

Home is Where the Music Is

ONE PORTLAND FAMILY BUILDS A STAGE

Abbie Weisenbloom, a CMC parent and volunteer, has intalled a stage in her living room with the vision of creating an intimate performance venue. We caught up with her recently to ask her about it.

(CMC) What got you started on the idea of having house concerts?

(Abbie) As with many ideas, the idea of having a house concert was one that evolved over a period of 11 years due to a combination of forces in our lives, the main one being having children! My husband and I have two children who have been taking violin and piano lessons for a number of years. As many parents can attest, practice can be isolating and frustrating; especially when you aren't yet at the level where you can play in an orchestra, chamber music, or a band. Add to that various levels of support at the family or community level and it can be a really challenging experience, especially in those harrowing early years.

As our children were starting on their path to music, I started playing flute again and started to learn the violin and some piano as well. I also joined in some musical groups and communities, both classical and folk. My



husband doesn't play music, so I was trying to find a way that music could bring our family together. At the same time I was aware that professional musicians were often trying to find venues that they could afford to perform in.

I mentioned to some of them that I would be interested in hosting a house concert, although I admit that I was really unsure of what that might entail. I had only been to two at that point. No one took me up on my offer for two years; finally, one of them did. That's when I had the first part of our stage built to fit a space in our living room. At this point, most people didn't quite understand what I was doing or why. "A stage, ... in your living room?!" It was built by Brecher Designs and can be disassembled. That was 1 1/2 years ago. Since then we have hosted 14 groups from around the world, and expanded the stage 3 times. We leave it there, except for a piece made expressly for chamber groups that makes it deeper to accommodate their stands and seating arrangements.

What have you learned along the way?

I have leaned that if you want to do something badly enough it may very well happen, although when it might happen is not always easy to predict. When you are doing something with no road map such as an entrepreneurial adventure, it's a scary, uncertain process. Take it slow, be positive, and be kind to yourself. There will be times when nobody will understand or be there to assist, especially in the early stages, but that is OK; it won't



always be that way. When you are putting on a show, make sure that your audience is prepared for what they are going to see/experience. Make sure that the musicians are comfortable and have time to set up.

There are many different musical communities in Portland. I am continually fascinated with how they overlap. Bigger is not necessarily better. Being flexible and willing to take some healthy suggestions from others is important. I remember when a musician suggested I move some large items of furniture. At that point, I couldn't imagine doing that. Two months later, it was done and has been an improvement. Also, lighting our pathways leading to our front door. On the other hand, knocking down walls to improve the view? That's not going to happen!

What have been the best aspects of hosting house concerts?

Meeting people. I miss traveling and used to live in France. By hosting groups from all over the world, our world expands without leaving Portland. Also, revamping our living space. After 11 years of raising children, our home needed freshening up and rearranging. However, inertia often won over. When you have 40-50 people over for a concert, inertia takes a back seat! Now our living room is much emptier, has a fresh coat of paint, and is prettier in general.

With no other relatives in town and a tendency to keep to ourselves as a family, we feel much less isolated. We also host a jam session as well. We feel like we are contributing to the needs of the community. A side benefit is exposing our children to music in this way. I'm also using skills that have been put on hold for a long time: technical /artistic/and hopefully, soon, linguistic.

What are the groups who've played so far?

1. Jamie Laval and Zac Leger (www.jamielaval.com) 2x
2. Crowfoot (www.crowfootmusic.com)
3. Lisa Ornstein, André Marchand, and Normand Miron (Québécois)
4. Rio Con Brio (www.rioconbrio.com) Brazilian choro
5. As Faiscas - Music from Galicia
6. Ex Pirata Intl - Music from France and Canada
7. Kevin Carr - storytelling (www.kevincarr.org)
8. John Whelan Trio (www.johnwhelan.com)
9. Celtic Fiddle Festival / Kevin Burke (www.kevinburke.com)
10. RVSQ - www.rvsq.com Classical Crossover
11. Alameda String Trio (CMC benefit) - Members of the Portland Opera Orchestra

12. Chamber Music Benefit for CMC featuring: Michelle Mathewson (viola), Katherine Schultz (cello), Scott Esty (vln), Michael Grossman (vln), Andrew Bonner (piano), Becky Reese (cello), Margaret Murer (piano).

We have 5 more booked through to February, 2011!

How do people learn more about upcoming concerts?

Contact me: Abbie Weisenbloom 503-233-4945. Or, e-mail abbiew@froggie.com to be added to to an email list.

Anything else you want to share?

My main area of study was French. I have always loved language. Music is also a language that has the potential to bring people together in a number of ways. I am continuing to work on how to integrate music into cross-cultural understanding.

Special thanks to the Alameda Trio (Michelle Mathewson, and CMC instructors Michael Grossman and Katherine Schultz) who performed at the Oct. 29 house concert to benefit the Center!