

Leucadia's Music School a Muse to Many

By Louise Julig

The Encinitas School of Music is not your parents' music school—no blue-haired old lady keeping time with a ruler, no stuffy conservatory airs—just lots of good music in an atmosphere of camaraderie and fun.

Perhaps one of the city's best kept secrets, the school offers music instruction to students of all ages from a staff of professional musicians who obviously love creating music and pass that passion on to their students with an enthusiasm that is infectious. Currently 18 instructors offer lessons in piano, guitar, bass, voice, strings and orchestral instruments, band instruments, drums and percussion.

I first found out about ESM two years ago when I enrolled my then four-year-old daughter in a Kindermusik class. While waiting in the hallway one day I casually mentioned to another parent that I should get my violin back in playing condition, as I hadn't picked it up in about 18 years. Strings instructor Rhy Thornton overheard me and convinced me to bring it in. A few weeks later I was back taking lessons, having a blast making music again.

Although I was definitely rusty, the encouragement I got was more than enough to get me back into the groove of playing. I couldn't believe how much fun it was. Although the Kindermusik program was eventually discontinued, my daughter moved into piano lessons, and I also

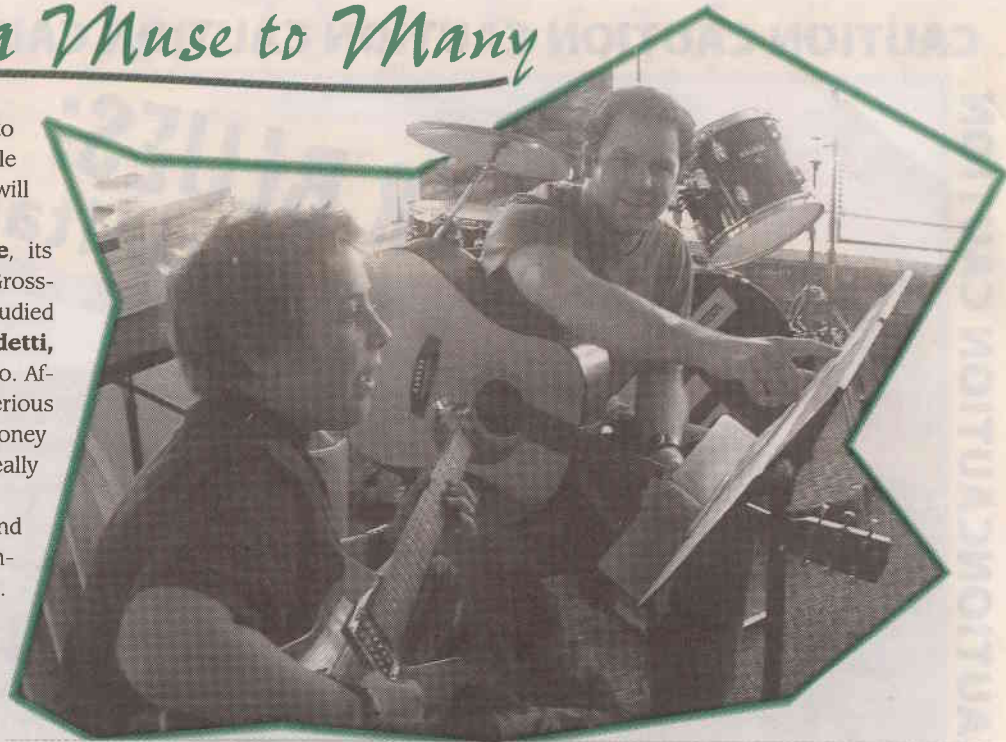
branched out into mandolin. I got to wondering, "Why don't more people know about this place?" I doubt that will be the case for long.

ESM is the baby of **Todd Pyke**, its founder and director. Pyke attended Grossmont college in the '80s, where he studied classical guitar under **Fred Benedetti**, and has performed all over San Diego. After his son was born, "I had to get serious about how I was going to make money with music, and so teaching was really the best way," Pyke said.

He started teaching in 1987 and moved to Encinitas in 1993, teaching guitar through Moonlight Music. When his teaching load became too large to handle on his own, he parted ways with Moonlight and decided to start his own school. That was on April Fool's Day, 1998.

In October of 2000 the school became a nonprofit organization with a stated goal of providing music education of all instruments to all ages of people. "Our mission is to create opportunities for kids—for people—to reach their spiritual goals, their personal goals, their professional goals, through music," Pyke said. "To help network the community together through music so that people who might never meet, would (meet), and just tighten up the community because they get to come play music together."

Located in a converted house off Orpheus street in Leucadia, the school exudes a funky charm that is in keeping with the Surf City vibe. Although the structure is



**Tom Burda of Jazz Duo and a student at the Encinitas School of Music.
Photo: SCT**

old, circa 1940s, Pyke said, "it has a certain charm to it—it's like a library where you go to study. It zones you into thinking, 'You're going to learn music here.' It's got its own vibe and you kind of tap into that when you go there."

Besides the vibe, something else students can tap into is the wide range of musical experience and musical styles represented by the ESM staff. Most of them are professional working musicians, the antithesis of "those who can't do, teach." A sampling of the ESM staff's professional experience and musical styles includes: FatCat (classic

rock, dance, funk), Ripplegroove (jazz fusion), Clydzdale Jockeyz (funk), Sol e Mar (Samba), Alas de Aguilar (mariachi), Leper-Khanz (Irish), the Jack Hill Jazz Band and Bell Brothers Band (Jazz), Cuerdas (string quartet), the Theatre in Old Town (musical theater), and the La Jolla Symphony (classical). Pyke himself also performs solo classical guitar.

Due to this depth of performance experience, another standout feature of the school is its emphasis on ensemble playing. Several recitals a year are held at the Star Theater in Oceanside where students perform in ensembles. The repertoire can range from Beethoven to the Red Hot Chili Peppers, but the goal is to get students used to playing together and in front of an audience. As Thornton put it, "Just like you've got to learn to play before you can play in a band, you've got to practice playing in front of people before you can really perform."



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Todd Pyke runs Encinitas School of Music, one of the city's best kept secrets.
Photo: SCT

It all ties in to the community outreach goal as well. "The recital is the fruition of our efforts, and the clearest picture that we have that shows how we're bringing people who would never meet, together under the auspices of music," Pyke added.

It is fitting the Encinitas School of Music is located on Orpheus Street in Leucadia, as Orpheus was a mythical Greek musician, and 'Leucadia' means sanctuary. A musical sanctuary built right into the landscape—how Encinitas.

The Encinitas School of Music is located at 775 Orpheus Ave. Call (760) 943-9480 or visit www.esom.org.

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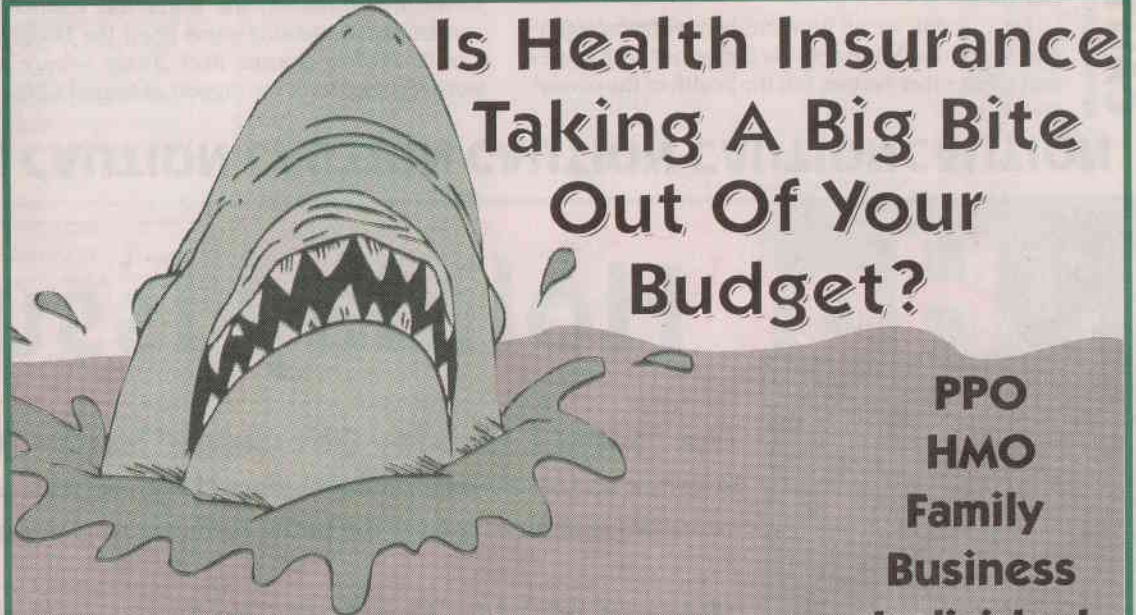
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