

cover story

Area creatives share those seminal works, people that sparked their journeys

BY DAVID JASPER • The Bulletin

With this week's issue being devoted to a theme of "firsts" — which could mean first efforts or fresh starts — this reporter reached out to some area creative folks in the performing, literary and visual arts to see if they could pinpoint a person, performance or work that inspired them on their artistic and professional paths. Next week, we'll share more of the stories involving perseverance, in honor of National Get Up Day, on Feb. 1. In the meantime, with these artists' various backgrounds, their answers were as unique and inspiring as their creative pursuits:

CHRIS THOMAS, COMPOSER AND MUSICIAN ▶

I can pinpoint two moments early in life that set me on course! Part 1: When I was in second grade, I overheard a local music teacher (in Pendleton where I grew up) play a few bars of Beethoven's "Für Elise." I had never been so enchanted by a piece of music. I memorized the tune and held it in my head all day until I got home to sing it for my mom. She knew what it was right away and played it on the piano. Right then, I knew I would spend the rest of my life sitting at a piano learning the music of Beethoven.

Part 2: After realizing I was hearing original music in my head, the prospects of going into the big scary world as a concert music composer seemed harsh, daunting and impoverishing. I had also been obsessing over the classic films of Hitchcock, Fellini and Truffaut, but didn't make the connection that I could follow my love of cinema into a career in music. Then I heard Danny Elfman's new score for "The Nightmare Before Christmas." I heard so much of myself in that music! I knew right then that cinema was where I belonged, and there were other composers ahead of me whose careers would be my guiding light. To this day I'm forever grateful for the music of Bernard Herrmann, Danny Elfman, Nino Rota and the other off-beat thinkers who taught (me) my strange imagination had a place in this world.

KATY IPOCK, COMEDIAN, COMEDY PROMOTER

I remember sitting around the house as a kid listening to Bill Engvall's album "Dork-



fish." My parents were laughing hysterically at lines I still quote when I drink more than two Coors Lights. I remember my older brother sneaking me into his room to watch "South Park." Bill Engvall and Trey Parker taught me the power of humor.

I didn't see comedy as something for me until a couple years after my son was born. I was desperate to get out of the house and do something that wasn't related to cleaning up diapers, litter boxes or toilets. Honestly, I just wanted some attention from strangers, and a stand-up open mic seemed like the most ethical way to get it as a married mother. I guess I can thank being elbow deep in poop for the motivation to put on real clothes and tell dirty jokes.

MEHAMA KAUPP, DANCER AND BEND BURLESQUE CO-FOUNDER

The first thing that comes to mind when I think of what influenced me to start burlesque was the movie "Some Like it Hot." Specifically the scene where Marilyn sings, "I Want to be Loved by You." That movie meant comedy, sex, silliness, and it started my obsession with pin-up and burlesque culture. I always had a huge desire to imitate and exude sexiness, and confidence like Marilyn Monroe, Brigitte Bardot and Eartha Kitt. The ability to combine a sultry attitude into art and add feminism really inspired me from a very young age!

TODD LOOBY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BENDFILM

"The voyage of the best ship is a zigzag line of a hundred tacks. See the line from a sufficient distance, and it straightens itself to the average tendency. Your genuine action will explain itself, and will explain your other genuine actions. Your conformity explains nothing.

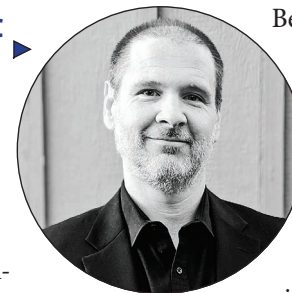
ing. Act singly, and what you have already done singly will justify you now."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance"

When I look back at all the individual "eras" that brought me here: an exploring youth, either playing sports or locked in front of a TV, an avid reader, environmental science master's degree, business management job, self-taught filmmaker, into nonprofit management, to BendFilm, it all makes perfect sense. And I would say that the single work that brought everything together and made sense of the seemingly conflicting interests I always had in my youth when I lacked sufficient idols or friends who had similar interests, it was the introduction to Emerson via "Self-Reliance" and the transcendentalists. Through that, my young mind was set on the West and taking a singular path there. I saw a few posts Monday in celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King and one of them was his emulation of Emerson and it all came flooding back. And what I love about both King and Emerson is that they both placed great importance on self-knowledge as a necessary prerequisite for how one should use it in service to others.

CHRISTIAN CLARK, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR ▶ CENTRAL OREGON MASTERSINGERS, DIRECTOR OF MUSIC AT TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

I've loved classical music as long as I can remember. My mom tells me I was picking out songs on my Cookie Monster piano at age 3, and I joined my first choir at age 5. I remember loving TV shows and cartoons with good music ... especially the Looney Tunes opera episodes, and Tom



and Jerry's "The Cat Concerto," featuring Franz Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2. However, it was my future high school choir director who convinced me to choose choir in my sixth grade year (rather than band or orchestra), and he continued to influence my musical choices even beyond college. I am grateful to him, and the many other teachers who helped shape my musical career.

MICHELLE MEJASKI, DANCER, CHOREOGRAPHER

I would not be where I am today if it were not for my tap teacher, Miss Carol Roller. I started taking tap classes with Miss Carol when I was 4. The studio I attended was Dixon Dance Studio in Indianapolis, Indiana. It was a small recreation studio. They did not have competition instructors or pre-professional training. When I was in eighth grade, Miss Carol told me that she had taught me all she knew as far as tap technique, but she wanted to continue to instruct me. She asked me if I would like to learn how to choreograph. I did not hesitate at the chance and most eagerly said yes! When I was a freshman, the studio offered me a teaching position. I choreographed for and taught Beginning Tap for adults and Beginning Jazz for ages 8-10. I taught at Dixon Dance throughout high school and had three tap classes and two jazz classes by my senior year. I continued training in tap, musical theater, jazz, and choreography at Ball State University and professionally throughout my adult life. Miss Carol instilled in me such a love for dance that I carry with me every day. The path she set me on has led to Mejaski Choreography & Productions here in Bend. I would not be here without her support, friendship and belief in me.

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