

Randall Vemer's MusArt

STORY BY SHARI STEINER

IMAGES BY HECTOR SALAZAR PHOTOGRAPHY

"Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration." — Thomas Edison

Randall Vemer is not a stranger to the values of dedication and perseverance. At the age of 10, he picked up his first violin. By the time he was 12, he was studying with local university faculty members and playing in the university orchestra. He was the only string player in his high school band, so he continued to explore music by playing with the Stevens College Orchestra and attending the Interlochen Arts Camp in the summer. He received his BFA in music and art history at the Oberlin School of Music in Cleveland.

During his senior year at Oberlin, he came to the Rose City for a practice audition with the Oregon Symphony and got the job. (The odds of a talented college violinist becoming an orchestra player are about the same of a talented football player being drafted to the NFL.) At age 22, he became the youngest principal viola player and soloist of the symphony. Fresh from college, he started his international career, performing here in the NW and traveling the globe to play with numerous renowned opera and ballet companies.

"What used to come so easily," says Vemer, "wasn't easy anymore." After 20 years with the Oregon Symphony, he started to lose the dexterity of his left hand. He was diagnosed with Focal Dystonia, a neurological disorder causing muscle spasms with repetitive movements (such as playing a stringed



instrument). His career was over. Recalling the events of that time, Vemer shares that music was his destiny. "It's why I got up in the morning. It was devastating."

Randall has always enjoyed the classroom, so he returned to school. He took web design courses at PCC and sprinkled in some art classes for fun. He followed that with multimedia and computer science courses at PSU. Of course, he added a few elective art classes. While working as a computer programmer/web designer, he continued to take painting classes, studied with individual artists, and (yes, kids) watched a lot of YouTube videos.

"To play the violin, you must understand fundamentals that go back 300 years. Classical painting is the same idea,"



MusArt book features all Vemer's paintings as photographed by Hector Salazar. Chin's haikus are also featured in each photograph.

MusArt: A Musician Paints Them, film director, Kevin Hanzlik, created a 12-minute visual experience that arranges the paintings by their section in the orchestra: strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion, followed by vocalists, conductors and composers. The film shares Vemer's path from musician to painter through the eyes of his fight with and victory over focal dystonia.

The film's original score was composed by Grammy winner, Dr. Kira Zeeman Rugen. She won Best Original Score/Best Composer for the short film in twenty different film festivals this year.

Thomas Edison may be right in that genius is the result of a lot of hard work rather than a switch of a light bulb. Vemer is all too familiar with the commitment, training and execution needed to bring a 1% idea to 99% fruition.

You can find links to Randall Vemer's gallery, short films, art camps, master classes and more at www.vemerpainter.com.

To view the short film, use the QR code.



shares Vemer. Thus, we have his newest series, MusArt, that marries his decades-long love affair with classical viola to his new obsession with classical painting.

MusArt exhibit is a series of 40 oil paintings depicting real-life orchestral musicians and their instruments. Many of the subjects were friends and fellow musicians that Vemer had worked with over the years. His goal was to create paintings that were historically reserved for rock n roll. He gloats, "I wanted to make orchestra musicians sexy." Leaning on his multimedia courses, each painting is partnered with a haiku written by Malaysian poet Christina Chin and a QR code that will allow the viewer to listen to each musician play the instrument highlighted in the painting.