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Young percussionists take turns making, learning music

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Ammishaddai Rivera plays the xylophone as members of the Creative Percussion Ensemble practice the theme song from "Star Wars" on Wednesday at Rogers Community United Methodist Church in Bradenton. The ensemble is putting on the finishing touches for a Friday night fundraiser to help pay for a three-day trip and performance in Orlando beginning March 11. PAUL VIDELA/Bradenton Herald

By VIN MANNIX — vmannix@bradenton.com

BRADENTON

The calypso sound of xylophones, marimbas, bells and drums filled the sanctuary at Rogers Community United Methodist Church.

While 8-year-old Lisa Williams sang "Marianne," other children played percussion instruments that filled the front of the church.

Suddenly, Lane Ruise, keyboardist and founder of the Creative Percussion Ensemble, waved for everyone to stop.

The 52-year-old fixed two boys on xylophones with a look.

"Fellows," Ruise said. "You're hitting that like you're working on the railroad. Play it softly. Sofftly."

Practice hadn't gone all that smoothly, but that's OK.

The ensemble was putting down the finishing touches for a Friday night fundraiser to help pay for a three-day trip and performance in Orlando beginning March 11.

"They're nervous and want to do their best," Ruise said. "Still a lot of work to be done."

The ensemble is a 3-year-old program that gives these first- through fifth-graders -- there is an older group, too -- a chance to try their hand at different instruments, including bongos, tambou

rines and more.

After every number, they rotated stations.

"It's fun," said Henry Robinson, 10, who likes flute best.

"Every time we change it teaches you about that instrument."

"I like drums, but I look forward to playing something else," said Jamari McCray, 9.

Lisa Williams like marimbas best, but enjoys mixing up her instruments.

"They have different sounds I can groove to," she said.

Which is what their director wants to hear.

Ruise has taught music for nearly 30 years, but his fervor for sharing that passion is evident.

"Whatever the setting, be it orchestra, ensemble, band, I want them to train to play any percussion instrument so when they leave here they're not just a drummer, but they're percussionists and they're familiar with different types of music," Ruise said.

During this week's practice, they played patriotic music, gospel, show tunes and pop to name a few genres.

"I want them to be well-rounded musically," Ruise said.

Ollie Adams appreciated his efforts, watching from a back pew.

A piano teacher, she has a son, Daniel, in the ensemble.

"He's giving them all an equal chance with each instrument," Adams said.

"It's not easy to accomplish. It has its challenges, but he's doing a nice job with all these kids."

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