

Oregon Mandolin Camp: River of the West 2011

by Mary Spencer Ernst



Comments from past participants:

"It was a really great experience – the location, the small size, the nice teachers."

"Excellent players, excellent instructors (solid, professional instruction) and a wonderful environment. What else could you ask for?"

Brian Oberlin's third River of the West mandolin camp was a long weekend in early June, lasting from Thursday at 5 pm to Sunday at noon. The location was a vintage estate 20 miles east of Portland, Oregon, in the small town of Corbett. The property was once the country estate of Julius Meier, the governor of Oregon from 1931 to 1935 and a partner in the Meier and Frank Department Stores (now part of Macy's). Corbett, Oregon, is on the edge of the Columbia Gorge and is just down the road from the historic Vista House and from Multnomah Falls. The views are incredible where we were, and I saw deer and rabbits wandering around on the grounds and eagles and vultures flying overhead.

Brian's camp included three guest artists/instructors. Brian was in charge of solo swing mandolin and bluegrass techniques. Carlo Aonzo taught the classical Italian mandolin. Peter Ostroushko taught from his repertoire of European and American styles of music and also music theory. Don Stiernberg taught jazz, swing, chords and music theory.

Each of the three guest mandolinists presented two workshops. The format was somewhat different from other camps I've attended; we did not pick which workshop to go to. We were assigned to one of three groups and we rotated through all six workshops as one group so we all had the same workshops, but not at the same time. The best result of this for me was that all of us had two workshops from Carlo. If there had been choices, some

players might have skipped the workshops put on by the classical guy. Instead they got a solid drill on scales up the neck and practice on difficult finger exercises. Maybe they will convert.

The other workshops were heavy into chords and music theory. For me this is tough. I know a few chords but have no idea when to play them and how they interact. But I did finally understand how to make an augmented chord and a diminished chord and when to use it. Then the best was when Peter gave us sheet music for *President Garfield's Hornpipe* with the traditional chords and then a version modified to use alternate chords.

In addition to workshops, master classes were available with all four of the leaders. We were able to have about 15 minutes of attention from an instructor for whatever we wished. My hubby and I combined our time and asked for help from Peter on a harmony for a piece we like to play.

All workshops need performances and we had ours on Saturday night. All four pros gave us about 30 minutes of their best. I can't even describe the skills they have. Then during the last morning, we had the student performances. We had each been assigned to a band for the camp and each band had practiced up to 15 minutes of music to perform. I still don't understand how Brian selected us for each band, but I was lucky enough to get into Carlo's band (a.k.a. Italy). The other bands had such creative names as Oregon, Chicago and Minnesota.

Late nights usually had one organized jam, led by one of the pros, and then other jams as needed. The facility had enough space to spread out the different jams comfortably. One night Carlo led a classical session of quartets and we had all four parts covered.

There were 45 of us, most of whom were from the Northwest, so I finally met some of the mandolinists

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of the Willamette Valley. Brian conducts the Oregon Mandolin Orchestra in Portland and teaches in Portland, so he has connections with the Portland area musicians. Lots of the participants could not sight-read music but could either play by ear or slowly read music. The camp accepted nearly all levels of musicians but there were no workshops slanted for the absolute beginner. The instructors all have years of experience and were able to present material to all levels in the same session.

Most of us stayed in dorm rooms in the main lodge that had the dining room and meeting rooms. This is the closest my room has ever been to the main action and I sure enjoyed being able to drop my stuff off instead of carrying it around all day long and to every meal.

The next camp will be June 7-10, 2012, at the Menucha Retreat Center outside of Portland, Oregon. Instructors are not yet confirmed, but there will be a pre-camp concert in Portland on June 6, 2012, featuring the instructors. Brian holds the attendance at 45 or fewer participants so that there will be adequate access to the pros.



Instructors (left to right): Peter, Brian, Carlo, & Don

A Letter from Germany:

I have made a Google map of the mandolin orchestras in the USA and Canada using the CMSA list of orchestras. I will continue to add orchestras if I get news about them. I do also want to add links to YouTube videos later if available. I think this is a great way to discover the "mandolin world". You can click on the landmarks to get the information, zoom in and out etc. I have also added a special landmark for the CMSA. You can find this and other maps in my blog www.mandoisland.com on page "mandolin orchestras of the world".

During the last years I have scanned several mandolin methods and made them available for free download from my homepage www.mandoisland.de

Best wishes

Michael Reichenbach

2012 CMSA Convention

October 9 - 14

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Sheraton Minneapolis West
