

Trail Band featured in holiday concert

Last show for heralded musical group

By Brenna Visser
Cannon Beach Gazette

After 25 years, The Trail Band has reached the end of the musical journey. Known for its eclectic sound and iconic Christmas shows played around the state, the eight-person brass band ensemble will play their final performance Dec. 26 at the Coaster Theatre in Cannon Beach.

Like many looking to retire, Marv Ross, the group's founder, said the reasons are typical: the desire for downtime and travel. "We've done it for 25 years. We're cutting back...trying to simplify life and have more time to travel," Ross said.

But the beginning of this group's journey was anything but typical. The ensemble formed in 1991 after Rindy and Marv Ross, better known at the time for their place in the popular 1980s pop-rock band Quarterflash, were asked by the Oregon Trail Advisory Council to form a musical group to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Oregon Trail.

For the first two years, the product took the form of a musical, based on the diaries of those who traveled the trail, all done in the brass band style popular in the mid-19th century.

"I had always wanted to do one, so I saw this as my chance," he said.

Eventually, the show ran its course — but things just didn't feel finished.

"Well now, what do we do with this amazing band we've put together?" Ross said.

In 1994, The Trail Band decided to create a new show, Christmas With The Trail Band — a holiday concert akin to the parlor orchestras and townsquare brass bands of the 1800s. Originally produced as a television special for Oregon Public Broadcasting, the concert began to gain momentum, growing from a few shows in Portland to a full tour around the state 25 years later.

But the show got off to a rough start.

"I remember the first time we did Christmas show it was funny because it flopped," Ross said. "It was very old fashioned, which had done well within context of Oregon Trail. But at the Festival of Trees in Portland? It just wasn't going to work."

Over the next three days, Ross and his team rewrote the show, incorporating a gospel influence from Linda Ronstadt, a fellow Quarterflash band member, and

IF YOU GO
What: Winter Holiday Concerts with The Trail Band
Where: Coaster Theatre
When: 7 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 26
Tickets: \$39

brought the show to life.

Keying into unique sounds and musical styles is a large part of the band's success, Ross said. The group features rare instruments like the flageolet or cornet, and plays a variety of genres, spanning from the 15th century to jazz.

"It absolutely is unique — it kind of fell into our laps serendipitously," he said. "I never would have guessed that 27 years later we'd still be performing."

Cannon Beach connection

The Christmas concert started coming to Cannon Beach after local business owners and musicians Paul and Margo Dueber saw The Trail Band more than 20 years ago in concert. The connection was further strengthened after Paul Dueber took a songwriting class with Ross about 10 years later.

After inviting Ross and his wife Rindy to play a few concerts at their home, Dueber knew they were perfect for Cannon Beach's Haystack Holidays celebrations.

"Their sound is so unique, mostly because of all the different kinds of instruments they play," Dueber said. "They clearly love what they do."

The band since has been capping off Haystack Holiday festivities for the past three years. Part of their success, Dueber feels, is their ability to stand out from what otherwise is a cacophony of homogeneous Christmas carols.

"People visiting here between Christmas and New Years...they don't want the typical Christmas concert," she said. "It's not like everything else they've heard through December."

For now, Ross and the band are trying not to think too hard about what it means to be arriving at the end of their trail together. He expects some laughs and some tears, and definitely some gratitude.

He is instead funneling his effort into making sure every detail of their last concerts are perfect.

"Because otherwise I'm sunk," Ross chuckled. "I'll save all the emotion for Cannon Beach — but God knows what will happen during that last show."



The Trail Band comes to Cannon Beach for its final performance.

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Broker
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Cheryl Johnson
Broker
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e: Cheryl.Johnson@remax.net

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