

# OMTA MUSIC NEWS

Opus 80, No. 5 · May 2026

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### State Board Meeting and Presidents Round Table

June 6, 2026  
Virtual/Online

### 2026 ESMAR Examination

June 13, 2026  
Willamette University, Salem, OR

### 2026 Syllabus Level VI and X Honors Recital

June 13, 2026  
Calvary Lutheran Church, Hillsboro, OR

### 2026 OMTA State Conference

August 7-8, 2026  
Mt. Hood Oregon Resort, Welches, OR



## IN THIS ISSUE

### State News

President's Corner	1
Conference	4
Conference Trivia Night	6
Certification	7
MTNA Conference Report	8
Education and Festivals	10
Grant Programs	11
OMTA Honors Committee Corner	12
Regista Launch	16
Membership	17
Syllabus	18
In Memoriam: Virginia Buhn	25

### District News

Central Oregon District	19
East Portland District	20
Eugene District	21
Hillsboro Area District	22
Rogue Valley District	23
West Portland District	24

## CONTACT & CONNECT

[office@oregonmta.org](mailto:office@oregonmta.org)  
[www.oregonmta.org](http://www.oregonmta.org)

PO Box 5335  
Portland, Oregon 97228

@OregonMTA



## PRESIDENT'S CORNER



**Heidi Evans, NCTM**  
OMTA President

May means celebrations! The year is winding down, many festivals and Syllabus events have taken place, auditions have been performed, and much practicing has happened in the past few weeks. I always feel a bit dizzy by the time May rolls around—there's just so much happening. Graduations to look forward to with their bittersweet changes, families moving in and out, and so many recitals. Outside, it's the season of pollen, new buds and blossoms every day (Gurlitt, Op. 107), and students racing across the gamut of emotions from extreme stress to elation or relief after their performances.

Take a moment and reflect on all that you've accomplished in your studio this year, the students who pulled it together, the students who excelled, and the ones who showed up even when life is hard. They showed up because they have a relationship with you, because you teach them that music matters in their lives. It gives us all a safe emotional outlet to express our deepest feelings, it can lift spirits when shared, it teaches focus, discipline, public performance skills, and links us all together across the planet.

You are the most wonderful set of colleagues I could ever have imagined being given the privilege to serve, and I am so grateful for this opportunity. I would like to thank all of you whom I've leaned on for advice, all of you who have volunteered for one or more roles within OMTA, and each of



you who has participated in our organization's events. By my current count, that's about 500 people who make Oregon the best MTA. Thank you, all.

As my presidency comes to a close, I'm proud of what OMTA has accomplished these past two years and I look forward to its next chapter—our incoming president, Amie Belisle, has fantastic leadership skills and instincts. I will continue to serve OMTA in different roles, and as ever, I look forward to seeing you in August for our State Conference!



*Heidi Evans, NCTM  
OMTA President*



The link below connects you to your local District Associations, OMTA Board of Directors, and Committee Chairs:  
[www.oregonmta.org/about/leadership](http://www.oregonmta.org/about/leadership)

#### **OMTA Board of Directors**

##### **PRESIDENT**

Heidi Evans, NCTM

##### **PRESIDENT-ELECT**

Amie Belisle, NCTM

##### **SECRETARY**

Anna Danese, NCTM

##### **TREASURER**

Cindy Peterson-Peart, NCTM

##### **RESTRICTED FUNDS TREASURER**

Jeremy Hatch

##### **PAST PRESIDENT**

Liz Willis, NCTM

##### **CERTIFICATION**

Anastasia Kitaev, NCTM

##### **COMPETITIONS**

Dr. Julia Lee

##### **CONFERENCE**

Amie Belisle, NCTM

##### **EDUCATION**

Dr. Janet Pollack

##### **FINANCE**

Cindy Peterson-Peart, NCTM

##### **MARKETING**

Vacant

##### **MEMBERSHIP**

Ayden Katterman

##### **PARLIAMENTARIAN & LEGISLATIVE**

Kathy Gault, NCTM

##### **PERSONNEL & CONTRACTED SERVICES**

Heidi Evans, NCTM

##### **PUBLIC RELATIONS**

Vacant

##### **PUBLICATIONS**

Jeremy Hatch

##### **SYLLABUS**

Barbara Roberts, NCTM



# CREATIVITY THRIVES HERE



Portland State  
School of Music & Theater

- Bachelor's degrees in piano performance, jazz, and music
- Master's degrees in piano performance, collaborative piano, jazz, and music
- Opportunities to work with world-renowned faculty and guests
- Piano-specific scholarships available



[PDX.EDU/MUSIC-THEATER/](https://pdx.edu/music-theater/)

**NOW ACCEPTING  
APPLICATIONS FOR  
THE 2026-27  
ACADEMIC YEAR**

## PSU STEINWAY PIANO SERIES

The PSU Steinway Piano Series brings internationally acclaimed pianists to Portland twice yearly for a weekend of public recitals and master classes.



**"One of the secretly best  
concert series in Portland."**  
- Oregon ArtsWatch

**Join us, May 15, for our Spring Recital!**

***Mystics and Romantics* featuring pianist Dmitry Rachmanov**

Public master classes by Rachmanov and piano faculty, May 16-17



STEINWAY & SONS  
PORTLAND

# 2026 OMTA STATE CONFERENCE

## August 7-8 at Mt. Hood Oregon Resort in Welches



**Amie Belisle, NCTM**  
OMTA President-Elect

Registration opens in just two weeks for the 2026 OMTA State Conference! Head over to [oregonmta.org](http://oregonmta.org) to learn more. We can't wait to see you at the Mountain!

### Why Attend?

The OMTA State Conference is a wonderful opportunity to improve your teaching, learn from experts, and find new repertoire. Connect with colleagues, make new friends, get new ideas, and take time to recharge and invest in yourself. We hope to see you there!

### Trivia Night Kick-Off

On Thursday night—"Conference Eve"—get ready for laughter and some friendly competition, as we'll be getting the party started with a fun-filled, music-themed Trivia Night. Start organizing your teams now! Teams may be composed of 1–8 players, with team sizes of 4–6 players recommended. Gather your friends and choose a clever name for your team—extra points will be awarded for the best team name! Feel free to team up with members from OMTA districts other than your own. See Debra Sostrin's article on page 6 for more information.

### Artists & Presenters

We are pleased to feature an outstanding lineup of artists and presenters this year, including Rodolfo

Leone, Susan Bruckner, Sophia Pereyra-Johnston, and Jessica Evotia Andrews-Hall. More information is available at [oregonmta.org](http://oregonmta.org).

### Discussion Topics

One of the great values of the conference is coming together and sharing ideas about the practices, barriers, and policies that we experience as individual teachers. What topics would you benefit from discussing with colleagues? Share your ideas for group discussion at the time of registration.

### District Awards

Celebrate someone in your district who has contributed in a significant way by nominating them for an OMTA District Leadership Award. This award recognizes outstanding OMTA members whose extraordinary service and leadership have enriched their districts and positively influenced students, colleagues, and the broader organization. Recipients will be honored at the OMTA Conference Banquet. Nominate your colleagues at <https://oregonmta.org/teachers/honors-and-awards/district-leadership-award>.

### Recreation Options

There is plenty to do at and around the Mt. Hood Oregon Resort! Included in the Resort Fee, you'll have access to tennis, volleyball, basketball, croquet



courts, lawn bowling, a putting green, horseshoe pits, a pool, and a hot tub. Resort guests also receive 20% off golf. Just a short drive away, you'll find numerous hiking and biking trails, and Ski Bowl—about 20 minutes from the resort—offers year-round activities for everyone.

### Master Class Opportunity

Having your student perform and receive feedback from one of our guest artists is rewarding for the teacher and the student. Questions can be directed to Charlotte Laughlin with an application deadline of Friday, May 15 to [ilove8kids@aol.com](mailto:ilove8kids@aol.com).



OREGON  
MUSIC TEACHERS  
ASSOCIATION

*Registration opens May 15!*



## OMTA State Conference

August 7 – August 8, 2026

Mt. Hood Oregon Resort

Learn more and register at  
[oregonmta.org](http://oregonmta.org)

*See you at the Mountain!*



OREGON  
MUSIC TEACHERS  
ASSOCIATION

# NOT TO BE MISSED! OMTA MUSIC TRIVIA NIGHT

## Conference Eve, Thursday, August 6, 2026 · Mt. Hood Oregon Resort

Debra Sostrin, Trivia Night Organizer and Master of Ceremonies



### Question 1:

What's happening the night before the OMTA State Conference officially begins, giving you the perfect excuse to warm up your brain, your social skills, and your funny bone?

**Answer:** Trivia Night, of course. Thursday, August 6, 2026. Consider it the unofficial prelude... with fewer scales and more snacks.

### Question 2:

What kind of trivia questions can you expect?

- A. Music
- B. More music
- C. "Wait, I should definitely know this"
- D. All of the above

**Answer:** D. Bring your inner music nerd. Or borrow one.

### Question 3:

Do you need an advanced degree in musicology to play?

**Answer:** For some questions it might be helpful, but for other questions it definitely would not. There will be something for everyone.

### Question 4:

How big can your team be?

**Answer:** Anywhere from 1 to 8 players. Flying solo? Brave. Bringing 8 people? Also brave. The sweet spot is 4 to 6 players, but we don't judge your strategy.

### Question 5:

Do you have to stick with your own OMTA district like it's a lifelong allegiance?

**Answer:** Absolutely not. Mix, mingle, and form your dream team with members from other districts. This is trivia, not turf war.

### Question 6:

Can family members and partners join in the fun?

**Answer:** Yes. The more, the merrier. Also, they might actually know the answers and surprise you.

### Question 7:

Do you need to form a team ahead of time?

**Answer:** Optional. You can plan your team in advance, ask to be placed on one, or just show up and see where the aleatoric musical winds take you.

### Question 8:

Will there be refreshments to sustain your brilliant (or wildly incorrect) answers?

**Answer:** Yes. A no-host bar and snacks will be available. Hydrate responsibly—especially before scribbling down "Beethoven!" with full confidence.

### Bonus Question:

Will you regret missing this?

**Answer:** Let's just say: history remembers those who showed up for Trivia Night.

See you there! Bring your knowledge, your guesses, your sense of humor, and your best "I totally knew that" face.



# CERTIFICATION

## Newly Certified Teacher Spotlight



**Anastasia Kitaev, NCTM**  
Certification Co-Chair



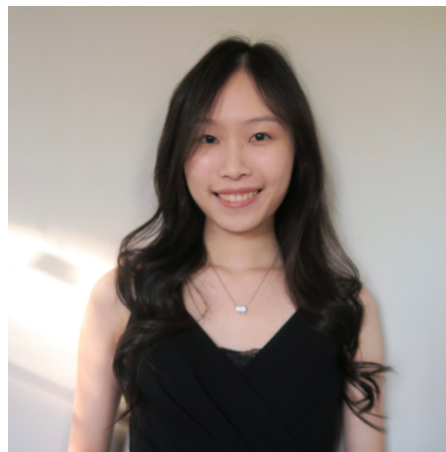
**Sarah Barker Ball, NCTM**  
Certification Co-Chair



We are delighted to announce that Tiana Wong from Rogue Valley District has successfully completed the requirements to become a Nationally Certified Teacher of Music (NCTM). She worked steadily toward this goal starting in September 2025, and her commitment and hard work were rewarded with official notification on April 1 of this year. Following are her reflections on this process and what it means to her:

NCTM has always been widely regarded as one of the most prestigious titles a music teacher can acquire within the United States. Through collaborations and initiatives, MTNA has always been able to provide new programs and support to local teachers in both state and nationwide levels. With current education department policies, decentralization has become a strong emphasis. The responsibility of educating the next generation shifted from the federal government to independent contractors and teachers, which would have created great weight had organizations such as MTNA not existed.

The teaching projects which I participated in to fulfill the NCTM requirements were an amazing journey which took me back to my years of training as a Masters of Music candidate. The combination of tasks span through musical analysis, piano pedagogy and performance, allowing me to evaluate my teaching style with measurable metrics. At the same time, I also secured understanding on how to apply some of the tested components to building a sustainable ecosystem for local institutes. At a



Tiana Wong

minimum, the teacher's profile projects provided a great opportunity for me to review existing knowledge.

The most memorable part of the project was the part in which I was required to record the lesson progress between me and my student. For a long time, I have underestimated the efficiency of logging lesson progress in the form of video recordings. During the span of the project, my student developed a more mature approach when it comes to performing on camera and on stage. It also provided a valuable opportunity for my student to get used to handling stage fright. I am delighted to witness the progress. Having earned NTCM certification, I am proud to utilize this connection and resource to educate students in the United States and contribute to education reform and cultural exchange, especially among underserved populations.



# MTNA CONFERENCE REPORT



**Heidi Evans, NCTM**  
OMTA State President

Oregon was well-represented at the 2026 MTNA Conference in Chicago this March. Over twenty-five members attended the conference, hearing inspiring performances and presentations, greeting friends from across the country, and making new connections. We enjoyed several Oregon meet-ups planned by Amie Belisle, NCTM, our President-Elect.

I'd like to give a shout-out to Susan Todd, NCTM, who was on the MTNA Conference Planning Committee and put many hours into selecting the outstanding presentations in advance, as well as introducing six of the sessions while at conference! The entire conference was so well-planned and ran so smoothly—kudos also to the great MTNA staff and the entire planning committee!



Jun Yun with Susan Todd and Will Chou



Oregon Dinner at MTNA, counterclockwise from bottom: Karen Ruppert, Gary Ruppert, Will Chou, Elise Yun, Ayden Katterman, Elizabeth Morris, Mary Hewitt, Jeremy Hatch, Roman Klimov, Natalya Klimov, Amie Belisle, Lorraine Alner, Laura Blattner, Susan Todd, and Heidi Evans



Zachary Cheng with Heidi Evans and Susan Todd

Three Oregon students competed in the MTNA Student Performance Competition, and we enjoyed cheering on their exceptional performances. They were:

- Junior pianist Zachary Cheng, student of Dr. Renato Fabbro
- Young Artist pianist Jun Yun, student of Dr. Alexandre Dossin
- Young Artist saxophonist Evan Ney, student of Dr. Idit Shner



Some favorite moments from the conference were those celebrating its 150th anniversary with historical photographs, documents, and a beautifully produced video of MTNA's history at the Gala celebration. Another favorite moment was the keynote address by Scott Yoo, host of PBS's "Now Hear This" program, where Scott shared his love of music and his philosophy about our deep human need for cultural nutrition. The conference passed in a whirl of lectures, workshops and performances covering all ages and levels, all eras in music, new premieres of works, and undiscovered repertoire gems. There were excellent workshops on pedagogy and performance anxiety, one or two of which I am arranging to bring to Oregon in the near future.

Thanks so much to all my Oregon colleagues who attended and whose presence made this the best MTNA conference ever!



NW Division Dinner at MTNA, clockwise from bottom left: Susan Todd, Heidi Evans, Natalya Klimov, Roman Klimov, Theresa Bogard, Cindy Peterson-Peart, Will Chou, Brian Hsu



OMTA members at the Gala Dinner, L to R: Amy Belisle, Kathy Gault, Heidi Evans, Cherise da Cunha, Susan Todd, Cindy Peterson-Peart



# EDUCATION AND FESTIVALS

## Reflections, Baroque Festival Honors Recital, Composition Honors Festival, and ESMAR

Dr. Janet Pollack, Education and State Festivals Chair

### REFLECTIONS

I wish to thank all the state festival chairs—Marla Hansen, Sandy Hull, NCTM, Natalya Klimov, Robin Ziari, and Lorraine Alner, NCTM—who worked tirelessly this past year to make our state festivals a success. Many of you may be surprised by the enormous amount of time and energy that goes into organizing, setting up, emailing, purchasing awards, scheduling and in general running a festival. Without such generous members like those mentioned above, OMTA could not offer such events.

### RECENT EVENTS

#### Baroque Festival Honors Recital

The OMTA 2026 State event took place on Saturday, March 14, 2026, at the Saint Mark's Lutheran Church in NE Salem. The event went extremely well, co-chaired by Natalya Klimov and Marla Hansen, and a good deal of enthusiasm permeated the event. There were fifty-three students who participated from eight districts; five students registered but were unable to perform and received medals (seven medals, two students were two-time winners). An additional seven students qualified at the district level, but did not register to perform on the state honors recital or to receive a medal. Rather than a simple one-page program, this year the co-chairs created a booklet to add a sense of specialness and a touch of elegance. It was so well-received that we decided to continue offering these memorabilia to all who attend.

The **2027 State Baroque Honors Recital** is **confirmed for March 13** at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in NE Salem. Registration will be through OMTA's new registration system, Regista, located on the OMTA website. Therefore, please remember that teachers and district chairs are no longer expected to mail their entry fees. Participating teachers, be aware

that once you have been notified of the competition results from the District Baroque Festival chair, follow the guidelines for the new registration system to register your students for the State Baroque Honors Recital. The closing date for registration will be posted closer to the event date. **Note:** We encourage all districts to hold their district festivals no less than 3 weeks before the final event, although 4 weeks prior is preferable.

Please feel free to reach out to co-chairs, Natalya Klimov, at (805) 698-2583 or [romanatalya@gmail.com](mailto:romanatalya@gmail.com) or Marla Hansen at [4marlarae@gmail.com](mailto:4marlarae@gmail.com) for additional information.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### Composition Honors Festival

The **virtual 2026 State Composition Honors Festival**, chaired by Robin Ziari, will go live on the OMTA website on June 8; all festival reports and list of honored composers **must be received by May 16**. Adults are welcome to participate in this festival! For additional information concerning the upcoming 2026 festival, consult the OMTA website and/or reach out to Robin Ziari at [zremusicpdx@gmail.com](mailto:zremusicpdx@gmail.com).

#### ESMAR

ESMAR will take place June 13 in the Department of Music on the campus of Willamette University, Salem. Applications from those who intend to participate should have been postmarked no later than April 15. For further information concerning requirements, consult the OMTA website at <https://oregonmta.org/programs/esmar-extended-study-of-musicianship-and-repertoire> or reach out to the chair, Lorraine Alner, at [esmar@oregonmta.org](mailto:esmar@oregonmta.org).



# GRANT PROGRAMS

## OMTA/OCF Nellie Tholen District Enrichment Project Programs: Teacher Enrichment for All!



**Karen Huntsberger, NCTM**  
Nellie Tholen Grant Coordinator

The grant presenter roster for 2026–2027 was emailed to district presidents and program chairs on April 7. Please contact me when you have decided on the presenters you'd like to have speak to your district next year.

This grant program is available to all districts outside the Portland metro area. East Portland, West Portland, and Tualatin Valley districts are not eligible, but you can choose presenters and programs from the roster and book them independently.

Questions? Email me at [grant.coordinator@oregonmta.org](mailto:grant.coordinator@oregonmta.org).



OREGON  
MUSIC TEACHERS  
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# State Conference

August 7 - August 8, 2026

**improve your teaching**

**learn from experts**

**make new friends**

**get new ideas**



**invest in yourself**

**recharge**

**find new repertoire**

**connect with colleagues**



learn more at [oregonmta.org](http://oregonmta.org)



# OMTA HONORS COMMITTEE CORNER

Susan Todd, NCTM, and Fern MacArthur, NCTM, OMTA Honors Committee



Kathy Gault, 2026 Oregon MTNA Foundation Fellow with MTNA Ceo Brian Shepard, MTNA Past President Martha Hilley, and MTNA President Kevin Chance.

*Photo Credit: Lan Vo Photography*

Central Oregon District members Kathy Gault, NCTM, and Gary Ruppert were both honored at the MTNA conference in Chicago this March. Gary



Gary Ruppert, 50 Year MTNA Member

received a certificate and pin celebrating his 50-year member award at the Awards Brunch, and Kathy Gault received her MTNA Foundation Fellow pin and certificate at the Gala. Kathy was nominated by the OMTA board in spring 2025, and donations funding her nomination came from friends, colleagues, family members, and the OMTA State Conference Raffle.

## Foundation Fellow

The OMTA Honors Committee is pleased to announce Liz Willis as the **2027 Oregon MTNA Foundation Fellow** nominee. The MTNA Fellow program is a prestigious honor that recognizes outstanding individuals in the music community while supporting the efforts of the MTNA Foundation Fund

through donations in the nominee's name. If Liz's nomination is fully funded by January 15, 2027, she will be honored at the annual MTNA Conference in April 2027 in St. Louis, Missouri.

The OMTA Honors Committee encourages all



Liz Willis, 2027 Oregon MTNA Foundation Fellow Nominee

members to consider adding a donation in Liz Willis's name to the MTNA Foundation when renewing their MTNA dues this spring, or by sending a donation directly to MTNA. The MTNA Foundation actively supports students and teachers throughout the country through commissions of new music, awards for excellent performances, scholarships, study grants, and awards

such as the Studio Teacher Fellowship, which is given to an independent music teacher to assist in developing and enhancing a newly-established studio. Donating to the MTNA Foundation is a meaningful way to honor exceptional leaders in the music community like Liz Willis, and it supports the important work of the Foundation.

Liz Willis, NCTM received her undergraduate education in music theory and piano performance through Trinity College of Music, London. She earned her BA in piano performance from Pacific Lutheran University in Washington State. A member of MTNA/Oregon MTA since 1985, Liz is incredibly grateful for the many opportunities for personal and professional growth provided within the Associations. Liz has served as Oregon State President, State Syllabus Chair, State Membership Chair, Parliamentarian and as an adjudicator. She also had the honor of serving as the first president for the new East Portland District from 2018–2020.



Liz writes: "I joined OMTA in 1985 upon moving to Portland. My first studio in southwest Portland was a fortunate location, as many active OMTA teachers lived in that area. I was picked up, taken to my first Portland district meeting, and introduced to what seemed like sixty teachers! Meetings were held on the east side of Portland at Westminster Presbyterian Church, which has a large kitchen and meeting hall with a stage. After the business meeting and a very interesting program, there was a sit-down lunch. Great opportunity to connect! Nellie Tholen was present at every meeting."

"It has been such a privilege to serve on the boards of many OMTA state presidents: Dorothy Fahlmann, Mary Ann Guenther, Gloria Dakin, Fern McArthur, Bonnie Esbensen, Cindy Peterson-Peart, Selina Manson, Sarah Barker Ball, and Heidi Evans. I've learned much from each of them, and, to slightly 'mis-quote quote' Cindy Peterson-Peart: "It was fun!" Volunteering for OMTA continues to be fulfilling. Working towards common goals for the improvement and longevity of something far bigger than one's self is often a personal growth experience. And it is fun!"

"My first "job" was working as a syllabus co-chair under the guidance of a wonderful long-time member, Geraldine Thune. We typed up schedules with carbon paper—everything involved many paper forms. We actually had "scheduling parties" where teachers in the district would work together to fit all the students into the days allotted. My first board position as the State Lending Librarian does not even exist anymore. OMTA maintained a library of mainly audio cassettes and some other resources for our members. Many recordings were from either national conferences or our own state conferences."

"I served as the State Syllabus Chair under Presidents Mary Ann Guenther and Gloria Dakin. Geneva Wright and Patty Peterson worked with me on developing the adjudicator training manual and introducing the job of syllabus Ombudsman. Geneva Wright was our first Ombudsman. There was also a revision of our classical piano syllabus manual during that time. I enjoyed working with presidents Fern McArthur, Dr. Bonnie Esbensen, Cindy Peterson-Peart, and as Membership Chair. President Selina Manson needed a Parliamentarian, which allowed me more education

assisting Past President Susan Todd in writing our State Bylaws as we left the old Constitution form of governance."

"Over the years, the Portland District had become the largest single district in the states, and there was some pressure from various directions to split it into smaller districts. East Portland was the first split, in 2018, with Hillsboro also becoming its own district after that. I was honored to serve as the first president of East Portland, from 2018–2020. I learned a great deal from serving under Irene Huang as her president-elect of Portland. Thank you, Irene! I was fortunate to also learn from the wise leadership of Sarah Barker Ball during her state presidency during Covid. Kudos to you, Sarah! It was not an easy time, and you were calm, gracious and completely dedicated to our membership."

"Locations and meeting formats have changed substantially over the past forty-plus years, but the ideals and camaraderie of our membership have remained. OMTA is quite unique among all of MTNA's state members. My initial "working relationships" have morphed into strong, long-lasting friendships with colleagues whom I deeply respect and love spending time with."

Liz's colleague and friend, Debra Sostrin adds: "For over fifty years, Liz has guided the musical education of students with unparalleled devotion. Her pedagogy incorporates generosity, kindness, warmth, and humor, all while holding her students to the highest standards of musical artistry, literacy, technical mastery, and discipline. Liz has provided her pupils with abundant opportunities to perform in recitals and festivals and indefatigably mentored their progress through OMTA's Syllabus program. She is also a highly valued adjudicator for OMTA's Syllabus and at festivals outside of our organization, so her commitment to students extends far beyond her own personal studio."

"Liz's generosity, kindness, conscientiousness, tact, and energy are recognized by everyone who knows her. Her optimistic "can-do" attitude ensures that—whatever task she is asked to perform—she will get the job done, on time, impeccably executed, and with good humor!"



"Liz Willis embodies everything I love about our organization. She could be its poster model! She figures significantly in one of my earliest and warmest memories of my own membership in OMTA. Newly arrived in Portland after having lived abroad for twenty-six years, I was attending my first OMTA State Conference. I knew very few people in the organization. There was a meeting that solicited opinions from members. Never shy, and a holder of very strong opinions, I was nevertheless conscious of the fact that I was a new member and perhaps not the most appropriate person to be sharing my thoughts. So, it was with a modicum of insecurity that I walked to the podium to contribute. As I spoke, I looked out on the crowd of members seated around tables, and couldn't help but notice one face in particular, absolutely beaming at me with the most radiant smile and nods of acknowledgement. I immediately felt welcomed, supported, and at ease. And who was that radiant visage in the crowd? Yes! In my mind, Liz Willis will always be 'the smiling face of OMTA!'"

### Honorary Life Members

This spring your Honors Committee also received OMTA Board approval for two new Honorary Life Members: Michele Alspach and Rita Warton. The Oregon Music Teachers Association State Honorary Life Member award brings recognition to individuals who have given extraordinary service to OMTA at both the district and state levels for many years. Recipients are recognized at the OMTA Conference and receive free membership at the state level for life.

#### Michele Alspach, Rogue Valley District

Michele Alspach was born in Medford, Oregon, but grew up in Siskiyou County where she began studying piano at age nine. She then pursued and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Piano Performance from Chico State University. Her love of teaching began during her undergraduate years. As a postgraduate student of Mary Handley at San Francisco State University, she was trained in teaching the Suzuki method. Michele continued teaching as she and her husband Rick raised two daughters while living in northern California and ultimately settling in Ashland, Oregon.



Michele Alspach, Honorary Life Member

Rogue Valley president Terri Horn writes: "The rich cultural opportunities offered by living in the Rogue Valley provide a perfect match for Michele, the most dedicated piano teacher I know. Her daughters excelled in theater and music, and Michele became one of the most respected piano teachers in our region. She has been an active member of Oregon Music Teachers Association for twenty-seven years. Even with her busy teaching schedule, she embraces leadership roles in this organization, going above and beyond to give students and other teachers opportunities to develop their musical abilities and excel at their profession."

"Michele shared with me that she has studied classical piano for sixty-one years and has taught for fifty-one years. She is a student of Dr. Alexander Tutunov, Artist in Residence at Southern Oregon University and a world-renowned pianist who chooses to live in our Valley. Under his tutelage, Michele has advanced her skills to a new level. She is truly entirely dedicated to the study of piano and sharing her expertise with her students. Michele so deserves the recognition recently awarded to her by her fellow members of OMTA as an honorary lifetime member. Michele serves as a mentor for all of us; she sets high standards for herself and her students, inspiring them to become skilled pianists, as well as instilling a lifelong appreciation for classical music. I feel fortunate to be among her peers in this profession."



### Rita Warton, Lincoln County District

Rita Warton grew up in New Zealand in a household full of singers and pianists, taught by their mother, who received her teaching degree after she graduated from high school, and who was their first piano teacher. They sang constantly in 3-, 4- and 5-part harmony. During her teens Rita added 'Pump Organs' to her skills, as her father was a minister in a country parish. She attended Auckland University as a music major and then married an Englishman and emigrated to the US. Their four children were all musicians, and Rita became an accompanist for them and their band and orchestra colleagues during their middle school through college years.



Rita Warton, Honorary Life Member

In 1992 Rita joined OMTA's Lincoln County District and has served as treasurer and president twice since then. Her studio expanded to twenty-seven students during this time and many of them have participated in various festivals over the years. When Lincoln County District was invited to kick off the Tholen Fellows, they were part of the first cohort. Rita keeps busy with her involvement in festivals, recitals and Spotlight Concerts as a singer and pianist, playing church music, and playing for Missoula Children's Theater since its inception at the Lincoln City Cultural Center, as well as putting on a series of monthly "Coffee Concerts" there.

Lincoln County President, Jessie Treon, adds: "Rita has served in every office in our district. She was our president for many years, attended state meetings,

and brought the news of the state back to our district. She currently serves as Treasurer of Lincoln County District. Rita is ready to jump in for any project. She is at every student event, and has performed countless times at our Spotlight on the Teachers Concerts over these years. She sings as well as plays the piano at these concerts, and always exudes a happy, calm energy, which keeps us all on the positive side of whatever we are doing."

### 50-Year+ Members

OMTA proudly recognizes our members who have been in our organization for over fifty years. We encourage you to give them a call to learn some of their wonderful teaching experiences.

#### 60+ years

- Barbara Straw, Linn Benton District
- Barbara Parker, East Portland

#### 50+ years

- Pauline Eidemiller, NCTM, West Portland, Tualatin Valley
- Phyllis Pieffer, NCTM, West Portland, Hillsboro Area
- Carol Ratzlaf, NCTM, East Portland
- Christine Mirabella, Eugene
- Jill Geil, Central Oregon
- Lanetta Paul, NCTM, Blue Mountain
- Katherine George, NCTM, East Portland
- Hiroko Nelson, NCTM, East Portland
- Margaret Littlehales, NCTM, Central Oregon
- Mary Burck, Linn-Benton
- Nancy Brown, Tualatin Valley
- Mary Ann Guenther, NCTM, Linn-Benton
- Gary Ruppert, Central Oregon

The Honors Committee reviews nominations for the above awards, as well as the OMTA Nellie Tholen Excellence in Teaching Award, presents nominations to the board, and follows through with publicity work and communicating with MTNA. The work is important, but not very time-consuming. If you would like to help serve on this very fun committee, please contact OMTA President Heidi Evans, NCTM.



# REGISTA LAUNCH

## The Editors

On Friday April 10, State President Heidi Evans, NCTM hosted a small party to celebrate the launch of Regista. Attendees included three developers from Watermelon Webworks and about ten OMTA members. Below are some photos from this fun event.

Here we would like to thank all the members who have given countless hours and provided thoughtful feedback in order to help make Regista a success—and who are continuing to devote time and energy to fine-tuning it! It would not be such a success without you!



# MEMBERSHIP



**Ayden Katterman**  
Membership Chair

Hello everyone! It was great to see so many of you at the MTNA national conference in March. I look forward to continuing to meet more of you and see our state membership grow! If you ever need anything, please don't hesitate to reach out.

We have had several new members join over the last two months.

## **East Portland**

Paul Moyer, Active Member  
Brian Bishop, Collegiate Member

## **Eugene/University of Oregon**

Albert Leong, Collegiate Member  
Corrina Lobschied, Collegiate Member

## **Hillsboro**

Alli Sauer, Collegiate Member

## **Rogue Valley**

Michael Wheeler, Institutional Member

## **Umatilla-Morrow**

Biplob Daas, Collegiate Member

Welcome to OMTA! We look forward to meeting and working with you.



# SYLLABUS



**Dr. Barbara Roberts, NCTM**  
OMTA Syllabus Chair

Dear OMTA Teachers,

I have been your Syllabus Chair since June of 2022. It has been my pleasure to give back to the organization that has given me so much in my teaching career. I will be stepping down this June, and taking my place is Alexis Gibbons, NCTM, who will bring fresh, new energy to this wonderful program.

In the last four years we have accomplished many things. Highlights include the updated Classical Piano Syllabus Manual, the addition of almost ten new Syllabus adjudicators (some are still going through the process), and the new Regista online registration system. And we have identified the parameters for creating Syllabus programs for jazz piano and other instruments in the future.

OMTA has a wealth of great teachers who volunteer their time to make our association work so well. We

are all so lucky to be a part of this organization. We have an outstanding Board of Directors, a very helpful Syllabus Committee, dedicated Syllabus District Chairs, terrific Syllabus Adjudicators, and so many great teachers, all of whom give so much to OMTA. And special mention goes to all the host teachers who volunteer their studios for Syllabus exams. Without them, our Syllabus program would not be possible.

I'd like to especially thank our wonderful OMTA President, Heidi Evans, NCTM, for her unfailing leadership and support these last four years. Heidi is an exceptional leader with terrific ideas, thoughtful responses, and a positive attitude which has been an inspiration to me and to so many others.

Thank you all—it has been my privilege to serve you!



# CENTRAL OREGON DISTRICT

**Grace King**, Central Oregon District President Elect

The Central Oregon District members enjoyed hosting Dr. Stephen Lewis, NCTM for a presentation on *The Mighty Wrist* after our regular meeting in April at the home of Renee Dugan. We all came away with useful information and inspiration on how to continue teaching efficient movement at the piano to our students! I personally had several “aha” moments during Dr. Lewis’ presentation.

On March 7, students from seven different piano studios performed music by Latin American or Spanish composers, or in Latin American or Spanish style, at our winter festival entitled “Música Latina”. The pieces were crowd pleasers, and enjoyable for students to perform.

At the end of the month, on April 25, we’ll be hosting our last festival of the school year, the Students’ Choice Festival, in Sunriver.



Dr. Lewis presenting to the Central District



# EAST PORTLAND DISTRICT

**Dr. Lauren Fraley, NCTM**, East Portland District President

The East Portland District has had a busy 2025–2026 year! From premiering new festivals to having some awesome guest presenters, we've learned a lot this season. Our Fall began with our third annual Honors Festival. This festival featured accomplished students of many age groups, as well as an adult performance recital, which was very successful. We introduced a new festival this past March called "Out of the Margins Festival: Music by BIPOC, Women, and Nonbinary Composers (for voice and piano)." It was a successful festival day, with sixteen participants and a positive outlook for future years! We will end our festival season with our All Periods Festival, also featuring an adult student portion.

Our programs this year centered around introducing and developing improvisation in our private studios.

We began with a presentation from Dr. Lark Powers on *Folk Song Improvisation*, kept it rolling with Dr. Stephen Lewis, NCTM speaking to us about *Improvisation as a Teaching Tool*, and rounded it all out with Rory Cowel who presented on *Teaching Jazz Skills*. We've learned a lot of valuable improv skills to carry on to our students! Other highlights from our programs this year included hearing from Andrew D'Antonio, NCTM and Heidi Evans, NCTM on the new updates to Syllabus, and Melissa Terrall about Mexican piano repertoire!

We're looking forward to meeting with the West Portland District for some end-of-year social time in May and a great summer break from programming!



# EUGENE DISTRICT

Dr. Janet Pollack, Eugene District Corresponding Secretary

## Reflections

As our season comes to a close—and my tenure as corresponding secretary—I find myself reflecting on all our district has offered members this year, and how much members have given to our district. We had the privilege of working with such inspiring master teachers as Dr. Peter Mack, learning about the four senses required for playing the piano from Dr. Stephen Lewis, NCTM, investigating how music interacts with the brain from Dr. Susan Bruckner, and observing our students coached by Dr. Alexander Tutunov. All these presenters shared thoughtful suggestions and informed perspectives on teaching and playing the piano. Several members organized monthly meetings to devise ways for adult students to more fully participate in group events and to consider how OMTA could better support these devoted learners. These meetings culminated in an adult gathering and recital at the Tsunami Book Store in downtown Eugene, with suggestions for more future events. Members Ayden Katterman and Nick Rieser introduced a wildly successful Silent Film Festival that included adult students playing alongside young pianists. And on April 11 we held our Composition Celebration which also included adult students.

Our president, Alexis Gibbons, NCTM, explored varied and creative ways to bring our members together and to afford all an opportunity to engage in learning opportunities and to participate in social events. To encourage wider participation in the district's decision-making, business meetings were offered both in-person and via Zoom, and educational programs and social gatherings were scheduled on different days in varying locales so that those who could not attend the regularly scheduled meetings had a chance to reconnect. For OMTA to gain a greater profile in the community and for members to freely exchange music and books on a daily basis, she suggested the addition of a Little Free Music Library in the South Hills.

Perhaps most notable is how our district has continued to grow during these past two years under the guidance of our membership chair, Ayden Katterman. From Fall 2024 to Spring 2025 we added twenty-one new members, twelve of them collegiate; this year, we have added an additional eight members, comprising a University of Oregon professor and seven collegiate members. Our collegiate chapter at UO has also grown steadily thanks to the oversight of Dr. Brian Hsu (Eugene OMTA Vice President) and the Collegiate Chapter President (Helen Nebeker) and Vice President (Yuet Yang Siew). This bodes well for OMTA's future in Eugene.

## Upcoming Events

There remains a number of events both edifying and social yet to come. On April 24 we will hold our last formal meeting of the year. Syllabus exams are scheduled for May 1, and on May 2 "The University of Oregon's Piano Festival" will take place, hosted by our collegiate chapter. May 11 promises a fun social gathering, and on July 25, the "In Good Hands" festival will come to Eugene to engage our students in the performance of original compositions.

## Members Around Town

The last Tsunami Books Series Concert will reprise "The Great All-Beatles Sing Along" on Thursday, May 7 at 6:30 PM. This delightful event is spearheaded by our member Paul Safar. Sandy Holder and Sophie Phillips-Meadow will join Paul in the Beatles tribute. On Sunday, June 7 at 3 PM, Paul Safar, Julia Frantz, and Sandy Holder team up for the "Classical on Broadway Series" at The Jazz Station in downtown Eugene. All are welcome at these events!



## HILLSBORO AREA DISTRICT



**Sarah Ball, NCTM**

Hillsboro Area District President

At our March meeting we had the privilege of hearing Emily Ross speaking about *Fragile Folks: Working with Anxious Music Students*. Members and guests all listened with bated breath, hanging onto every bit of her insights and tips about managing anxious students. Not surprisingly, several of Emily's ideas pertain to teachers, as well! We had the opportunity to share our most challenging teaching situations and receive tips. Because Emily is a certified music therapist with years of experience and an approachable style of communication, we all found this time to be well spent.

We also discovered that it is worthwhile to make personal connections and invite non-member

teachers and music lovers to our presentations. This is a great way to raise our visibility in the community and increase awareness of the valuable resources OMTA provides. Our non-member guests seemed excited about this event, and several are interested in joining our organization.

During the remainder of the school year, we have planned several social events: two coffee gatherings and a potluck brunch! A great way to celebrate another successful year in OMTA and continue to strengthen our connection.

Many smiles during the process.



# ROGUE VALLEY DISTRICT

**Terri Horn**, Rogue Valley District President

Greetings to our OMTA friends!

We are anticipating three major events in the next month:

- Sonatina Festival and Recital over April 18–19;
- Presentation by Dr. Diane Baxter entitled *The Pianist as Athlete* on April 25, followed by a master class for OMTA teachers; and
- Syllabus evaluations over May 1–2 with Heidi Evans, NCTM and Amie Belisle, NCTM serving as adjudicators.

There will be more information to share in the next issue of Music News, after these events have happened.

Our newest member, River McNabb, has added lots of energy and enthusiasm to our group. We are excited and grateful to him for organizing a

Composition Festival for our chapter next year. We are also eager to celebrate the end of our year with a traditional potluck at the home of a member in June. We will plan for "Make Music Day" on June 19, in partnership with Artistic Pianos in downtown Medford. This was a fun day for celebrating music of all styles last year. A group of us played an arrangement of "Canon in D" for six players. We were all laughing when we finished, as our synchronization had kind of fallen apart as the piece progressed!

That's all for now—we look forward to seeing many of you at summer conference in Welches, Oregon, such a lovely place!



# WEST PORTLAND DISTRICT

**Anna Cosma**, West Portland District President

West Portland District holds a virtual meeting once a year, during Portland's unpredictable weather season. This allows us to book presenters without the hassle of traveling and without needing to cancel the meeting due to inclement weather. On February 25, we had a wonderful presentation on Chopin's wonderful works. Dr. Ivona Kaminska gave us a detailed layout of the cultural, historical, technical and musical aspects of Chopin's music, focusing on three different types of mazurka and the rhythmic gestures of the polonaise. Even though our meeting was virtual, Dr. Kaminska stood up and physically demonstrated the differences between weak, strong and different pulsing in Chopin's pieces, which gave us a deeper understanding of styles and rhythms. The meeting was well attended and engaging.



Dr. Ivona Kaminska

On March 11 our district held a Reading Circle, where we read books on the topic of music, anything related or relatable to us teachers. I'm looking forward to having even more members participate in the future, to unwind and relax in between our busy schedules.

Our next meeting was April 29. We had Deborah Cleaver with a presentation on *Artistic Pedaling*.

On May 27, we have a get-together planned with our neighboring East Portland District. We look forward to connecting with colleagues from another district.

Festivals:

Thirteen students from the Baroque Festival, which was held late February, performed at the State Honors Recital in March. The West Portland Baroque Festival had forty-seven students participate from twenty teachers.

For our Ribbon Festival, forty-two students participated from eight teachers over the course of two days, February 28 and March 1.

It is a very busy season preparing for West Portland's largest festival, The Romantic and Contemporary Festival, scheduled to be held two weekends in April: 18-19 and 25-26. We have 128 students registered from twenty-nine teachers.

The Trula Whelan Concerto Festival will take place May 23.

A big thank you to all of West Portland District's chairs for making all events and meetings go and grow! Looking forward to our future events and meetings!



# IN MEMORIAM

## Virginia Hawley Buhn, 1926-2026

### The Editors



Virginia Hawley Buhn

Virginia Hawley Buhn, an OMTA member for over seventy years, passed away peacefully on April 9, 2026, at the remarkable age of 99. Despite enduring significant pain the latter half of life, Virginia never spoke of her suffering. Instead, she radiated joy and warmth, with positivity so genuine it was felt by everyone she met. Strong-willed and ambitious, she was committed to making the world a better place—and that she did, impacting countless lives throughout her long life.

Born December 16, 1926 in Yakima, WA, she was the only child of Warren Hawley, a landscape architect, and Edith Gilliland Hawley, a piano teacher. Showing an early talent for music, she began piano lessons with her mother at age 4. As her abilities blossomed in the years that followed, she became known throughout Yakima Valley as a piano soloist and accompanist.

She attended Whitman College and later transferred to University of Washington to study piano with the acclaimed Berthe Poncy Jacobson, as she earned a BA in Music. She moved to New York City for graduate school, and was accepted into the Three Arts Club. She studied piano with Edwin Hughes,

renowned pianist and pedagogue, and earned a Master of Arts in Music and Music Education from Columbia University.

After graduation, she returned to the Pacific Northwest and began a long, distinguished career as a piano teacher, respected by colleagues and beloved by students. Her students earned numerous awards and scholarships, and many became professional musicians. She valued every student and was dedicated to preparing each for a lifetime's enjoyment of music. She found deep purpose in her work, and retired at the age of 88.

Virginia was active as a lecture-recitalist, adjudicator & clinician, and held many leadership roles within OMTA. A strong advocate for high standards in music instruction, she served two terms as chair of the National Certification Board for the MTNA. In 2007, she was named a Foundation Fellow, an honor recognizing individuals who have made significant contributions to the world of music. In 2014, OMTA presented her with its first "Excellence in Teaching" award, an honor that touched her deeply. Through her musical activities, she formed many friendships she cherished dearly.

Virginia's greatest love was her family. She shared fifty years of companionship with her beloved husband, Edward, before his death in 2005. She is survived by two children, David Buhn and Mary Alex, Mary's husband, Scott Krajca, two grandchildren, Michelle Buhn and Shaun Schuster, and seven great grandchildren.

In lieu of a memorial service, Virginia requests you think of her as you listen to music of your choice. Contributions may be made in her honor to Food for Lane County, the Arthritis Association, Oregon Music Teachers Association, or Oregon Public Broadcasting.



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The submission deadline is always the 15th of the month preceding the date of publication.

<b>September <i>Music News</i></b>	August 15
<b>November <i>Music News</i></b>	October 15
<b>January <i>Music News</i></b>	December 15
<b>March <i>Music News</i></b>	February 15
<b>May <i>Music News</i></b>	April 15



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**EDITED BY**  
Jeremy Hatch  
[musicnews@oregonmta.org](mailto:musicnews@oregonmta.org)

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**GRAPHIC DESIGN BY**  
Samantha Yeung  
[www.samanthayeung.com](http://www.samanthayeung.com)

**ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS**  
Robin Power & Caris Power  
[office@oregonmta.org](mailto:office@oregonmta.org)

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## CONTACT & CONNECT

[office@oregonmta.org](mailto:office@oregonmta.org)  
[www.oregonmta.org](http://www.oregonmta.org)  
PO Box 5335  
Portland, Oregon 97228



@OregonMTA

