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TUESDAY
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McMinnville, Oregon

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CONNECTIONS

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Marcus Larson/News-Register

In her living room studio, where she composes, Anne Britt plays a song she wrote for her latest music book. She is working on her second book of hymn arrangements. Below: Britt has finished three books of music — “Eventide,” featuring hymns; a book of children’s tunes; and a varied collection of songs based on her family.

‘Composing is a bridge’

Writing music allows pianist to express herself, connect with others

By STARLA POINTER
Of the News-Register

Music has always been a big part of Anne Britt’s life. She’s played piano since childhood, performed duets with her mother, accompanied school groups and church choirs, and provided audition and rehearsal music for theater performances.

For the past seven years, she’s been pursuing another musical passion as well — composing her own piano pieces. She termed it an enjoyable, satisfying and fulfilling activity.

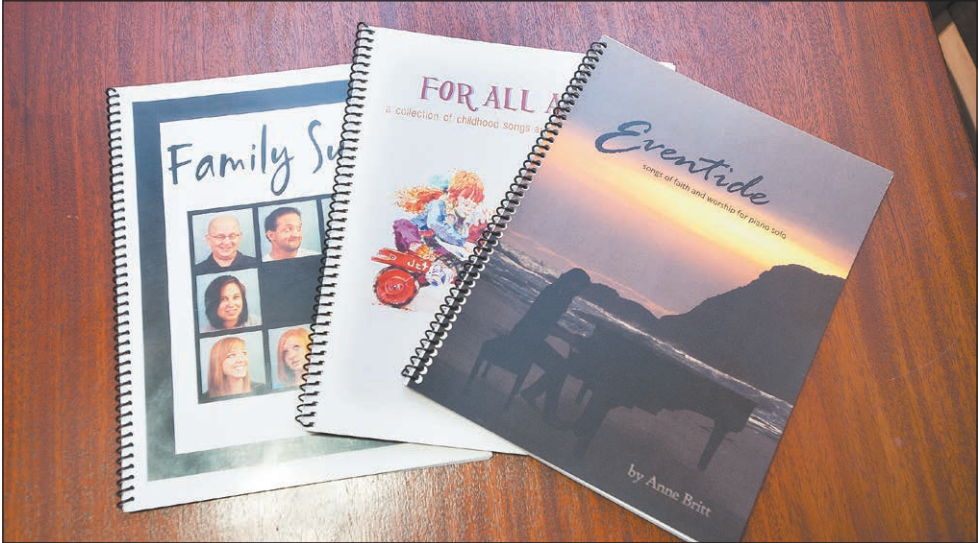
“It’s a way for me to communicate my feelings, my emotions, my joy, and to bring joy to others,” she said. “I’m not a talker, so music is a good way for me to express myself. It’s a way to connect.”

Other people agree. They listen to and purchase both her secular and sacred compositions from her website, www.annebrittmusic.com. And the annual LDS Church Music Submissions competition has recognized her twice, with an honorable mention in 2010 and the top instrumental award in 2013.

Last month, Britt and her husband, Dave, traveled to Salt Lake City to hear her version of “Master, the Tempest is Raging” performed in the contest’s concluding concert. It was a joy to sit in the audience in the Temple Square assembly hall and hear her piano solo performed, she said.

“I was thrilled,” said Britt, recalling her excitement when she opened the letter

STOPPING BY



informing her she’d won. “I would have been happy with honorable mention.”

Britt composed a version of “Master, the Tempest is Raging” because it’s a favorite of her mother-in-law — one she requested every time she visited.

It’s one of many pieces her family inspired her to write. In fact, she has a whole collection, “A Family Suite,” filled with songs capturing her own personality or those of her husband and their six kids.

For her husband, she wanted to write something filled with humor and energy. “He’s a kid at heart,” she said.

Remembering a vacation that included staying in a hotel featuring a rubber ducky

in the bathtub, she wrote his song, “March of the Rubber Duckies.”

When other family members heard the humorous, lively march, they agreed it captured his personality perfectly. “That’s Dave!” they said.

Britt’s own piece, “Bridge to Tomorrow (Anne’s Song),” started with a dream. It’s not the way she usually finds inspiration, but proved successful in this case.

She awoke with a snippet of music in her head and quickly wrote it down.

She chose the tune’s name because it fit her new hobby. “Composing is a bridge to a whole new part of my life,” she said.

Sometimes Britt starts with well-known melodies, such as children’s songs or folk

pieces, and adds her own twist, creating the likes of “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Estrellita” and “Froggy Went A’Courtin’ (A Wedding Disaster Story).”

“I like to take something simple and familiar and give it a different feel,” she said. “Maybe pick a different style, like boogie-woogie or swing, jazz it up or slow it down, maybe use minor chords if it’s in major.”

Familiar hymns like “Master, the Tempest is Raging” and “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” are frequent starting points. “With hymns, I try to keep it fitting with the emotion of the song, keep it respectful,” she said.

She enjoys working with sacred music. “It’s one of the best ways to connect ... to make people feel that spirit,” she said.

When she had completed more than a dozen hymn arrangements, she put them together into a book. She is selling “Eventide” through her website and selected sheet music stores.

She’s currently at work on a second volume of sacred arrangements, with a Christmas music book in the future.

Although she has composed many pieces, sacred and secular, and in a variety of genres, Britt is still a little surprised by it all. She never thought she would become a composer.

Britt started playing piano as a child in Cave Junction.

Her mother was a piano teacher and

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OFFBEAT OREGON

Hollywood in Oregon

Part one: Early movies filmed around the state

Oregon has come into its own as a place to make movies.

The iconic projects have come thick and fast, especially in the last 25 years or so. The last 15 years of the century saw “The Goonies,” “Stand By Me,” “Drugstore Cowboy,” “Point Break,” “Free Willy” (twice), “Mr. Holland’s Opus,” “The Postman,” “Ricochet River” and “Men of Honor” filmed here — along with dozens of others. And the 21st century so far has brought us “Pay It Forward,” “Elephant,” “The Ring” (twice), “Fahrenheit 9/11,” “Into the Wild,” “Twilight,” “Coraline” and



Finn J.D. John, an instructor at OSU, writes about unusual and little-known aspects of Oregon history.

more than 100 more — including such unforgettable classics as “Kindergarten Cop” and “Jackass: The Movie.”

And of course, we can’t forget the burgeoning television business, highlighted currently by “Grimm” and “Portlandia.”

But Oregon’s relationship with the movie business goes back much farther — to a time when parts of the state were wilder than much of Alaska is today.

I’ve cherry-picked 15 of the most influential of these early Oregon movies, and I’m going to start presenting them (in order from oldest to newest) this week. It will take three columns to do that.

These are, in my opinion, and the opinion of folks responding to a question I posted last week on the Offbeat Oregon History Facebook page) the most important movies, but there are more — lots more. For a definitive list, look up <http://oregonfilm.org>, or plan a visit to

See OFFBEAT, B2



Image: United Artists

A vintage movie poster for Buster Keaton’s “The General,” a 1926 silent movie shot, in part, near Cottage Grove. The film was regarded as a financial failure, but it cemented Keaton’s reputation as a comedic genius.

Composing

Continued from B1

tuner. While she didn't provide her daughter with any formal lessons, she offered suggestions and helped her find different pieces to play.

Instead of reminding the youngster to practice her keyboard skills, "she'd have to tell me to stop," said Britt, who couldn't get enough of the piano.

They loved sitting down together to play duets — something they still do. They played duets on the accordion as well.

As a high school student, Britt accompanied singers and choirs. She continued playing at college, majoring in math and enjoying music on the side.

As an adult, she played — and still plays — piano and organ for church services. And when her children were in middle school, she got involved with their activities, including musicals directed by Deborah Johansen, who needed an accompanist.

"When Mrs. Johansen moved up to the high school, I moved up, too, with my kids," said Britt, who now accompanies high school and middle school choirs when needed. She also serves as a rehearsal pianist at Linfield College.

In 2007, she helped with a Mac High production of "Guys and Dolls" that Johansen was co-directing

with vocal music director Dana Libonati. "I knew Dana taught music theory, and I asked if he could give me things to work on," she recalled.

Under the tutelage of Libonati, a composer and arranger, she studied musical structure. He asked her to write short pieces to demonstrate the concepts she learned. Working a little at a time, she soon realized she, too, could create music.

Her many years of playing and listening to various genres helped when she started composing on her own. "I had developed an ear for what sounds good, what's interesting to play," she said.

As a player she looks for variety — something not always predictable, or which incorporates different rhythms and structures. She also looks for pieces that are evocative, whether they express peace or excitement.

She tries to incorporate those requirements into the pieces she writes.

She sits down to compose at an electronic keyboard hooked to a laptop loaded with music-writing software. As she builds the musical structure, the computer turns it into notations on a staff.

Writing a piece of music might take a couple days. "I like to have a chunk of time to focus on my composing," she adds.

When she's satisfied with the results, she plays and



Marcus Larson/News-Register

Anne Britt started composing in 2007 after studying with Dana Libonati, vocal director at McMinnville High School and a composer himself. She has always played piano, but never expected to write her own music.

records her new composition.

"I love to play my own work, and to know that others play it," she said. "When I started composing, I had such a sense of accomplishment and growth.

"Now, when I hear from others who've listened to

it, or played it, I know I've touched them. That's motivation to do more."

Starla Pointer, who is convinced everyone has an interesting story to tell, has been writing the weekly "Stopping By" column since 1996. Contact her at 503-687-1263 or spointer@newsregister.com.

Offbeat

Continued from B1

the Oregon Film Museum in Astoria.

"THE FISHERMAN'S BRIDE" (1908)

Selig Polyscope Film Co. Filmed in Astoria. Cast and crew information unavailable.

The Fisherman's Bride was, as far as I've been able to learn, the first movie filmed in Oregon; it was shot in and around Astoria. It's a classic love triangle, with two young fellows — a good boy and a bad boy — battling over a lovely bachelorette. The girl chooses the good boy and they set a wedding date. But the bad boy plots his revenge by arranging to have the good boy kidnapped and shanghaied on a deepwater sailing ship just before their wedding. This plan is, of course, foiled, and our hero gets to the church on time.

The interesting thing about this flick, other than its status as the state's first, is that it was not a period piece. While it was being shot, guys like our hero really were being shanghaied out of Astoria with some regularity. Melodramatic though the whole thing sounds today, something like it may very well have happened in real life during the time the film crew was there shooting this movie.

"THE GENERAL" (1926)

United Artists. Shot in various places including Cottage Grove. Starring Buster Keaton and Marion Mack.

This was one of the most important movies of the silent era, and a real study in contrasts. It crushed Buster Keaton's independence as a filmmaker, but it cemented his reputation as a comedic genius. It was widely regarded as a failure, yet its revenue margin was about 50 percent in the black — which is saying something, because it was phenomenally expensive to make. It culminated in the most expensive scene of the silent era — in which a burning bridge collapses under the weight of a full working steam locomotive, sending the whole works crashing into the Row River just southeast of Cottage Grove.

It's that scene the "The General" is most remembered for in Oregon.

The story takes place during the Civil War. Johnnie Gray, a Southern railroad engineer, has his beloved engine, The General, stolen by some Union spies — with his girlfriend aboard. Johnnie gives chase in another locomotive, steals back



Image: Universal Pictures

A vintage movie poster for "Bend in the River," a 1952 film shot in the Columbia River Gorge and on Mount Hood.

both train and girl, and tries to make it back to the Mason-Dixon line while the Yankees give chase. Along the way, of course, there's plenty of Buster's trademark style of physical and expressive comedy.

The filming of "The General's" culminating scene brought locals out from miles around to watch, and about 500 Oregon National Guard soldiers were hired as extras. The event is commemorated with a mural on the side of the Cottage Grove Hotel today.

The wrecked locomotive was left in the river after the film was made, and became a popular visitors' attraction for Cottage Grove; it was salvaged for scrap iron during World War II, but there are still a few train parts in the riverbed today.

"RACHEL AND THE STRANGER" (1948)

RKO Pictures. Shot in Springfield-Eugene area. Starring Loretta Young, William Holden, Robert Mitchum.

This fascinating film deals with some Old West topics that few movies want to touch — the experience of women, for one thing, and the indentured-servitude system of temporary enslavement.

In the story, a widower moves west in the late 1700s with his young son; deciding they need a woman around the house, he buys the contract of an indentured servant named Rachel. He marries Rachel

so that people won't think he's living in sin with her, but he shows no romantic interest until a handsome stranger comes to the area and begins to woo her. There is, of course, an Indian attack along the way as well.

"Rachel and the Stranger" was shot in the Springfield-Eugene area — at a stockade that the crew built along the McKenzie River, several scenic settings along the Mohawk, and at a rustic-farmhouse set built near Fox Hollow Road outside Eugene, among other spots.

"BEND OF THE RIVER" (1952)

Universal. Shot in Columbia River Gorge, Mount Hood. Starring James Stewart, Arthur Kennedy, Julie Adams, Rock Hudson.

"Bend of the River" is the first of two Westerns shot in Oregon featuring possibly the most universally beloved movie actor of all time: Jimmy "George Bailey" Stewart. It's also adapted from a historical novel by the late Bill Gulick — a historian who, despite his unfortunate decision to hang his hat over the border in Walla Walla, ranks among the very best popular scholars of Oregon history.

In this movie, set just after the Civil War, two gunfighters with checkered pasts are seeking a new start in a Westward-bound wagon train. When the wagons arrive in Oregon, they learn that a gold rush has broken out, and the

The last steamboat race on the Columbia River took place in a promotion for "Bend in the River," when the sternwheelers Henderson and Portland charged up the river from Portland to Rooster Rock.

man they bought their winter supplies from plans to renege on the deal, meaning the settlers will starve. The two men seize the food, fight off the supplier's goon squads and head for the settlement. On the way, one succumbs to the temptation to steal the food, and the other — Jimmy Stewart's character — has to fight him to save the settlement.

Portions of this movie were filmed on the Columbia and Sandy rivers, and there are gorgeous scenes showcasing Mount Hood, Rooster Rock and Crown Point. Some of the scenes were also filmed above the timberline on Mount Hood, and a pair of working sternwheelers were in the movie as well. In fact, the last steamboat race on the Columbia River took place in a promotion for this movie, when the sternwheelers Henderson and Portland charged up the river from Portland to Rooster Rock. (Both of these sternwheelers were designed as towboats, so neither was built for speed; however, their skippers gave it their best. The Henderson won, but blew a gasket in the process.)

Next time, we'll continue this survey of iconic pictures filmed in Oregon with the other Oregon-based Jimmy Stewart movie, "Shenandoah."

(Sources: Internet Movie Database, imdb.com; columbiariverimages.com; Oregon Governor's Office of Film and Television at oregonfilm.org; Blankenship, Megan. "On the Set in Eugene," The Artifact, July 2009)

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