

Musician Spotlights, Issue 14

Rhett Bender, Saxophone

What better way to celebrate Saxophone Day and the birthday of the Saxophone's inventor (Adolphe Sax) than by spotlighting our own Principal Saxophonist, Rhett Bender!



Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?

I am a Professor of Music at the Oregon Center for the Arts at Southern Oregon University where I teach music theory and saxophone performance. I play soprano saxophone with the Globe Saxophone Quartet and I direct the Siskiyou Saxophone Orchestra. I frequently travel to China as a Guest Artist-Teacher at the Sichuan Conservatory of Classical Music. I earned music degrees from Iowa State University (BM) and the University of Georgia (MM, DMusA).

I started studying violin at the age of 10. When we moved to a small farm community without an orchestra, I learned to play tuba and euphonium with the band, and joined the jazz band on electric guitar. But in 8th grade I took home a dusty tenor saxophone from the band room closet which began my love of the saxophone. Before I graduated high school I had won over

20 first place medals and superior ratings becoming the winningest Iowa high school musician at that time. I accepted the job at SOU in 1996 and moved to Oregon. I met my wife Amy, a stage manager, while performing with *As You Like It* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. I am a proud Selmer Artist Clinician.

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

I started on violin in fourth grade. But when I started middle school my family moved to a small farm community in Iowa it did not have an orchestra. The band director found a tenor saxophone for me to try. I was immediately smitten. One of my favorite pieces is Henri Tomasi's concerto for saxophone and orchestra that will be featured in the April concert with my friend Otis Murphy. Otis and I played in a saxophone quartet together while we were both at the University of Georgia.

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

I love playing challenging symphonic music with the incredible musicians of the orchestra and working with my good friend Martin Majkut.

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

My wife Amy and I spend our free time Alpine and Nordic skiing, Mountain biking, and bike touring around the world.

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

- The saxophone is the most successful musical instrument invented by a single person—Adolphe Sax. November 6, is Sax's birthday.
- I traveled to Paris to hand select my saxophone at the Selmer factory.
- As a pandemic stunt, last year I played all of my major scales while downhill skiing at Mt. Bachelor with a band director from Carson City.

