

ROBESON EXTRA

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LUMBERTON, N.C.



Staff photo by Jared Lazarus

Steven Trinkle plays a tubaphone, an instrument he designed, for students at Union Chapel Elementary School.

Students take note of his classic lessons

By Gene Gorman

Staff writer

As Steven Trinkle played his trumpet, Ricky Barton kept tempo from his spot on the front row.

First, Ricky, a tiny third-grader, was a conductor waving his hand to the beat of the music.

PERSONALITY

Then Ricky joined Trinkle in an imaginary duet. His nimble fingers pumped the valves of an invisible trumpet.

'We need audiences that know what's good and what's bad.'

— Steven Trinkle

"That's right, kid," Trinkle thought as he peered under his music stand. "Now, keep it up."

A grant from the state Arts Council is paying for Trinkle to perform concerts at 17 elementary and middle schools in the county. Once a week, he works with brass players at three high schools.

Trinkle hopes that his performances, which include Bach, Handel and Stravinsky, will encourage young people to learn more about music. His approach to

See Personality, next page

teaching is as tough as the music he plays.

"I'm back here, and I'm playing music from the 1500s for them, explaining to them what it is and why it's important," Trinkle said. "They're going to become better people because of it."

Trinkle worries about the survival of classical music. He said the students he teaches have short attention spans. A long piece of music is an opportunity for listeners to lose themselves in thought, he says. But it's usually the listener who is lost.

Trinkle's students are like a boy at Pembroke Elementary who raised his hand, pointed to a keyboard on stage, and asked: "Can you make that do heavy metal?"

But other students asked questions about Trinkle and his trumpets. Are they expensive? Do you get tired? How did you learn how to play it?

Trinkle's sister handed her little brother a trumpet when he was 8, and he has been learning to play it for 36 years.

Trinkle has a collection of trumpets. One is nothing more than a mouthpiece with a long, plastic tube with a bell on the end.

"All this stuff is just plumbing," Trinkle says.

Growing up in Silver Lake, Kan., surrounded by cattle farms and wheat fields, little could distract Trinkle from his music.

"My sister and I have talked about this," Trinkle said. "There was nothing there. There were no trees. We were in sort of a hilly area, but there wasn't any great beauty there. We've always kind of thought that that helped us with our imaginations."

Trinkle moved to Red Springs three years ago when his wife, Ge-

nie Burkett, took a job teaching at Pembroke State University.

Trinkle was worried about coming to Robeson County, because he thought it would be difficult for him to make a living with his trumpet.

"But I'm booked solid," he says.

In addition to his program in the schools, Trinkle works part-time for Pembroke State University and Fayetteville State University. He plays trumpet with two symphonies, one in Greenville, S.C., and the other in Augusta, Ga. He gives private lessons and conducts a brass ensemble at PSU.

In between teaching and performing, Trinkle tries to practice everyday.

"In order to survive, you have to have a lot of self-discipline," he said. "I find the practicing tedious, but the solitude of it is good. It's creative. It's a chance to think and derive energy from those things that you continually fail."

Trinkle is a serious musician. He is also laid back, with a wit as quick as a well-played staccato note.

Ray Faircloth plays trumpet at St. Pauls High, one of the bands that Trinkle has been helping. At a

recent rehearsal, Ray was struggling to figure out some of the markings on his sheet music.

"I'm not really good with abbreviations," he said.

"Especially when they're in Italian," Trinkle shot back, without missing a beat.

Trinkle's sarcasm — along with his shaggy brown hair and goatee — are vestiges of the 1960s, when he was a trumpet-playing hippie.

He still has a Bohemian approach to life. He and his wife have found an abandoned artists' colony near Myrtle Beach, S.C., where they go camping.

Trinkle hopes that his appreciation for music and art, and the people who produce them, will come through in his performances with the county's students.

"If you expect to educate people, then you must use language and art forms that are serious, that are heartfelt," he says. "We're trying to build better audiences. We need audiences that know what's good and what's bad. Without that, somebody is just going to keep stuffing stuff down our throat. Pretty soon, we won't know the difference."