



The cover of the Oyster Crackers' new album.

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series at the Columbia Theatre in Longview, Washington. It is available to view at the theater's Facebook page.

While they enjoyed open mic sessions online through Zoom, hosted by the Peninsula Arts Center, they began socially distanced in-person rehearsals at the River City Playhouse in Ilwaco.

"The acoustics are great and we were at opposite ends of the theater," said Smith, who directs and acts with Krause at Peninsula Players' shows there. "It was a challenge."

'Happy'

The trio had full lives before they were united in music.

Krause, whose career in oceangoing ventures spans four decades, recently retired from Lindblad Expeditions, where she spent 25 years as a chief mate, expedition leader and naturalist, occasionally leading campfire singalongs on the beaches of Baja, California. A former gallery owner, she works as an artist and is completing a mural in Long Beach.

Smith grew up in Ohio, beginning piano at age 5. She taught herself the accordion by

listening her mother. Her 30-year teaching career in Oregon was mainly with third and fourth graders.

"We started our day and ended our day with singing — my students loved it. Music makes me happy," she said.

Smith taught herself guitar and harmonica to use in the classroom; in retirement, she learned the violin and mandolin.

Mack was raised in southern Germany by parents who loved to sing outdoors. A highlight of her youth was when her children's choir sang in a cathedral.

"We often sang hiking songs in harmony," she recalled.

As a fan of folk music, she brought her guitar when she moved to Long Beach in 1978.

"I have a lot of wonderful memories singing at Oysterville Vespers with Barbara Poulshock and performing German songs with my sister and also my friend Andrea Patten," she said.

Inspiration

Their collaboration grew from performing together with the Bayside Singers, a Long Beach Peninsula choir. Krause hankered to learn "Heather's Song" by Rory Block, using an arrangement by one of her favorite

groups, Misty River.

After one Bayside rehearsal, she asked Mack and another musician, Teresa Goodwin, to sing the parts.

"We all loved the song and spent months learning it by ear," Krause remembered. "I believe that Teresa came up with the name 'The Oyster Crackers.'"

Misty River and the Wailin' Jennys, both all-women groups, provided inspiration. After about six months, Goodwin stepped aside. Krause and Mack, impressed by Smith's rich soprano and ability to play multiple instruments, invited her to join them.

All said their rapport creates the magic. "We have been close friends through this. We enjoy being together," said Krause, who has been inspired by songwriting camps and classes. "That joy of singing in harmony with other human beings is likely my happiest place."

They record rehearsals to pinpoint improvements.

"We are not afraid to say, 'I'm not getting the harmony,'" Smith said.

All sing leads. Smith usually sings the high parts and plays fiddle, mandolin, harmonica and sometimes accordion. Mack's voice fills the middle range with what

Krause affectionately calls "her honey tone" and accompanies with percussion and guitar. Krause sings the low parts and plays rhythm guitar.

In recent times, cellist Phyllis

Taylor has added to the group's variety of sounds. Guest artists on the CD recordings are Al Price on banjo, George Coleman on guitar and Janet Clark on fiddle.

'Special'

Mack is especially keen to resume live, in-person performances.

"It's a real joy to perform and connect with the audience and share the stories that we are sharing musically — lyrics that people can relate to," she said. "It's scary to be up on stage, you bare your soul, you worry about the music, but it's also a real special feeling. The audience responds in such a loving way to us."

'THAT JOY OF SINGING IN HARMONY WITH OTHER HUMAN BEINGS IS LIKELY MY HAPPIEST PLACE.'

— Bette Lu Krause, musician and songwriter



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