.
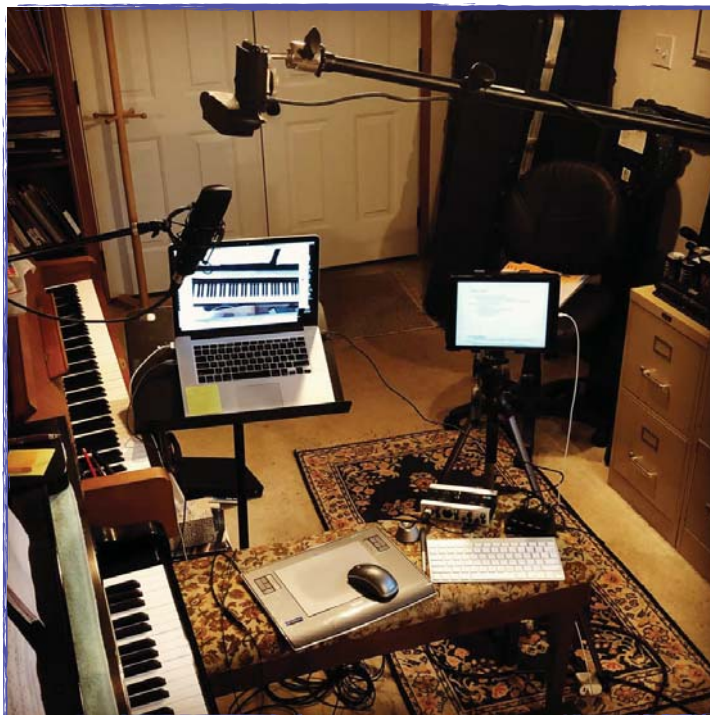
Hang in there. It can get better!

Yours,
Neil

AUDIO FIX for Zoom

In the computer version of the Zoom app:

My current setup, including laptop, overhead webcam, wireless keyboard, Wacom tablet for mouse and whiteboard, and condenser microphone. iPad is for lecture notes for group class. Laptop screen shows the view from the webcam.

1. Find your Settings or Preferences (it can be called either).
2. Within Preferences, select the Audio section in the left column.
3. Disable "Automatically adjust microphone volume"
4. Click the "Advanced" button in the lower right corner of this window.
5. Check the box next to "Show in-meeting option to 'Enable Original Sound' from microphone." (*This is the big one we need*!)
6. Disable "Suppress Persistent Background Noise"
7. Disable "Suppress Intermittent Background Noise"
8. Close preferences window.
9. IMPORTANT: when you start a meeting (every meeting) there will now be a dark grey button in the upper left corner of your window that says "Turn on original sound" click this so that it says "turn off original sound"
10. Your student will now hear the sound from your microphone without the squishing effects.
11. The preferences will stay activated from now on in your computer, but you will need to click that grey button every time you start a new meeting (and so will your students once they have set this up on their devices).

Unfortunately, you must also walk your students through these steps if they have a laptop or desktop computer. If they are using a mobile device or a Chromebook, this option is not available to them at this time.