

Good vibrations!

By **Tamie Meck**

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Photos by Tamie Meck David Alderdice, third from left, performs with the Marimba Project during the 2015 Cherry Days festival. Marimbas provide "a quick way of getting people to have a good experience of playing music together," says Alderdice.

When it comes to music, David Alderdice wants his students to say "yes" to opportunity.

A world-class percussionist and session drummer, Alderdice has collaborated with musicians from throughout the world. He performs and records a long list of styles and with a long list of artists. A teacher, mentor and rhythmist, he also provides opportunities for saying yes.

"I want people to have this experience with music that elevates them and uplifts their human condition and takes them on a journey, and not just a vacation," says Alderdice. When they return, they are rested and transformed and apply what they've learned to their own life rhythms.

He and wife Arlyn Deva offer classes and workshops, as well as recording and other services, through their Embodying Rhythm School of Percussive Arts studio in Hotchkiss. Their goal is to deepen others' relationship with life through "the study and practice of all the universal applications that rhythm, percussion, music and dance have to offer." It's really catching on.

Alderdice also runs the Marimba Project in partnership with The Learning Council, the Blue Sage Center for the Arts, the Lamborn Center, and the Hotchkiss schools' music department. While the history of the marimba dates back hundreds of years, the Zimbabwean style ("think big wooden xylophones," says his website) originated in Africa

in the 1950s, and was designed for use as an ensemble instrument.

Alderdice mentors students of all ages and abilities. His older students often believe they aren't musical or rhythmical and were turned off to music at a young age through negative experiences. "Music is not something that if you missed it, you missed it," he says. Everyone has built-in rhythm and music. "We function through rhythm, by breathing and blinking and in our heartbeats."

Alderdice didn't start his own musical journey as a percussionist. While his parents enjoyed music, they weren't musical, but at about age 5 they asked him and his older brother to select an instrument. He selected the violin.

"I hated it," said Alderdice. "It took me years to get the sound right." Because it requires a combination of skills to make music, it can be difficult to learn. Despite the frustration, he loved the sound and vibration created by pulling bow across string, and played in school orchestras.

"You don't have to spend as much time to get those pristine sounds," (with marimbas), he said. Once basics are learned, other skills naturally follow, and learning becomes a joy.

In third grade he switched to drums, but he doesn't recall why, "besides I didn't like playing the violin. There was just something about it." He started on snare drum, then saved up for a drum set. At age 10 he started lessons with Francis Thompson of the Duke Ellington School of Arts in Washington, D.C. "That was a big chunk of my education."

His large high school in D.C. offered marching and jazz band, show choir, percussion ensemble, and a drum line.

And he began saying yes to every opportunity.

After high school he chose a community college over the bureaucracy, competition and debt of a major music school, and enrolled in Montgomery College in Maryland as a fine arts major. He took weaving, painting, drawing, sculpture and ceramics -- every visual arts class he could. "I figured it was all the same universal concepts."

During the day he practiced fine arts, but at home he applied those lessons to his instruments. For example, one art exercise calls for coloring a white page black and erasing the paint to expose the picture. On drums, he experimented in creating noise, then erased some of the noise to get to the music. An exercise of drawing a picture in only four lines turned into creating sound from silence with minimal strikes.

Black/white.

Sound/silence.

He studied dance to bring grace to his performance -- to still hit the instruments with force, but maintain balance and subtlety. As with centering the clay on the potter's wheel before pulling it up into a vessel, he sought that central point where music begins.

"The music is already in the drum and really, we're trying to tap into that sound, that vibration, and pull it out," says Alderdice. He begins with his students by asking where music begins, then helps them find that central point and start pulling music out of the instrument.

His instruments range from his first drum set and a full ensemble of marimbas, to ordinary "found" objects including pots and pans, water bottles, old telephones, and stacks and stacks of Bundt pans that, depending on the materials they're made of, fill the air with a range of sounds. "No one collects Bundt pans the way I do," Alderdice mused.

He teaches using the south Indian Solkattu method of learning rhythm which removes the technical exercises that stimulate the analytical part of the brain in order to free up the creative side of the brain. It's like learning to ride a bike by learning balance before figuring out how to operate pedals and gears: students learn rhythm first, then add mallets or drum sticks as an extension of the body.

Alderdice became more involved in local schools a couple of years ago while volunteering with Hotchkiss K-8/High School music director Jeannette Carey. While working with her high school students on a piece he composed for them to be performed exclusively on found instruments, he realized that, as he had when growing up in D.C., kids in the area don't have a lot of musical opportunities in this area to say yes to.

With support of The Learning Council, he and Carey created an all-ages community ensemble band, teaching parade, jazz and contemporary music along the line of the New Orleans Second Line traditions. "I was born in New Orleans," said Alderdice. "I have parading in my blood."

The band meets Mondays and includes a wide range of students, including middle school students just picking up their first instruments, and their parents, some of whom haven't played an instrument for years or decades.

He brings a great deal of creativity to the school programs, says Carey, whose

percussion section at last week's K-8 school fall concert at Hotchkiss High School featured 30-gallon trash cans, five-gallon plastic buckets, and pots and pans. His presence gives her more confidence to make unconventional instruments part of the program, and having him work with percussionists frees her to work with the reed section. That allows the entire band to progress more quickly.

Through his experience in high school line bands he brings visual dimensions to performances through synchronized gestures, added Carey. And his enthusiasm is contagious. He loves the kids and the kids love him and are always asking if he'll be at the next class.

For the past seven years he has been involved in the annual Celebrate the Beat dance performance at North Fork Montessori at Crawford. The residency program immerses students in classes for about two weeks and culminates in a high-energy community performance. Alderdice said he envisions a similar program with marimbas.

His most recent title is as Artistic Director of World Music at the Blue Sage Center for the Arts. This Saturday, Oct. 3, he will present the first of three World Music performances: "Tomchess -- Musical Journeys of a 21st Century Musician." The series is part of the non-profit's 2015-2016 concert series program.

Tomchess studies the oud, an 11-string lute-like instrument, the ney, an end-blown reed flute, both of Middle Eastern origin, and the morsing from South India; Charlie Parker Mertens will perform on upright bass and Alderdice will perform on frame drum.

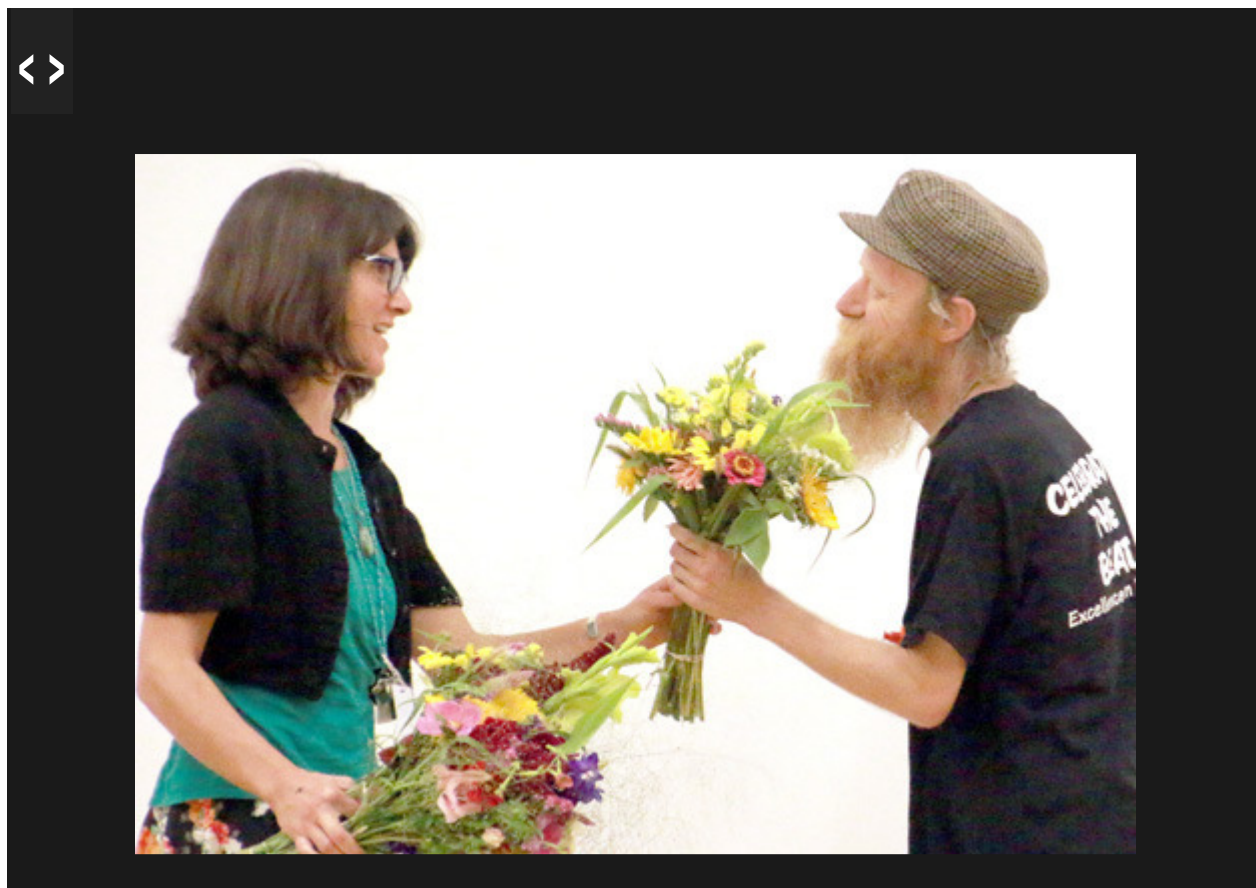
The Feb. 6 concert, World Music Salon, features a selection of Western Slope musicians studying World Music, each in a 10- to 15-minute set.

Percussionist and composer Jon Seligman, a college teacher with whom Alderdice has performed, collaborated and studied will join him and other musicians for the final concert on March 19.

Alderdice is also the house drummer for the Western Slope Concert Series, now in its 17th season. He and violist Stephanie Mientka will perform "Viola and Percussion: Exploring Middle Eastern With a Classical Twist" on Jan. 8 in Grand Junction and Jan. 10 at the Montrose Pavilion. He will perform Jan. 30 at the Avalon Theatre in Grand Junction and Jan. 31 at the Pavilion with the Celtic band Feast, one of many bands he has helped to start over the years.

Alderdice, who came to the area in 2003 and is also an organic gardener, calls his relation with the many people and organizations supporting his efforts a "reciprocal relationship." He and Arlyn recently were blessed with a son, which has provided him with a whole new world of inspiration.

"I feel blessed to be able to live here and make a living with music," he says. "Not just to teach and perform, but to just share what I love with the community."





- David Alderdice provides the beat for the 2015 Celebrate the Beat dance performance at North Fork Montessori School.



