

New director at music school brings gospel experience to job

■ **MUSIC:** Julia Neufeld may have rescued the Gospel Ensemble

By **Janna Braun**
Freelance Reporter

A little music can go a long way — at least for Julia Neufeld.

Neufeld is the latest addition to the University's music school. Not only does this new director bring with her experiences few have had, but the determination to keep a program alive as well.

The program she supervises is the Gospel Ensemble, and Neufeld has all but saved it from extinction after its previous director, Jon Gainer, declined to return to the group for personal reasons.

"I was approached by one of the University's deans on Sept. 21 and told there was an opening here," Neufeld said. "I was also told that this program could end if I didn't take the position, and I can't stand to see a great program like this die, so I said yes."

"Jon Gainer planted a lot of seeds here, and I plan to water them and hope they grow," she said.

The class, which is offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 5 p.m., currently has 57 participants, but Neufeld is hoping to have approximately 100 by the end of the term.

"I'm really excited about the

young people here because they're so full of energy," she said. "This first term is going to be hard because all this has happened so quickly, but things are really starting to fall into place."

Neufeld explained that the class teaches students about gospel music and its roots and attempts to mainstream the black gospel experience into contemporary sounds.

"It shows the culture and art form of this music, because music is really an art, and shows how it overlaps with all other kinds of music," she said. "If you listen to other kinds of music, you can hear the threads of gospel within them, even with people like Michael Jackson or the Rolling Stones."

The art of gospel music is not new to Neufeld because she has been involved with it in a variety of ways for the last 35 years.

Her parents were both ministers in the South, and Neufeld found herself constantly surrounded by the church and its music.

As a child, she and her parents traveled to several different countries to help establish churches. It was during those travels that Neufeld learned a great deal about different people and their cultures, which had a profound influence on her life.

"It taught me to never have



ANDREW BRACKENSICK/Emerald
Julia Neufeld, director of the Gospel Ensemble, says that the first term is difficult but things are beginning to take shape.

limitations about people and that with an open mind, you can accomplish a great deal," she said. "This is what I try to relate to my students."

Neufeld started playing the piano at her church at age 8 and continued with music through high school, college and beyond by starting various community choirs for children of all ages.

Neufeld married a Californian, but her husband received a job offer in Eugene last December that convinced the couple to relocate. "After moving here, I felt a bit disconnect-

ed," Neufeld said, "but through music and church, I've met tons of people."

As a white gospel singer, Neufeld has found that people don't always take her music seriously because of her race, but she has learned ways to overcome this.

"I've experienced a lot of doubt in audiences," she said. "But I always say to myself, 'Just wait and see.' When people feel and see what I have to offer, they usually accept it."

"My experiences with the black culture are numerous and my music speaks for itself," she

said. "I have my own style and people need to remember, music is not a white or black experience, it's an art form."

Neufeld believes that individuals should not judge others by what is on the outside.

"You can't judge someone from their exterior," she said. "Music breaks down a lot of walls and that's what it's all about: bringing people together. No one group or person has a monopoly on gospel, and I want to add whatever I can to it."

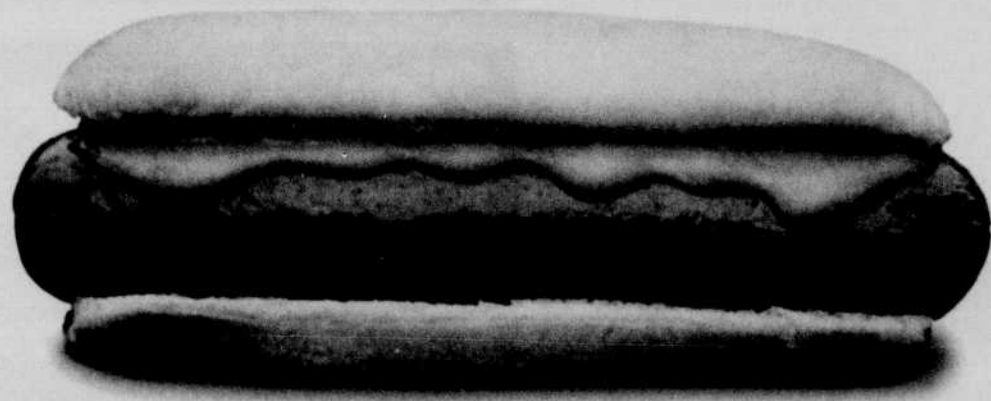
In March of 1990, Neufeld appeared on cable's Black Entertainment Television channel on the *Bobby Jones Gospel* show, and also received an offer from Arista records in 1989 to record a gospel album, but declined.

The Gospel Ensemble plans to show its first performance of the year at the EMU on Oct. 20 from 11:30 a.m. to noon for visiting minority students who are considering attending the University. All students are welcome to attend.


"I've never taught a college class before, but I'm 100 percent committed to these students," she said. "I want to inspire them to get as much as they can out of music and be open-minded to what gospel has to offer."

"It's something to be shared and expressed and it's my goal to touch as many people with it as possible — even if it's only a few people."

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