

# King leaves Sisters on a grace note

By Emily Woodworth  
Correspondent

At the end of September, award-winning musician, conductor and instructor Stephanie King relocated to her new home in Chestertown, Maryland, leaving Central Oregon's musical culture appreciably improved through her talent and influence. King and her family of five moved to Sisters in 1999, pursuing a less hectic lifestyle after 16 years in Portland.

Upon arriving from a metro area where opportunities abounded, from accompanying at the Oregon Ballet School to earning her MAT in Music to performing Grieg's Piano Concerto with the Willamette Falls Symphony as a featured soloist (a bucket-list item for her musical career), she recalls initial concerns that Central Oregon would not have the same cultural amenities. "When I first came, I was worried about opportunities," she says. "But it's really grown a lot and I've been so pleased to see that develop."

King made various contributions to that development. In addition to teaching private lessons and occasional stints as a substitute teacher, King taught both band and choir at Pilot Butte Middle School from 2002-2005. She has become a highly sought-after accompanist for choirs and music groups in Central Oregon, including the semi-professional Bend Camerata, the Sunriver Music Festival, and formed long-time relationships with choir directors, including former Sisters' middle and high school choir

director Tara MacSween.

In 2005, King joined the Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration in Sisters as its music director. "They didn't have a music director before I started, so we figured it out as we went along," King recently took a choir of about 25 members on their fifth international tour, this one to Québec, Canada. Previous destinations have included Germany, Ireland and Austria, and a 4th of July celebration, featuring one of King's original compositions, in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Her musical contributions as an independent pianist extend abroad, too. In 2016 she was selected as an accompanist for the prestigious Tuscia Opera Festival and International Lyric Academy in Italy, chosen from an international field of competitors. She has been invited back for three straight years, spending a month each time accompanying for classical musicians and vocalists.

As King begins her new chapter in Maryland, she will again work with an Episcopal church as music director. In addition to the historical richness of her new home, King is excited about opportunities afforded by nearby Washington College's vibrant music program. "The whole town comes together for a two-week international festival where music students come on scholarship to be mentored," she says. King plans to host a piano student during the festival, and is excited at the prospect of being a musical mentor. The festival offers 35 concerts and allows community members to attend rehearsals for free.

"Any time you move, you have to recreate yourself in that new context," says King. Though she is excited, she remarks, "I will greatly miss the friendships and relationships I've developed here." That said, her training has prepared her well for adapting to new contexts. King started piano at five years old, and decided to pursue it when she was 12, after her family moved to San Bernadino. Just two years later they moved to San Jose and she had to adapt to a new teacher. King ended up with renowned pianist Aiko Onishi, who was on faculty at San Jose State University (SJSU). Onishi was hesitant about taking on such a young student until King proved her mettle through a six-week test period with Fantasie by Chopin. Their student-teacher relationship extended through college as King pursued her bachelor's at SJSU.

In her program at SJSU, King learned instruments from every category (woodwind, string, brass, etc.) and how to direct bands and choirs, a very different experience from solo performing. "I love accompanying. One of my strengths is being in sync with the director," she says. "But I also love



PHOTO BY RICK JUDY

Stephanie King made a mark on Sisters' thriving music community.

directing because of the organizational aspects. You have to listen for the sound you want, then know how to adapt and shift it."

After college, she again re-created herself in the context of Portland. She worked closely as assistant and accompanist for renown choral director Charlene Archibeque, and also served as creative arts director and pianist at Greater Portland Bible Church where she oversaw all creative media, from visual arts to music. While in Portland, King also received her MAT from Lewis & Clark

College and won the Mu Phi Epsilon piano competition.

From San Bernadino to San Jose to Portland to Sisters, and now onward to Chestertown, King has adapted repeatedly to new musical contexts. In every new context, she has made contributions through her prodigious skill and upbeat attitude. Those who have worked with her in Central Oregon know that their loss will certainly be Chestertown's gain, even as they cherish the time Stephanie King has spent enriching the musical community.

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