

MUSIC

The pros of being amateur

Marimba-philes aren't in it for the money, they're in it for the joy of making music

BY KATY DAVIDSON

Raise your hand if you've ever performed in public before."

Kite Giedraitis, a local musician who has been teaching marimba lessons for more than eight years, scans his basement studio in search of a single upstretched arm.

The only response is a collective "who me?" expression until one woman finally asks, "Does a clarinet recital in grade school count?"

It's apparent these musicians are not in it for the money. They will never get any major media exposure, they will never do a stadium tour of the world, VH1 will never go behind their music. So why on earth would they want to devote time to playing marimba?

"It's just beautiful," says Sethyn Bryan, a 38-year-old woman who works by day in a children's services

it, it made me want to do it," she says. "I was kind of a couch potato back then, but a lot of the women encouraged me to join."

Shapiro, a 43-year-old "mother of two cats," says the feeling of community keeps her going back every week.

"There's a lot of positive energy in our group. It's given me a lot to know I can contribute," she says.

After playing for a few months, Shapiro used her own persuasive powers to convince her friend Tey Morris to play. Morris says the major allure of marimba is its therapeutic nature and the ease of learning it.

"You can pick it up from sight and sound," she says. "You don't have to practice that much to sound good."

Part of marimba's simple, carefree air comes from the actual music itself—the songs are melodic, fast and catchy. But some

marimba-philes say the best part is playing in a community of musicians, working together to combine sounds and rhythms. "Marimba pulls community together. Even though [the music] is from far away, it's very inclusive. People rotate among the instruments, they play lead and supporting roles. It's actually a kind of

model of society," Giedraitis says.

Sethyn Bryan was first introduced to marimba in the late 1970s. She believes one of its most fascinating aspects is the seemingly psychic communication the musicians have while playing together. During each song, the group follows the lead of one player at a time. The leader gives cues within her melody that indicate when a change is coming.

Giedraitis' students, in collaboration with many other marimba groups from around Portland and around the state, will perform a Family Marimba Concert and Dance at the end of February. They will be joined by Nabi Camara, a West African who now lives in Seattle, and Joe Hlupheka Bayana from South Africa. Both musicians have been playing marimba their entire lives.

Even playing with these professionals, Giedraitis' students don't think they'll get too nervous.

Morris says: "We take it seriously, but we have fun with it. It's a release, an escape."

■ The FAMILY MARIMBA CONCERT AND DANCE will be held from 6 to 10 p.m. Feb. 26 at the Echo Theatre, 1515 S.E. 37th Ave. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for those under 18, and free for children under 12 who are accompanied by an adult.

For more information about the concert or joining one of Kite Giedraitis' classes, call (503) 775-9039.

KATY DAVIDSON considers herself a short-haired hippie.



Lynn Anderson takes a whack at playing the marimba

office. "Marimba is physical; it's meditative and melodic."

Judging by the ever-increasing number of people who populate Giedraitis' classes, Bryan is not the only one who feels this way.

The marimba, an African instrument similar to a xylophone, originated in Zimbabwe and was developed by the Shonah people, according to Giedraitis. During the late 1960s, a man named Dumi Maraire moved from his native Zimbabwe to Seattle and began teaching marimba at the University of Washington.

The term "marimba" can be used to describe the actual instrument or the style of music. The African songs are melodically kinetic, their rhythms are buoyant and upbeat, and they create an optimistic atmosphere. Players bang vigorously on the marimbas with mallets, and the sound they make is similar to loud drops of water.

"Marimba is fanciful and high-energy," Giedraitis says. "There are many melodies going on at once—it's polyphonic and polyrhythmic."

Giedraitis himself started playing in 1987 with a group called Boka Marimba, did some part-time teaching for a few years, then took a yearlong trip to Africa in 1991. Now he's a full-time teacher who holds classes four days a week in his multiculturally decorated basement in Southeast Portland.

Interestingly, about two-thirds of Giedraitis' students are women, several of whom identify as lesbian.

Lea Shapiro was first inspired to join a marimba class when she saw a concert last year. "I saw so many middle-aged women doing



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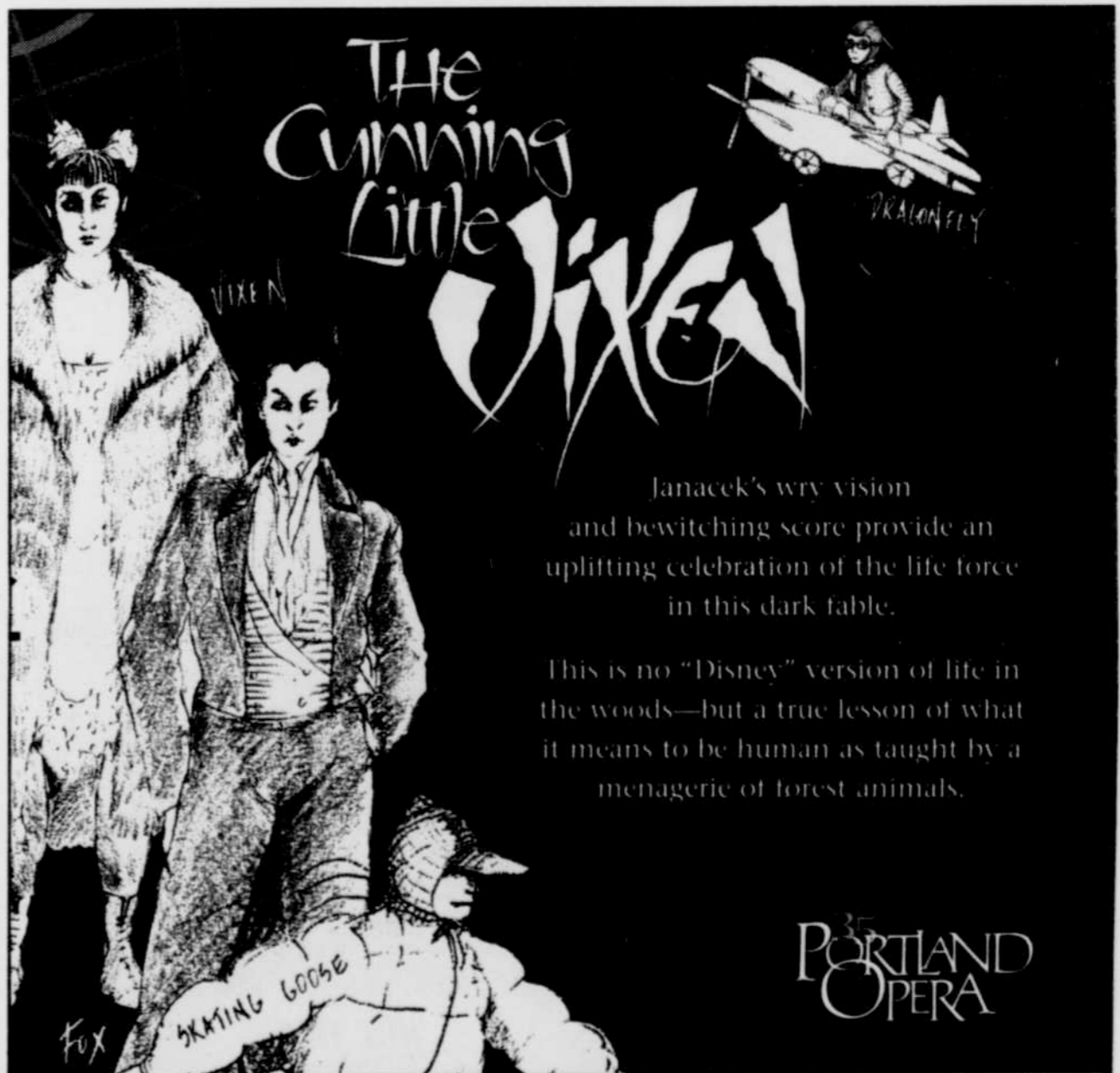
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