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Hail, Trombones and Liszt

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When Linfield music faculty and students occupied the splendid, purpose-built and sound-isolated spaces of the Vivian A. Bull Music Center in August, they realized a dream from as early as 1872 when leaders of McMinnville College first contemplated musical instruction.

Earlier college music facilities sufficed, but only thanks to ingenuity among music faculty members and forbearance among their colleagues. Music instruction, begun in 1883, for temporary abodes. The program proved challenging for students as well. When a trombone or saxophonist arrived to practice in the trailer next door that had 1/8-inch paneling and no insulation, everyone else would flee from the noise.

As the music department moved into its new digs in the Vivian A. Bull Music Center, musicians carried with them more than just instruments, sheet music and tuning forks. They also brought many memories of Renshaw Hall.

Originally designed for visual artists, Renshaw opened its doors to musicians in 1969 after Frerichs Hall burned to the ground.

Renshaw’s hub was the main office, run by Donna Root, secretary for both music and art. Most days, faculty and students crowded the 10x13 foot office to make copies, use the phone or talk with Root.

The building’s most prominent architectural element, the art gallery, featured a two-story ceiling and four skylights. When a second floor was added above the gallery to accommodate rehearsals, rain or hail storms could drown out the choir.

Musicians and artists alike learned to accept Renshaw’s notoriously thin walls, according to Jill Timmons, professor of music, whose office was located next to that of the late Marion van Dyk for years. One day, Timmons practiced a particularly difficult work by Franz Liszt.

“I must have made more repetitions than usual,” said Timmons, “because through the wall I heard his voice announce confidently, ‘You’ll get it!’ It was a joke we shared for years and one of my fondest Linfield memories.”

Practice proved challenging for students as well. When a trombone or saxophonist arrived to practice in the trailer next door that had 1/8-inch paneling and no insulation, everyone else would flee from the noise.

Some Renshaw memories are tangible. Plaster busts of Giuseppe Verdi and Robert Schumann hang man nooses, hung by music history students in 1981, now grace a shelf in Timmons’ new office.

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This dream dates back to 1872

In 1965, Colonial Hall ended its lifespan of almost 60 years when it was deliberately burned as practice for fire departments statewide. Just three years later, fire destroyed Frerichs Hall, moving the music department to Renshaw Hall.

In 1947, Colonial Hall ended its temporary lifespan of almost 60 years. It was deliberately burned as practice for Renshaw’s notoriously thin walls, according to Jill Timmons, professor of music, whose office was located next to that of the late Marion van Dyk for years. One day, Timmons practiced a particularly difficult work by Franz Liszt.

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Vivian A. Bull Music Center fast facts: 14,000 square feet, six faculty studio offices, a music library, 10 soundproof practice rooms, the Woolley Rehearsal Room, the 98-seat Delkin Recital Hall, a seminar room, lobby area with instrument storage space.

The Department of Music boasts approximately 50 students enrolled as majors and 50 minors. Yet each year hundreds of non-majors—and some community members—take music classes, participate in a variety of ensembles and present nearly 50 performances, ranging from major concerts to intimate recitals to the choir’s annual spring break tour. For a complete listing of Linfield music groups, go to http://www.linfield.edu/music/events.php. Click on http://www.linfield.edu/music/events.php for a schedule of music events.

– Marvin Henberg

Professor of Philosophy