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# GREY-BRUCE boomers

A **FREE** magazine for adults 50+

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Remembering  
the good old days

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# It's never too late!

LEARN TO PLAY MUSIC  
IN YOUR RETIREMENT

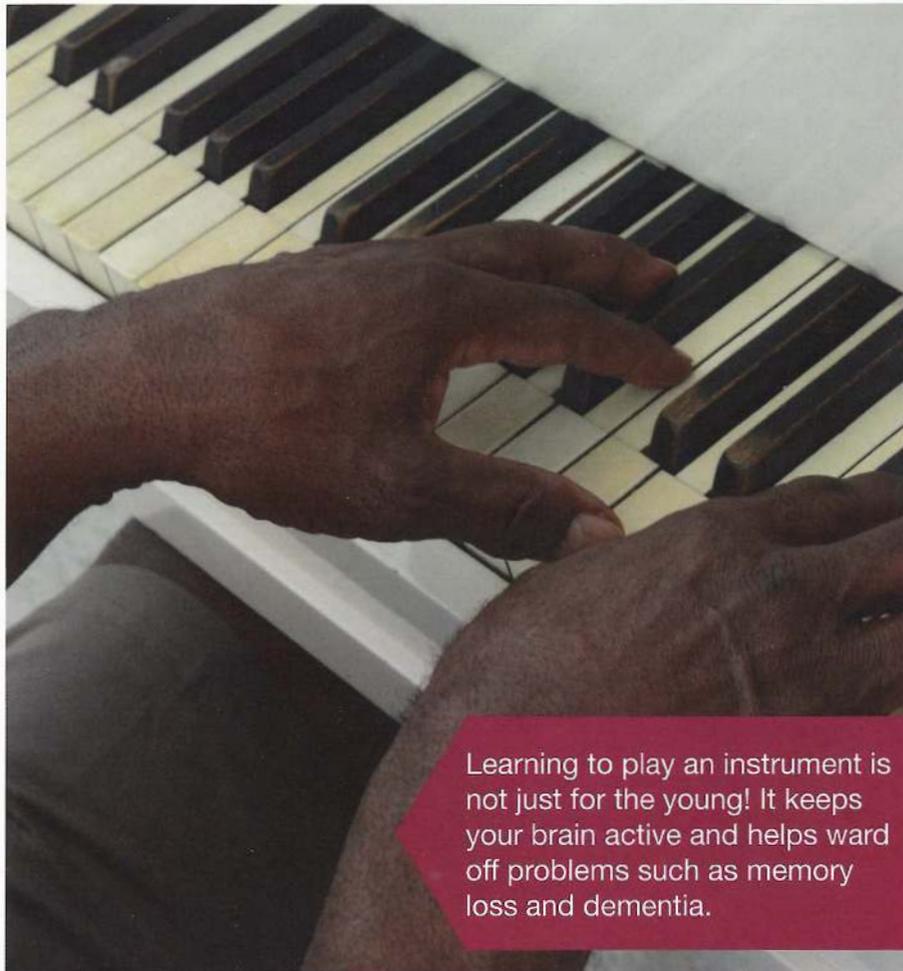
BY RICHARD POPIEZ

What a concept – retirement and learning to play an instrument.

“Yep, I always wanted to do this. Yep, I’m finally going to get around to doing this. Yes sir, the time is here and nothing’s going to stop me now. The Golden Gate of opportunity has opened and I have all the time in the world. I am going to learn an instrument, come something or high water. Here we go, and, yes, I am finally ready to take the plunge.”

Hold it, the brakes just went on! All those crazy reasons we couldn’t do it years ago are starting to make their appearance again. Yes, you always wanted to be a rock star, that person sitting in someone’s kitchen playing the fiddle, the one on stage performing on a grand piano, the harmonica player in the bar that everyone was cheering, or the busker who, right in the middle of the mall, took out a cello and stopped everyone in their tracks by playing Guns ‘N Roses songs.

Are you one of the people who always wanted to learn to play an



Learning to play an instrument is not just for the young! It keeps your brain active and helps ward off problems such as memory loss and dementia.

instrument, but just didn’t have the time? We always seem to be full of reasons why we cannot do something. “I’ve always wanted to learn but I’m too old now,” “I never had the time when I was younger,” “I wish I’d done this at a younger age,” or “It’s too hard to learn when you get to my age,” are some of the excuses that have followed us for years.

My grandfather, with the encouragement of my blessed grandmother, decided in his early-80s that he was going to learn to play the

organ. Not the little toy one but the full-blown, ‘this has knobs, buttons and levers, and two rows of black and white keys, and everything else under the sun rolled up into one large piece of furniture’ sized organ. As if that wasn’t enough of a challenge, he wanted to learn how to read music as well. All this from someone who never learned as a child but thought, “Someday I will do this.”

All his life, he loved listening to music and just never found the opportunity (or the time) to take lessons. “Good

for him,” I thought. “Way to go Grandpa!” Not only did he finally learn to play the organ, he also learned to read music. Along with playing, he taught himself to save the songs he played by recording himself on his computerized organ. He eventually joined an organ group for seniors, which met once a month and performed small concerts together in a school auditorium for the public. Now how cool is that?

So why do we hesitate to fulfil some of our dreams? Learning to play an instrument is not just for the young but also for the young at heart. Sure, kids are like sponges and they can retain vast amounts of information. They learn quickly, have very nimble joints and all seem to be like little Mozarts in no time at all. On the other hand, the rest of us are wannabes and that’s OK too!

For those of us who are older and past the age of 14 (OK, maybe 50ish), we have a lot going for us. As mature and experienced adults, we can decide on our own that we really want to do this, and that commitment and determination, not to mention more free time since the kids have grown and gone, can make us work harder. One of the best parts is that learning to play an instrument, whether a four-string ukulele, 12-string acoustic guitar or 66-key piano, can be very beneficial as we get older – as an accomplishment, for socializing and to help boost brain power. As we age, stimulating the brain with such things as crosswords, learning a new language, problem solving or anything that keeps our brains active helps ward off problem like memory loss and dementia. Plus, playing music is fun and very rewarding. Just as it is in children, learning something new is always a positive thing and being positive keeps us happy, which has been proven to prolong life and contribute to keeping the body and mind healthy as well.

So, how do you approach this and where do you go? Well, let’s pick an instrument. Maybe there’s something you’ve always wanted to play like a trumpet, saxophone, piano, guitar or violin. Oh, and let’s not forget the drums and other related instruments like congas, bongos, djembes

(jem-bay) or cajons (ka-hon). If you aren’t sure where to start, the ukulele is a good first pick. It is light, portable, easy to play and lots of fun. Violin or fiddle (same instrument, just depends on the style of music you are playing) is a bit more challenging but don’t let that stop you. And that goes for wind instruments, drums or keyboards too. Everything has its own level of difficulty, but there are always ways in which you can learn.

Have you always wanted to learn an instrument and play music? Well, what’s stopping you? Why not start now? Forget the excuses you’ve used for the last two or three decades. Take the plunge and you will never regret it.

Once you’ve decided on an instrument, it’s time to do some shopping. The Internet is full of musical instruments for sale, but alas, it’s always ‘buyer-beware.’ Department stores sell musical instruments and their prices can be reasonable but the quality can be an issue. Most places like these are selling only, so they often don’t have experienced staff to answer questions, and the instruments are not usually set up properly. Seek help from someone you trust who knows what to look for. A store that specializes in music and musical instruments is always your best bet. They have experienced staff who know how to guide you to your first instrument that is right for you.

Next, you’ll need lessons. You might choose private lessons by a qualified teacher. Lessons can be offered one-on-one or sometimes in small or large group sessions. Each has its own benefits, so think about which option works best for you. For those who are shy or immobile, a few teachers will do house calls, but you will have to ask. If you are not quite ready for the classroom scenario, there are many teaching aids out there ready for you to take advantage of. If you have Internet access, YouTube is a great resource for free online sessions. Check some out and see if any appeal to you or ask your local music store

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staff for recommendations. They often get feedback from musicians and students about good stuff online. There are also teachers who offer courses online for a fee. They may offer a few free lessons at first and these can be an excellent way to try something to see how well it works for you and your lifestyle.

Another option is the more traditional teach-yourself-at-home print books. Many lesson books are easy to follow, are geared for adults wanting to learn at home and may come with a CD or DVD. Check your local music store for a great selection of books at all levels, and there are usually experienced musicians there to ask for advice. From my experience, most musicians are happy to help someone who wants to start playing, but are unsure of all the avenues.

Lastly, consider doing this with a friend. Nothing beats the social aspect of learning an instrument. Consider asking someone or a few friends to join you in taking lessons. That way you have someone you can get together with to practice or play. Remember that music is not only good for the soul but also for sharing!

Have you always wanted to learn an instrument and play music? Well, what's stopping you? Why not start now? Forget the excuses you've used for the last two or three decades. Learning an instrument and playing music is fun at any age – big or small, young or old. Take the plunge and you will never regret it. Be willing to learn and be patient with yourself. Remember that it's not how good you are but instead, how good it makes you feel. Keep it fun and keep it light.

You never know, you just may find yourself someday playing on that stage or in that friend's kitchen. Either way, music is rewarding. Do it for you. There's no time like the present! ■

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