



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Kindergartners help play a song with The Condor Band recently at Grove Elementary School in Milton-Freewater. The Condor Band plays music that originated in the Andes region of South America.

Soaring with song

The Condor Band plays traditional folk music of South America

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

The audience in Milton-Freewater was witnessing a rare occurrence.

With its members spread across the Northwest, the The Condor Band's original lineup was performing for the first time in 12 years.

The audience could be forgiven for not knowing this fact — most of them hadn't been born the last time all of The Condor Band members convened to perform.

A group that plays traditional folk music from the Andean region of South America, The Condor Band finished a three-week stint of performing for students at Grove Elementary School in Milton-Freewater on March 10.

The seven-piece band convened at Grove and played a mix of the familiar and foreign.

Songs were sung in both Spanish — Grove is 56 percent Latino — and Quechua, an indigenous language spoken in parts of Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador.

Along with acoustic guitars and a violin, the group also featured a pan flute and a charango, a small Andean guitar partly made out of an armadillo shell.

All the while, their kindergarten audience assisted the band members

with maracas, drums and gourds distributed by the band.

The band — Clark Colahan on the pan flute, Dan Rasmussen on the recorder, Victor Trejo and Jon St. Hilaire on guitar, Howard Ostby on percussion, Trudy Ostby on violin and Larry Dickerson on the charango — was able to reunite and play a series of shows for all 12 classes of kindergartners and first graders at Grove thanks to a grant from the Umatilla County Cultural Coalition.

The idea for The Condor Band started in earnest when the wife of Colahan, a Spanish professor at Whitman College, bought him a pan flute at a renaissance fair in Moscow, Idaho.

Up to then, Colahan played instruments like the Irish tin whistle, but he was intrigued by the pan flute and took it up.

Colahan and Rasmussen were colleagues at Whitman, and they began to add members to the band through the circle of friends and acquaintances at the college and from a local contra band.

Although most of the band members come from different music traditions, the joy and uniqueness of the music drove them into the genre.

Inspired by his admiration of Andean bands, Dickerson saw a charango at a Pasco pawn shop and



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Victor Trejo sings the traditional Bolivian song "Cunata Quiracai" in the native language of Quetchua.



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Clark Colahan plays the Andean pan flute, a wind instrument made of bamboo shoots or other hollow reeds, while performing with The Condor Band recently at Grove Elementary School in Milton-Freewater.



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Fore video of the group playing visit eastoregonian.com

Walla Valley area, St. Hilaire lives in La Grande, Trejo lives in Richland, Washington, and Rasmussen lives in Lyle, a city on the Washington side of the Columbia River Gorge.

The full band hasn't played together in a dozen years, but a smaller lineup has performed for the past three or four years at a world music class at Walla Walla University.

While their reunification stint was short-lived, Colahan said the Walla Walla Children's Museum is interested in hosting them and they'd be open to more gigs that would bring Andean folk songs like "Cunata Quiracai" and "El Papagayo" to the people of the region.

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Larry Dickerson holds out his instrument, a charango, which is a small stringed instrument that is made from the shell of an armadillo.



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Drummer Howard Ostby answers a question about his drum during a performance of The Condor Band recently at Grove Elementary School.