

# Multi-talented musician, performer teaches passion for music

By Alexander Peters  
Austin Reporter

After almost 60 years of playing music, Christopher Cross Hehsmoth is still bringing fresh perspectives to the table.

Hehsmoth, director of computer applications and webmaster for the school of music, has had an extensive career as both composer and performer. He has done it all throughout the years, whether that be scrapping together gigs and money, life on the road winning esteemed awards.

Hehsmoth's credits include more than 100 individual performances, more than 100 compositions, arranging national Broadshow tours and close to 140 separate arrangements.

Hehsmoth was taught classical piano by his father, also an avid musician, and continued to study music throughout his college career.

"I always wanted to play jazz. I picked it up not caring what happened. I was determined to stay with it," he said. "I was in my 20s and what really mattered to me was doing what I wanted to do."

But trying to make a career out of music wasn't easy. Money and shows were hard to come by, he said.

"I learned to invest in myself, and to keep at it," Hehsmoth said. "I built a personal skill set and trusted in myself no matter what was to come."

After going it alone early in his professional career, Hehsmoth teamed up with a childhood friend to form a band and hit the road on tour.

That band, Christopher Cross, convinced Hehsmoth to stray away from his native jazz and dive into the depths of rock and roll in the 1970s.

The group opened for Fleetwood Mac for a year, then did the same for The Eagles during

their "The Long Run" tour.

Christopher Cross went on to take home an Academy Award and five Grammys. But the band's success eventually faded.

"All of a sudden it all disappeared, and I was back in Austin playing jazz gigs," Hehsmoth said. "But it was a relief in a way, because there wasn't much time to create in between moving equipment, touring and performing."

Hehsmoth has gained a variety of professional recognition since, including back-to-back awards by the McDowell Fellowship. He placed first in the 2010 National Association of Composers and made a live Austin City Council Chamber TV appearance before accepting the "Live Music Capital of the World Honoree" in 1996. He won "Best Music Director" as awarded by the Austin-American Statesman for his music production of "Hair" and first place winner of the Worldfest International Film Festival for his arrangements in

the film, "Scary Movie."

Hehsmoth joined the university's staff in 1997, where he still teaches composition and jazz piano, and maintains the devotion to compose and perform music.

"I'm just looking to produce more of my own work and make it a broader appeal by mixing cultural influences with my composing," he said. "Right now, I'm working on an orchestral piece with steel drums from Haiti. I'd like to use it as a reminder of the disaster that took place there a few years ago and how much the Haitian people still need our help."

Now with his mark in the ranks of professional musicians already made, and a career that has been more than successful, Hehsmoth preserves his passion for music.

"When I'm creating I'll listen to a broad pallet of music until I hear some sort of ear-candy, so to speak. I play with the composition for a while until it sounds right. I work with it until I see what comes from inside."