Medieval instruments in a modern age

Christina Manuel, Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, March 26, 2018 4:14 pm

Having kicked off then end of last quarter with a showcase of their first performance, the Early Ensemble will now spend Spring quarter practicing, and recruiting new members to bring renaissance-era style music to the music department.

Cal Poly Pomona has a variety of music ensembles from jazz to orchestra to mariachi. However, the Early Ensemble is the only established student group to bring late medieval period music to life with instruments and music true to the early renaissance era of the 1500’s.

Made up of 10 official members, the Early Ensemble is a one-unit class with the Music Department Chair Peter Yates as the instructor. The class is open for all students at CPP who then are able to provide their own instruments upon joining.

Co-founders Jordan Rivera, third-year performance student, and Sean Gibson, third-year music education student, had the task of putting together the ensemble from scratch.

“Jordan and I were talking about, wouldn’t it be cool if we played a bunch of really old music?” says Gibson. “So we said ‘let’s just do this.’”

The group plays a variety of medieval instruments such as the crumhorn, the lute, an arpeggione, borrowed from Yates, the medieval bagpipe, the kortholt and different recorders, ranging from the great bass recorder to the soprano recorder.

The Early Ensemble features a vocalist as well as Music Education Professor Janine Riveire joins in on the fun with the student musicians in the group.

The Early Ensemble is student funded with members of the ensemble using money out of their own pockets to purchase rare instruments that cannot be found in just any music store.

Rivera addresses that he has spent around $2,000 tracking down his late-medieval instruments from auctions and personal sellers.

“Being a college student, it’s hard to pay for our shirts, the instruments and pieces of music here and
there,” says Rivera.

The student musicians spend an hour every Friday to come together and practice their music as a whole in preparation for their performances.

The music the Early Ensemble performs is based entirely from the late-medieval and early renaissance period, and is coupled with the members wearing Scottish ghillie shirts to closely resemble traditional renaissance clothing.

Alongside performing with medieval instruments, members of the group sing in a style similar to the renaissance period as well.

With the goal in mind of keeping the medieval style of renaissance music alive on campus, members of the ensemble want to showcase that there is more to old western music than just the classical style most people are familiar with.

Music from the medieval period has its own style and story, something the Early Ensemble is trying to capture and portray through their performances.

“It is a completely new experience when you get to play with instruments you’ve never seen or heard of before,” says Louie Tran, second-year music education student and member of the Early Ensemble.

With their first performance having a high audience support turnout, the Early Ensemble is looking for new members to join and add to the medieval performance fun.

Take a trip back to the renaissance era and visit the music department to join and learn more about the Early Ensemble.