

## Life



COURTESY PHOTO/ADAM GAZZOLA

(From left) Bob Falesch, Susan Wolf, Bret Hamilton, Ryan Seward and Geoffrey Simmons are members of the Pueblo Improvisers Community Orchestra.

## COMMUNITY

# Music to their ears

## Members of this ensemble discover songs in everything they hear

BY AMY MATTHEW  
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

What is music? A Mozart sonata, drum circles, “Stairway to Heaven,” a Thelonious Monk solo — those would be described by most as typical examples.

What about a hammer striking a nail, wind blowing or an airplane’s engine revving? Can those be called music, too?

Members of the Pueblo Improvisers Community Orchestra say absolutely — to any and all sounds, or no sound at all. To them, life itself is a continuous soundtrack, if only you learn to listen.

## SEE PICO PERFORM

**Tuesday** — 7:45 p.m., Smitty’s Greenlight Tavern, 227 N. Santa Fe Ave.

**Wednesday** — 7 p.m., Pueblo West Library, 298 S. Joe Martinez Blvd., “Out of This World”

**Oct. 29** — 7 p.m., Pueblo West Library, “Sounds From Space”

## No rules

PICO was formally named in 2013. The seeds of the group were planted during open mic nights at the Downtown Bar, when Susan Wolf would experiment with her cello and Geoffrey Simmons began to add percussion and sound samples.

They’ve since been joined by core members Bob

Falesch (keyboards), Ryan Seward (percussion) and Bret Hamilton (dance), as well as several other musicians. Composer Bob Marsh, who named the group, lives in San Francisco but has participated in some Pueblo appearances.

Simply put, there are no rules in a PICO performance. It’s free improvisation; their music is ad-libbed in all aspects — sound, length and participation.

“It’s a way of expressing yourself without limitations,” said Wolf.

That doesn’t mean it’s without a framework, however.

“We create structure by listening to each other,” Wolf said. “You can hear that push and pull.”

Even though the members are playing different instruments, their willingness

to experiment with the tones they create can have surprising results.

“When something is really successful, often when we play it back we don’t know who made what sound,” said Falesch.

## Many influences

Wolf cites the late composer John Cage as a primary example of what PICO does. Cage was known for playing “prepared piano”: He placed objects between the piano strings to create different sounds.

He also is known for his composition “4’33,” in which musicians play ... absolutely nothing for 4 minutes, 33 seconds. The challenge is for the audience to listen for whatever environmental sounds occur during that time span. That’s the music.

The connection to such compositions may not be obvious at first, but this improvisation has its roots in classical and jazz.

“I think a group like PICO is best for a cross-pollination of the jazz and classical worlds — even

SEE EARS, 11A

## PETS

# Hush puppies

## Vet says music quiets shelter barking and lowers stress

BY SUE MANNING  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — Can music tame the savage beast? Can it hush puppies and calm kitties?

A veterinarian thinks so. Pamela Fisher has put music in more than 1,100 animal shelters, saying that it calms dogs and cats, and even cuts down on barking.

Fisher started the nonprofit Rescue Animal MP3 Project nearly four years ago by asking artists around the world to donate dog- and cat-friendly music. The result was MP3 players packed with 30 hours of classics, including music by Beethoven, Mozart and Chopin, nursery rhymes like “Three Blind Mice” and harps,

pianos and violins mimicking ocean waves and gentle breezes. She gives them free to animal shelters, sanctuaries and spay-and-neuter clinics.

“I have used therapeutic music in my practice and wanted to figure out a way to help the shelter animals in my own community,” said Fisher, a holistic veterinarian whose practice in North Canton, Ohio, includes alternative approaches like aromatherapy. Her “community” has grown to include shelters in all 50 states that house more than 115,000 dogs and cats.

## Dramatic difference

One fan is Tina Gunther, vet tech at the Cut Bank Animal Shelter near Cut Bank, Mont.,



*It just de-stresses them. They are still happy and wiggly, they just aren’t barking.*

TANIA HUYCKE-PHILLIPS  
BAY AREA HUMANE SOCIETY  
GREEN BAY, WIS.

and its sole volunteer (there are no paid employees). Winter temperatures at the rural shelter for six dogs and six cats routinely run well below zero, and “the wind blows nearly every day. We call them black blizzards — the top soil is just blown away,” Gunther said.



COURTESY PHOTO/AP

Ohio veterinarian Pamela Fisher, shown here with her dog Lili, created the Rescue Animal MP3 Project.

To calm the animals, Gunther tried the radio. Besides hit-and-miss reception, the news and sports had people yelling and disturbing sound bites. Then the project MP3 player was installed for

dogs on one side. “The difference has been dramatic,” she said.

She and her husband bought a second player for the cats.

SEE HUSH, 11A