

## **Excel Music: The Art Of Teaching Students One Note At A Time**

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Instructor Brandon Bair of Excel Music on Cross Creek Blvd. can teach you or your child to play the bassoon.

For some, the dream of living a musician's life is just that — a dream. For students at Excel Music in New Tampa, however, those dreams can become reality while learning under those who already have lived that glamorous life.

John Thrasher and his wife Sheri have both been successful touring musicians. The duo was on tour for 25 years and traveled from Canada to Japan, with their band, "Spiral Staircase," as well as with country music legend Mickey Gillie. The couple has performed for audiences of up to 100,000 and even played at the White House. Despite their love of touring, the Thrashers ultimately decided it was time to find a permanent home.

"As much as we enjoyed performing, we thought it would be nice to put down roots and do something that feels good and helps others. If just one student got to live their life the way we did, then it would be worth it," Thrasher said.

While still in Japan and with a little help from a book, having family in the area and the easy access to students and superb teachers, the Thrashers chose New Tampa as the place to live and

to start a music school. Since Excel Music's sole focus is on education, the Thrashers are able to hire teachers who really love what they do.

"We draw teachers who are really interested in music," says John. "Our teachers are well credentialed, nice people who are really good to our students."

In fact, six teachers at Excel Music have been with the school from the start in 2006 and several others have taught there for three and four years. All of the teachers at Excel are music lovers and enthusiasts, who are university trained and many have Master's degrees.

"My sons really enjoyed learning under the leadership of the instructors," says Lori Bleckley, whose three sons have been taking guitar lessons at Excel for more than three years. "They really like the challenge of learning a new instrument."

Excel Music provides lessons for students from ages four and up on almost any instrument with all skill levels and disciplines. While the school does teach many beginners, even experienced college students and professional musicians can come in and receive a little tuning-up help. Many adults take lessons at Excel in order to pursue the lifelong dream of learning an instrument, including one man who was 86 years old when he started taking trumpet lessons after his doctor told him he needed to do something to improve his wind.

John says the most popular classes are piano, voice and guitar, but the school offers lessons for a wide variety of instruments, including the bassoon. Two exciting new classes added this year are a rock band and a "Glee" group. The rock band will consist of six students and the "Glee" groups can have up to 12 students who will be performing songs from many different genres. According to Thrasher, students really enjoy performing in groups. "Having group classes is important because the students can learn from each other," he says.

Learning to play an instrument isn't the only thing that students are taught at Excel Music. The instructors also focus on the fundamentals of music, which include learning to read music, music theory and even music history. Lessons are taught on a weekly basis and teachers inspire students to practice outside the classroom.

"Hearing music in the house is a really nice element in the house," Bleckley says. "It brings us together as a family without using the TV."

Excel Music has partnered with Music & Arts, a nationwide band and orchestra instrument rental company, in order for students to have the ability to rent their instruments without the costs incurred from buying the instrument. This is especially important for young violin students who outgrow their instruments. Students can trade in instruments that are too small or try a new instrument without buying it. Instruments can be delivered to Excel Music, the student's school or even their house.

Many Excel Music students will be showcasing their talents at a recital on Sunday, December 11, at the University of South Florida. The recitals usually consist of about 100 students singing

and playing various instruments, and new this year will be performances by the rock band and “Glee” groups.

“I’ve been impressed that the instructors have motivated my sons to be on stage at USF, both playing guitar and singing,” Bleckley says. “They would never have done that on their own. It is a fantastic self-esteem-building experience to perform on stage.”

**Excel Music is located in the Cory Lake Isles Professional Center at 10353 Cross Creek Blvd., Ste. I. Hours are Mon. - Thurs., 2 p.m. – 9 p.m., 2 p.m. – 7 p.m. on Friday and 10am-3p.m. on Saturdays 10am- 3p.m. And closed on Sunday. For more information, visit [ExcelMusic.us](http://ExcelMusic.us) or call 991-1177.**