

SCRATCHPAD

A healer and harp builder

Duane Bolster found musical success through medicine

By ERICK BENDEL
COAST WEEKEND

For decades, Duane Bolster, a harp builder from Portland, tried to learn one instrument after another — piano, clarinet, coronet, accordion — but reading music remained mysteriously difficult for him. He couldn't comprehend how musicians sight-read so fluidly.

Then, about seven years ago, an ophthalmologist discovered

growths on the focal points of Bolster's retinas. His center of vision is gone in both eyes. He couldn't notice the disorder; his brain fills in the missing visual information automatically. For example, a word with six letters might, to him, appear to have four. He can read text in his peripheral vision, but tracking sheet music, it turns out, is nearly impossible for him to do.

He told me this story in the presence of a Celtic harp he built, now displayed in the window of Fairweather's House & Gallery, during the year's first Seaside Art Walk, held earlier this month. The instrument, fashioned out of ribbon mahogany, stands near his

wife Carol's handmade baskets, for which Bolster created the wooden bases.

Bolster, 70, hails from a family of engineers and inventors, and can figure out the physics of a thing just by looking at it. He has been making harps for about 15 years. The harp at Fairweather's took him about 60 hours to complete.

The harp that took longest to make — an elaborate, circular work of Bubinga, a hard, heavy African wood — was made for the Children's Cancer Association in Portland and required 200 to 250 hours. He crafted it so that the inside opens outward to project the sound — a design that led appraisers to remark, "You don't build harps like that," he recalled.

"I could never stand doing

something like somebody else did," Bolster said. "You don't get progress unless you improvise."

Bolster could probably have foregone the final 50 hours of detailing — the sanding, polishing and perfecting of the roundness — without really changing the look. But it was only his second harp, and everything had to be just right.


Bolster spent his career working as a registered nurse at Pacific Northwest hospitals, doing dialysis and aphaeresis, specializing in children and newborns — kids who were critically ill and those suffering from chronic conditions.

He remembers harpists who would visit the children and play for them, a ritual that at times eased the distress in the room better than pain meds and physical

therapy. "The children just loved it," he said. "And that was one of the things that inspired me to make a lot of harps."

When he retired from the medical field seven years ago, he did so knowing his harps would be used in medical ministry, to sooth sick children and other patients in hospitals and care centers.

"They just do magic stuff," he said. "Kids in pain ... you'd just see them relax," he said. "It was amazing. I watched that for many years."

He hasn't taken up harp lessons; he's been so busy making them and can't stop. But he can tune them by ear. If he were to start all over with music, "I'd learn how to play by ear, and that would have solved it all," he laughed. 

coast weekend

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

arts & entertainment

4

THE ARTS

Celtic concert

An 'armchair' pilgrimage to St. Patrick's world

7

COASTAL LIFE

Pouring at the Coast

Brewer's festival takes over St. Patrick's Day weekend

8

FEATURE

'Enigmatic! A Dance Extravaganza'

Ballet, jazz, belly dance, hip hop, drag and special effects at Liberty



12

DINING

Mouth of the Columbia

Bucket Bites food cart has rotating pasties

FURTHER ENJOYMENT

MUSIC CALENDAR.....	5
CROSSWORD.....	6
SEE + DO	10, 11
CW MARKETPLACE.....	15, 16
BOOKMONGER.....	19



Find it all online!

CoastWeekend.com

features full calendar listings, keyword search and easy sharing on social media.

COAST WEEKEND EDITOR

ERICK BENDEL

CONTRIBUTORS

NICOLE BALES

RYAN HUME

KATHERINE LACAZE

BARBARA LLOYD McMICHAEL

PATRICK WEBB

To advertise in Coast Weekend, call 503-325-3211 or contact your local sales representative.
© 2018 COAST WEEKEND

New items for publication consideration must be submitted by 10 a.m. Tuesday, one week and two days before publication.

TO SUBMIT AN ITEM

Phone: 503.325.3211 Ext. 217
or 800.781.3211

Fax: 503.325.6573

E-mail: editor@coastweekend.com

Address: P.O. Box 210 •
949 Exchange St. Astoria,
OR 97103

Coast Weekend is published every Thursday by the EO Media Group, all rights reserved. No part of this publication can be reproduced without consent of the publisher. Coast Weekend appears weekly in The Daily Astorian and the Chinook Observer.



DiscoverOurCoast.com

