

Newport This Week

Sharing the Joy of Music

By Mark Gorman

Renowned cellist Pablo Casals once observed that music is the divine way to tell beautiful, poetic things to the heart. Indeed, not all music is played solely for the benefit of an audience. Many of us play our instruments in solitude and enjoy what the experience brings to us.

Newport native **Peter Martin**, a former state representative and self-proclaimed computer nerd, is finding that playing the piano, both privately and publicly, is an experience he cherishes.

Newport This Week sat down with Martin to catch up on his latest musical project. He's known around town as a harmonica player, so we wanted to know how and when he got interested in the piano.

"I grew up in Newport's Fifth Ward and I never took music lessons," he said. "There was a piano in my home and I used to try to play it. We didn't know of any piano teachers, except for a nun who had a reputation for hitting students when they would make mistakes."

In high school, Martin decided to teach himself to play the piano. As he traveled as an adult due to his work as a computer consultant, he would bring a book of basic piano tunes and ask to play any piano he saw.

"I actually got to the level that I would characterize as being suitable to play at a Holiday Inn on the outskirts of a rural town," he said.

In 1991, Martin's work brought him to San Francisco, where he purchased a portable Yamaha keyboard. "I played two hours a night and three hours on Saturday mornings," he said. "My musician neighbors used to call me and ask me to turn the piano up, not down."

Martin recalled the time, while working in Culver City, California, and living in a Ramada Inn, when he discovered an unused piano in the hotel's bar.

"I realized I could use that late-night time in the empty lounge to practice," he said. "I brought a book of songs I was trying to learn. So, I started my nightly practice sessions at the hotel."

As his passion for learning to play the piano grew, Martin eventually enlisted a Berklee College of Music graduate to finally teach him proper piano technique. "We became friends and I took lessons from him for four years," he said.

As the years went by, Martin moved around a lot and put his piano passion on the back burner while he took up harmonica playing. He enjoyed sitting in with several bands in Chicago, Los Angeles and New Orleans. He moved back to Newport 20 years ago and now enjoys playing the harp with a local group, the **Young Geezers**. But the piano bug never really left him.

Last summer, a chance visit to Newport Hospital rekindled his keyboard obsession.

"While sitting at the hospital waiting for a routine blood test, I noticed the grand piano in the hospital," he said. "It frustrated me that it was sitting dormant and silenced under a heavy blanket. I contacted the hospital, arranged for an interview and an audition, and was accepted to be a volunteer piano player."

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Martin's rediscovering his love of piano illustrates the expression music for music's sake. A person who plays an instrument primarily for himself will always feel the joy of music. Martin summed it up best: "I can sit for hours playing the piano, whether there is an audience or not."

TO GO

WHEN: Wednesdays, from 2-4 p.m.

WHERE: Newport Hospital Atrium

ADMISSION: Free

This article was published on March 3/14/19:



Irish Heritage

Through March 31

'Irish Eyes 2019'
An exhibit by local artists on everything Irish, Spring Bull Gallery, 55 Bellevue Ave., 401-849-9166, springbullgallery.com.

Museum of Newport Irish History Interpretive Center
March 15, 16, 17 and 22, 23, 24, 648 Thames St., 11 a.m. to 4 pm., admission: by donation, newportirishhistory.org

Guided Tours of Fort Adams
Historic fort constructed with Irish labor between 1824-1857. Tour times: 12 noon & 2:00 pm (weather permitting). Saturdays and Sundays during the month of March. - (401) 841-0707 Adults: \$15, Children: \$8 (Mention Irish Heritage Month for \$3 discounts).

Friday, March 15

Big Daddy Award and Pre-Parade Party Honoring IHOP Restaurant owners, and long-time parade supporters, Bill & Karen Cardinal. Hibernian Hall, Newport. This free event will include a DJ, Hors d'oeuvres and a Cash Bar. Doors open at 6:00pm. Information: (401) 846-5081.

Saturday, March 16

St. Patrick's Day Mass in Honor of St. Mary's Church, 111 Bowdoin St., Newport, RI. 11:00 am. Mass and Order of Service. Members as the vic Great Fam

Sunday, March 17

Traditional Irish Sessions, Live trad Irish "session" host Gutierrez, Tim May Wright, 6 - 9 p.m., One Broadway, 401

Monday, March 18

Gaelic & Garlic A celebration of Ne Irish and Italian he at the Portuguese Center, the Vasco D Hall on Fenner Ave port, from 5:30 to 7

Sunday, March 17

Irish Dancing Ages 4-12 and their watch Irish dancing a bit about Irish cu tion, and some bas raphy, Newport Pu

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