

MUSIC CONSERVATORY OF SANDPOINT

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Where the magic happens - The Music Conservatory of Sandpoint was founded by Karin Wedemeyer in 2009 and moved into its current building in 2019.

The summer of 2023's goals and plans

The Music Conservatory of Sandpoint brings joy to many of all ages, with every song sparking engagement and curiosity among listeners. Along the institution's path, there have been many changes and developments, ultimately leading to what is now known and loved across Sandpoint.

Back in 2009, Karin Wedemeyer, the Conservatory's founder and director, found herself noticing a decrease in musical literacy, so she devised a plan to fix it. "The purpose at the very beginning was that we wanted to increase literacy in music reading," Wedemeyer said. "The Conservatory is like a trade school for the arts or music and performance."

With these goals in mind, the Conservatory began in the back of a dance studio, with only eight students and offering lessons in piano, strings and voice. "So at the very beginning, we were very frugal, we never really wanted to do more than we could or were able to. It was always important for us to have people's expectations met and [exceeded], rather than [trying to] introduce all instruments all at once...And then from there, we started to add gradually. And I think the word 'gradually' is what is important so that we didn't feel overwhelmed. But those core instruments were our foundation," Wedemeyer said. The music conservatory now instructs almost 500 students, ranging from ages two to adulthood.

In addition to offering classes throughout the school year, the Music Conservatory provides a method for introducing students to a multitude of instruments in a more compact period via the Summer Academy. The first session of this program began on July 10, with lessons in musical theater, piano, flute, ukulele,

percussion and marimba. The second session will began July 31, focusing on choir, orchestra and instrument art factory.

The 2023 Summer Academy offers a unique experience to familiarize students with their instruments, ultimately becoming comfortable enough to perform multiple pieces after only two weeks. "The camp is a very intense experience, it's daily for one thing. So we have the goal to create performance [ready] outcomes after two weeks of intense study," Wedemeyer said.

Even though that may seem an impossible task, much effort is put in place to ensure the students' ultimate success. "[If] you give it that level of intensity and focus, it's surprising to students what they can achieve. So very often they work away with having performed much better than they thought they would, which is fun to observe. And that just shows us that if we give it a complete focus, and that's all we do, then we can achieve a lot in not a lot of time. So I think that's one of the takeaways and the learning for students. Is that 'Wow, look what we have accomplished within those two weeks,'" Wedemeyer said.

Having forged friendships, as well as broadened students' understandings of their instruments, the first session of the 2023 Summer Academy was a success. "We have an integral philosophy within the school and that is what we value, we want to achieve excellence but we also really want for students to learn to collaborate and to work together...We've experienced that that helps a student excel and enjoy that journey of becoming a musician," Wedemeyer said.

The many talents of the first session

Piano



From Ludwig van Beethoven to Martha Argerich, famous pianists have made their mark on the world. The piano can shock audiences and fill them with countless emotions, throughout the range of one song. At the Music Conservatory of Sandpoint, students such as Andrew Ford, have also worked to achieve these goals during the Summer Academy. “I like how there are so many notes. [On the piano,] you can go from really high to really low...[however it can be challenging because] sometimes it has long stretches or you have to go really fast,” Ford said. “[The Conservatory] taught me new and difficult songs, which challenged my hands to do more things.”

Throughout the first session of the summer academy, Melody Puller, piano instructor, has been teaching the pianists to collaborate with others and perfect their craft. “My initial goal was to help [students] develop a sense of camaraderie amongst themselves because a lot of times pianists are sort of in their own little bubble. It’s not really a social instrument when [the students are] younger like this, and so they get a chance to spend time with others and work together,” Puller said. “I like being able to spend longer amounts of time with students and lessons to help them build their practicing skills.”

Flute

Dating back to 900 B.C. and originally called the “ch-ie”, the flute has since become a popular instrument all around the world, including within the walls of the Music Conservatory of Sandpoint. This woodwind instrument has piqued the interest of Michael Tsiro, a student of the Conservatory for the past couple of years. “[My favorite part about playing the flute] is the sound that it makes, and the range that it can play, [and the Music Conservatory] has a teacher who helps me play,” Tsiro said.

The flute segment of the night was composed of “Spring from The Four Seasons” by A. Vivaldi, “Pirates of the Aegean” by D. Bruce and “Quatuor cantilena Meditazione e canone per quartetto di flauti traversi” by C. Ferrari. Instructor Gosia Dauksza worked tirelessly to prepare her students for their performance, the result being an outstanding success, enchanting the audience with the challenging to perform, but beautiful melody and sound of the flute.



The many talents of the first session

Ukulele



The strum of a ukulele causes many ears to perk up, blissfully painting the image of waves crashing and the sun beating down on Hawaiian sand. The ukulele is another instrument that was offered at the Summer Academy's first session, and many took advantage of this opportunity. Hannah Neehan has been teaching the ukulele at the Conservatory for the past three summers and admires how the ukulele and Summer Academy can spark ambition amongst its students. "It's always really impressive to see how far we're able to come in [two weeks] and how hard kids are able to work in that amount of time. I think a lot of people underestimate just how hard kids are willing to work when they're motivated and dedicated to accomplishing something," Neehan said. The main goals of Neehan's class have been to not only prepare for their performance but to also practice composing their own pieces. Amelie Haller is one of the children learning the ukulele and has enjoyed being creative with her music. "We scatter ideas and then we all vote on one [idea] and then add lyrics to [the melody] if we want, then we choose the notes too," Haller said. Overall, the group's performance reflected their goals and left a mark on those watching.

Percussion

In addition to teaching the classics, such as piano and flute, throughout the first session of the Summer Academy, students are introduced to instruments rich with history, culture and stories from thousands of miles away. Ali Thomas has been instructing percussion at the Conservatory, specifically the djembe. "[The djembe] comes from the Malinke ethnic group in West Africa. It used to be a kingdom [and] part of the Malian empire and this empire spanned throughout these countries Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, and the Ivory Coast. And it used to be one area until it was colonized by the French and divided up into countries... I've been to Guinea several times to study this traditional music. Everything that we're learning in these two weeks is traditional from West Africa," Thomas said. Even though the djembe may look very different, it shares many of the underlying characteristics as other percussionist instruments, and therefore the goals of this section of the Summer Academy are similar to others. "All music has the same sort of code. All music has pitch and rhythm. Even these drums have a pitch... My goals were to turn ordinary students into master percussionists. I think we've beyond succeeded, this session has been probably the most intelligent group of students I've ever taught," Thomas said.



The many talents of the first session

Marimba



Session One's production ended with a flourish as 10 students and their instructor stepped onto the stage, pulled out their mallets, and began to play a steady beat on their marimbas. Hannah Nehhan, the group's instructor, recognizes that the marimba plays a key role in the musicians' body language and the way that they conduct themselves. "We have a lot of movement-based activities and then that goes directly into our playing and so [we are] feeling things in our body before we play it," Nehhan said. Another notable difference of the marimba is all the roles that go into performing a song. "We can't have all 10 kiddos [sharing all of the different] parts. Between our three songs, there are probably at least 15 separate unique parts, we can't have all the kids learning all 15 parts to be performance ready. So we solidified who's on what parts so that a kid can focus...It's really a lot of layering," Nehhan said. Nina Cardin is one of the musicians that performed on the marimba, and she noticed the unique sound and its African descent sets it apart from all others. "I like the sound of the instrument and playing it is fun [because] it sounds different," Cardin said.

Matsiko Orphan Choir

The performances of July 21 ended with a special guest performance from the Matsiko Orphan Choir, which works to assist orphaned children by providing education. The group sang, danced, and enchanted their audience. This performance was a 'sneak preview', with the group hosting longer performances at Sandpoint's Farmers' Market, Cedar Hills Church, North Summit Church and Talus Rock Retreat through July 22-24.



Shake It Up With Shakespeare bewitches audience

The lights dim, the music plays, and the audience excitedly awaits the start of well-known stories told through the fresh perspectives of Sandpoint's young performers. Having started practicing on July 10, a group at the Summer Academy worked tirelessly to prepare themselves for their performance of *Shake It Up With Shakespeare* on July 21. This production is formed from songs about and monologues from *Macbeth*, *Comedy of Errors*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry VIII* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Shakespeare's plays have always remained prevalent, however, these works are often not introduced until one reaches high school, where they are read within a classroom. However, these tragedies and comedies provide an opportunity for children to learn life lessons, while enjoying themselves at the same time. Elizabeth Iha, the head of the Conservatory's musical theater department, decided several months ago that she wanted the group's performance to revolve around Shakespeare. "We wanted to keep this Shakespeare theme because it's highly educational, there's all this music that we're learning, plus, we're learning about Shakespeare. So those two together, it's like you get double bang for the buck with the Shakespeare theme for the music," Iha said.

Although only having 10 days to learn an entire production might appear an impossible task, Iha reveals that the only aspect that changes are the accessories of the performers. "For [the Conservatory's last production], we spent almost the entire school season with but for [another production]. I would say the difference is it's more presentation based...so what's altered is costume and set design. We have a few props and that's it, but they're still getting the musical aspect by blocking, staging, the music you have to learn, [and] choreography is so really, what we sacrifice for that short time is set and costumes."

In addition to learning about the plays' characteristics, such as old English and iambic pentameter, students also are introduced to the uniqueness of Shakespeare's writing that has earned him his title of the most well-known playwright, even hundreds of years after his death. "I've been wanting to bring [Shakespeare] to the kids here [with] the words he uses and how the imagery with his words is so vast and deep and he goes deep into the human condition and I feel like it's another way to look at life or to understand it," Iha said.

Over their days together, the actors have both broadened their love for musical theater, as well as their talent. Maya Gunther, an actress in *Shake It Up With Shakespeare*, has been a part of the summer academy for the past three years. "What's special is getting to know people and kind of finding your passion for singing and making music...Now that I'm older I understand more and I can zone in to [my part], and get the choreography," Gunther said.

The characters, settings and experience that come with a play are valuable to any spectator, however, this joy does not only go one way, as the actors themselves feel a rush every time they step onto the stage and face the dozens of people eagerly awaiting the next line. Rowan Clemmons, an actor in *Shake It Up With Shakespeare*, argues that performing is even better than observing a play. "I just love being in plays and honestly I love seeing plays, but I feel like it's better to be in one because you get the experience of giving the story to the people [other] than receiving it," Clemmons said.

The Summer Academy's first session has provided a unique experience to everyone that participated, and many are looking forward to the next year's, more confident and enthusiastic than ever. "I'm encouraging them to take the risks, be courageous, but I've also set the container and that this is a very safe environment. We're here to support one another and the story we're telling," Iha said.

