

PERCEIVING PERCUSSION



Richard Evans from Boston practices Saturday before the start of the Zeltsman Marimba Festival's final concert showcasing marimba players from 17 states at Lawrence University Memorial Chapel in Appleton. RON PAGE/THE POST-CRESCENT

Performers display talents at marimba festival

By Cheryl Anderson
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APPLETON — Performing the musical, lyrical and dramatic "Northern Lights" solo by composer Eric Ewazen on Saturday at Lawrence University's Memorial Chapel, Tai-Jung Tsai's technique was sheer perfection.

Tsai, 24, of Taiwan, was one of 26 performers highlighted in the Participants' Showcase Concert, the final event of the 10th annual Zeltsman Marimba Festival.

Founded by Nancy Zeltsman, who leads the percussion department at Boston Conservatory, the two-week festival that alternates among Appleton and other cities, featured seminars for percussionists who then performed a dozen concerts for the public.

The event brought to Appleton 20 faculty and guest artists and 40 participants, including Lawrence students.

"Those of us who've been here several times think this is the best festival ever," Zeltsman said of the event's fifth visit to Lawrence University.



Tai-Jung Tsai performs during the Zeltsman Marimba Festival's final concert Saturday in Appleton. RON PAGE/THE POST-CRESCENT

The marimba is a percussion instrument with wooden keys and aluminum or brass resonator pipes that amplify the sound when a performer strikes the keys with a mallet.

The goal of the festival is to

open people's eyes to the marimba as a solo instrument, Zeltsman said. And it seems to be working. A free concert on the Fourth of July attracted nearly 200 people.

"We're on a mission to raise the consciousness that the marimba is a very viable concert instrument," she said.

That's something Tsai continues to learn. She just earned her master's degree in classical percussion from the Steinhardt School's Department of Music and Performing Arts Professions at New York University under the tutelage of Simon Boyar, an accomplished solo artist, producer, composer/arranger and educator. This fall she will begin studying for her doctor of musical arts degree at the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

Once she graduates, Tsai will continue to perform, but she also wants to share the knowledge she's absorbed with the next generation, she said.

"You have a responsibility; you have to teach," she said.

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