

Musician Spotlights, Issue 5

Kristin Kessler, Oboe & English Horn

Summer has definitely arrived here in Southern Oregon, so for this month of July we're celebrating our oboists! First up, Kristin.



Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

I have been a member of the RVS since the fall of 2001. So, this season is my 20th! I moved to Oregon from southern Indiana in that year with my husband, Steve. We were both in search of fulfilling jobs in a great place to raise a family after we finished our graduate degrees. I have both Bachelor and Masters degrees in Oboe Performance from Indiana University and studied with Marc Lifschey and Theodore Baskin while there. I also have a minor in Music theory which means I love to geek out about the inner workings of music. I work for a great private practice physical therapy office in Medford when I am not practicing or teaching oboe students.

What brought or inspired you to pursue oboe & English Horn? If you'd like to share one of your favorite pieces of music as well, I'd like to know!

When I was about 9 years old, I took part in a fine arts camp.

I loved the music portion of the camp and continued to take classical recorder lessons for a year after that. I grew very fond of my teacher, Ron Tucker, and was disappointed to learn that he did not teach the instrument that I thought I wanted to start in band: the flute. When he told me that he taught the bassoon (TOO BIG!) and the oboe, I decided that I should choose one of those so I continue to be his student. I knew the sound of the oboe from the orchestral music that I used as a competitive ice skater.

As for the English horn, I was asked to play it in youth orchestra and thought I needed to know more about it. I began to travel once a month to St. Louis to take lessons from the English hornist in the St. Louis Symphony, Marc Gordon. I love playing English horn and am so grateful that my position with the RVS allows me to play both instruments. English horn uses the same fingering system as the oboe but sounds a fifth lower. It feels a lot different to play. I feel like it is always an ab workout for me when I am playing the English horn properly.

One of my favorite orchestral works that features the oboe is Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scherzade". I love the second movement of Ravel's Piano Concerto for an English horn feature. I love Mozart's Oboe Quartet and Poulenc's Trio for Oboe, Bassoon, and Piano.

What do you enjoy most about being with the Rogue Valley Symphony?

Hands down - the players. This is my family. Because we moved here and have no family close by, the members of the orchestra are like a second family to me. I love the feeling that happens when we are all in a moment together- all 65(or so) of us. You can feel all our energies flowing together to create a moment of connection with the piece, the audience, and each other. It is magic. You can get those all over goosebumps sometimes. The orchestra is always working together and leaning on each other. Just like family.

What do you do when you're not playing music i.e. what are your hobbies or interests?

I love baking! In fact, one of my first jobs was in a bakery working with pastries. I also love being around the water and really enjoy kayaking at Applegate Lake with my family. I enjoy hiking with our 2 year old husky and cross-country skiing in the winter. I like reading and doing puzzles. I finished a 2,000 piece puzzle during the pandemic. I always have three books going at a time.

Finally, one unusual fact, story, or tidbit about you or your instrument?

I suppose I should say that reedmaking is one of my hobbies too. I do love choosing a thread color for tying the cane (bamboo) onto the tubes (which insert into the instrument.) I make all of my reeds for both instruments by hand, which gives me a lot more control over my sound and how they respond. I am perhaps a bit superstitious about my thread colors. Some just always make great reeds while others never work out. I also have named both of my instruments: Hamlet (oboe) and Capaldi (English horn).



This photo shows (from L to R) how a tube of bamboo gets processed into a usable oboe reed. The tube is split in 3 lengthwise and trimmed to length. Then the inside is scraped out via an apparatus with a curved blade. After that is it shaped and folded into a recognizable reed shape. Then it is tied onto the metal tube and scraped and opened at the top to create two vibrating reeds. Hence the name double reed.