

Drumming along to cultural beats at Elon

Brett Gubitosi
Senior Reporter

Boom-pat, boom-pat!

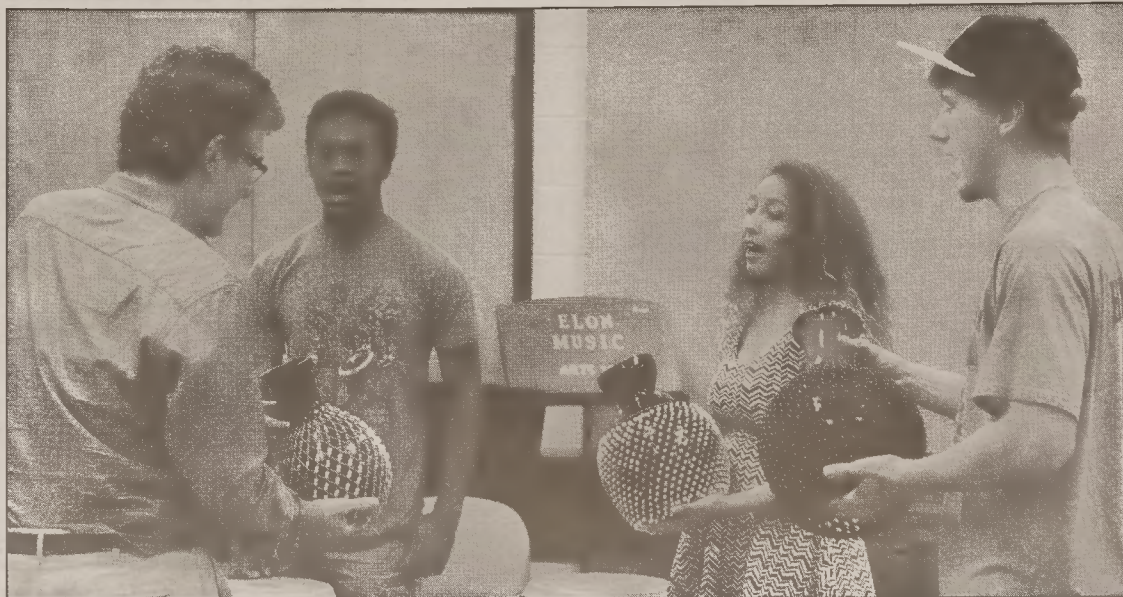
That sound is a drumbeat performed by Elon University students practicing for the "World Percussion Ensemble" concert.

This semester's performance will include instruments such as the chekere, dumdum, bongos, congas, clave, cajon and the cowbell, among others.

"World Percussion Ensemble" is a one-credit course that culminates with a live performance. The course is taught and directed by Jim Roberts, adjunct music instructor and university accompanist: in his seventh year directing the program.

The official title of this year's performance is "From Cuba to Brazil: Rhythms of the Caribbean and Beyond."

Students and faculty have the opportunity to enjoy these diverse cultural beats at Yeager Recital Hall 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 13.



"World Percussion Ensemble" adjunct instructor Jim Roberts teaches juniors Evan Gaskin, Danielle Williams and sophomore Tyson Glover.

Story behind the course

Roberts began playing drums at an early age and bought his first drum set at age 11. Intrigued by music, he earned his master's degree in performance at Northern Illinois University. After graduation, he became band director at Southern Nash High School in Bailey from 1985 to 1987.

Roberts said his perspective on cultural music changed in 1987, when his friend invited him to an African dance class.

"The second I walked into that class, I didn't understand it, but I knew I had to do it," he said. This began his journey of learning.

He quit his band directing job and joined the Chuck Davis African-American Dance Ensemble group. Although he was not an official member, he was a performing drummer for the group from 1990 to 1995. During this time, he met Khalid Saleem, a well-known African music specialist who was a faculty member at Duke University and performed in the American Dance Festival. He greatly influenced Roberts' passion for world percussion.

Roberts became aware of the unique cultural styles of drumming and ethnic music. His understanding and appreciation only increased further when he visited West Africa in 1991. While there, Roberts

took a two-week class on rhythm, dancing and songs of the culture.

Roberts said one thing he learned is in his studies is drumbeats and rhythms are related to a nation's language. Certain syllables in a language translate to music, such as the tals, a certain type of rhythm in Indian music. He wanted to share this knowledge about world percussion and spread cultural music diversity, so he began the Elon course.

"This class is the epitome of diversity," he said. "It's experiential learning, not just theory."

New experience for all

Roberts said one aspect of the program that makes it so special is its openness to students with or without any drum or musical experience, as well as non-music majors.

"Sometimes I train people from scratch," said Roberts. "I take anyone who has the willingness to play."

This semester's beats are from Afro-Cuban, Latin American, South American and Brazilian traditions. In previous years, the ensemble has performed drumbeats of the West African Gi Djembe style. One specific style the group is focusing on this se-

mester is Yoruba music, which originated in Nigeria and was adapted in Cuba as a result of slavery in the 18 and 19 centuries.

One section of the performance will feature drumbeats with call and response vocals in Eurabbie, a Nigerian language. Roberts acknowledged the difficulty of the performances, especially learning the vocal parts.

"It is not just going to morph into your mind," Roberts said. "It's something you have to work at."

Jon Metzger, professor of music, said there are 18 different performance ensembles over the course of the academic year. He enjoys attending their performances, including the "World Percussion Ensemble."

"This performance is especially [diverse] in the different world cultures and traditions that are represented," he said.

Junior Evan Gaskin is a strategic communications major with little musical background, but he has enjoyed the course's challenges. Prior to enrolling in the course, he was nervous about the live performance, but he feels more confident now.

"If you don't practice, you're not allowing yourself to [get] the most enjoyment out of it," he said. "It's nice to have a medium that allows you to access your inner

rhythm even if you don't have the technical skill."

Junior Danielle Williams has had experience with the viola and piano in the past, but playing percussion was new to her. She has embraced the challenge and relished the class' atmosphere.

"It's a good way to unwind and let frustrations out," she said. She was also impressed with her own drumming ability. "I never thought I would be kind of good at it."

Sophomore Christopher Greene usually plays the saxophone, but he said playing drums in the "World Percussion Ensemble" has improved his inner tempo, which he can apply to the saxophone. He was shocked when there was no sheet music for any of the music played in the class, but he learned to adjust to this difference.

This is sophomore Tyson Glover's second successive semester in the ensemble. He previously performed in drumlines and in band at Elon, but he had never done hand drumming, which is a vital component of the "World Percussion Ensemble." He said he is looking forward to performing.

"You want to give it your all when performing onstage," he said. "You want to give them a show. You practice to perform."

'Dancing in the Black Box' creates strong emotion, powerful imagery

Ally Feinsot
Senior Reporter

Nine pieces were performed at the Elon University dance program's fall dance concert, "Dancing in the Black Box" Nov. 6-8. The show included choreography by both students and faculty members as well as a guest artist, Helen Simoneau, who choreographed the final piece, "Flight Distance II." Each

DANCE REVIEW
"Dancing in the Black Box"
Our Rating:
★★★★

work allowed the audience to grasp a certain emotion that was expressed through the choreography, music and physical appearance of the dancers. The dances also portrayed specific themes, and while some were quite obvious, others had the audiences puzzling over what a specific piece implied.

The show opened with "2.5 Children," choreographed by senior Sophie McNeill,

which depicted women in the 1950s and their conformity to the role of a housewife. The dancers were dressed accordingly, with '50s-inspired hair and costumes.

Much of the number consisted of slow movement back and forth onstage, rather than a choreographed routine of leaps, kicks and pirouettes. A standout moment from the dance was an eerie yet graceful wave, which irked the character representing the rebellious women of the time period. As the piece's music faded and the lights dimmed, the dancer ran feverishly in a circle, attempting to push the remaining dancers' waving hands down.

Artistic Director and Assistant Professor of Dance Jen Guy Metcalf's piece, "Fragmentations," emphasized the extraordinary abilities of the dancers' en pointe. The piece had a darker tone with black costumes and dimmer lights and was full of fast-paced movement and impressive choreography, with each dancer perfectly in sync.

Sophomore Lucas Melfi executed

each move with control and showcased his strength and flexibility. It was easily forgotten that this difficult work was being performed en pointe as the trio effortlessly transfixed the audience with their abilities.

The use of upper-body strength was a key component in "From One to Seventeen," choreographed by senior Kate Phinney. At one moment, a dancer gracefully plunged to the floor into plank position, while another dancer lay over her.

Both moved as one body while the dancer in plank pressed down to the floor. The fluidity of the piece was seen through the dancers gracefully running across the stage in a semicircle. Simultaneously, a mysterious tone was felt, as it seemed like the dancers were running away from something or someone.

What was so intriguing about "Dancing in the Black Box" was the emotional responses from each performance vastly differed from piece to piece, such as

feelings of liberation, order, control and confusion. The intensity and drive of each dancer to perform to the best of his or her ability furthered the emotions felt throughout the performances.

A black box theater can often feel restricting, but the fluidity and eloquent movements of the dancers made the space feel infinite. The technical aspects of the performance were also a highlight of the showcase.

The dim lights throughout each piece allowed the audience to really focus on the intricate choreography and the portrayal of emotions, while the carefully orchestrated music correlated beautifully with each dance.

"Dancing in the Black Box" highlighted the incredible talent of Elon's dance program. Dance can tell stories, express emotions and explore various themes. Each of these components was portrayed in a small, intimate black space filled with adrenaline, strength and remarkable talent.