

NAPA SCHOOL OF MUSIC & NAPA MUSIC SUPPLY

Scoring High Marks

FOR MUSICIANS OF ALL AGES

By Linda Bausch



Summer Camp Guitar at Napa School of Music

Four short years ago, Ralf Lindner and his significant other faced a big decision—whether to settle in Germany or the Bay Area. At the same time, Ralf was also looking for a business opportunity. He had been a traveling a lot and was enticed by the desire to be home each evening. He learned about the successful, well-managed Napa School of Music which was for sale by the original owner, Peter Sykes. Ralf had experience as a musician, playing rock and roll and the blues. He also attended music schools in his youth. Impressed with the quality of the school, the instructors, and the beauty of Napa Valley,

they made their decision, bought the school and began to settle in.

The last things Ralf expected to see within a few short months were wildfires lapping at the edge of town followed by subsequent, rolling power outages, and for good measure, a global pandemic to top it off.

Ralf credits the Napa School of Music families for their support and patience, as well as the school's administrative staff and instructors; it was due to their quick action and

flexibility the continued success of the school was ensured during such unexpected and numerous hardships.

When the fires first burned in 2017, the school had its first shut down, that lasted seven days. Ralf was immediately thankful for the business interruption insurance; who would have known it would be needed so soon? Then came the power outages, maybe better known at the beginning as rolling blackouts; these necessitated the purchase of generators to keep the school fully operational when the power was cut.

Then came 2020 . . . for which all the previous hardships were merely good practice, as the months ahead would bring challenges and unforeseen expenses that only the most flexible and most prepared businesses would survive. Within a moment's notice, the teachers and students went from 100% in-class learning to closed doors, forced by a virus run amok.

The staff began discussions of how to most efficiently move from in-person learning to virtual sessions on a Friday afternoon and the program was fully operational by Monday. Utilizing software and Zoom sessions, most of the school's classes were able to continue uninterrupted. (The youngest students did not participate in Zoom instructions.)

Not all programs lent themselves to virtual classes; one example was the Summer Camps. It became obvious the intended 'camp' atmosphere didn't translate. Recognizing what wouldn't work was just as important as what was going to work well. Virtual band was no fun for the kids. A compromise was made and they turned the class into a recording opportunity where each student's part was recorded and then digitally mixed. In the end, more than 6,000 lessons were completed virtually during 'lock-down'. By the looks of things on this summer afternoon, Napa



*Ralf Lindner Owner/Director
Napa School of Music*

School of Music rolled with the punches in spite of the many challenges faced in such a short amount of time. All staff and instructors are vaccinated against COVID-19. There was not even a question of 'if' it should be required—everyone just did it. Masks are required inside the building. The office lobby was reconfigured to accommodate distance and capacity at the doorway. Physical barriers have been set up in each classroom. Full body length dividers stand between vocal students and the coach. Additional keyboards have been purchased for each piano and keyboard class. Flutes are taught outside at this time and all other brass or wind instructions have been put on hold until further notice. Almost all students have returned to the classroom setting with every possible precaution put in place, protecting health and safety above all else. Ralf purchased twenty air purifiers that are strategically placed throughout the building.

Stringed instruments, drums and vocals bring life to the Zeller Building on Maher Street. Most of the sixteen instructors came along with the transition of ownership. A strong connection to community keeps them engaged with the students. Most students are from Napa. But the quality of instruction at

Napa School of Music is known in surrounding cities: American Canyon, Fairfield, Sonoma, and Vallejo also send their students to the North Napa campus. Many students have progressed into professional musicians. Two of Justin-Siena music instructors actually oversee the choir and band programs for the high school.

Affordability and easy access to music for students of all ages is of the utmost importance to Ralf. Starting very soon, a new program begins for children as young as two years old. The tiniest brightly colored chairs were being unpacked for the pre-school kids, Music Fun Time, an on-going program, will focus on learning music theory and scales right from the start. Ralf said, "This will be a class where they actually learn about music. They won't just be jumping and dancing to some rhythm; it's really learning notes on the scale."

An important part of musical instruction for young kids is gauging their actual interest in learning music. Borrowing an instrument from the school to begin with is an easy way for parents to jump in without a big upfront expense to purchase an instrument. There are a variety of instruments available and a student may explore options as they find their niche. A couple of times a year, the school offers the opportunity for the student to actually own the instrument which has been on loan after three to four months of dedicated instruction.

The various, high-quality music programs are structured in three-month increments, a Musical Ladder System. The students perform scheduled achievement tests, earning colorful wristbands with encouraging descriptors as they progress. They move on to acquiring trophies for achievement which motivate the students as well. "Sometimes you see the children cry when they earn a trophy, many of them never having earned a trophy before." Ralf, and the staff, beamed with pride when the accomplishments of the students were mentioned. Their website



Napa Music Supply

describes all available instructions and programs offered, as well as recital information and testimonials of satisfied customers.

Our Local Partners are imperative to our success . . .

The strength of the school is dependent on a strong, local music supply company. Napa Music Supply on Redwood Road fills the needs of the school on a daily basis. Diane Shibley and her husband opened the music supply store on Redwood Road in October of 2005, and they've been running full-speed ever since. Along with Diane, who works at the shop during the week, there are two full-time employees; Josh is the assistant manager (and an amazing guitarist) with more than a decade of experience on site, and Brad, their talented guitar tech. Although not formally trained, Brad works closely with a local Luthier to hone his skills. "Brad can repair, restring and upgrade almost any stringed instrument," Diane said. A wide range of acoustic and electronic instruments are available for purchase and/or rental.

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Although the doors were closed for ten weeks during COVID, Diane managed to keep the business going by selling items online and making deliveries and utilizing curb side pickup. Safety precautions have been put into place at the shop. To protect the health of their customers, Diane received a formula from Taylor Guitars which is used to sanitize the instruments and will not harm the finish. Customers are very understanding about any limitations due to COVID protocols. The shop is open seven days a week, closed only on Christmas, New Year's Day, Easter and Thanksgiving.

Ralf said that he could save money by purchasing instruments and supplies for the school online, but it is much more important to him that the local music store is supported. Saving ten percent is nowhere near as important as working together within our own community. And—Diane loves seeing the smile on a kid's face when they receive their first instrument.

As the school's motto reads, "Building Self Esteem Through Music" . . . whether it's a guitar, bass, drums, keyboards or vocals that piques your interest, give Napa School of Music and Napa Music Supply a call. And then, let the music play.



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