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Sharon Petrarca

Daily Times

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By Sharon Petrarca
Daily Times Staff Reporter

"It's like walking into a children's party and hearing all the different noises," says Gerard H. Heroux of West Warwick, describing the avant garde piece he composed and performs at the Spring 1988 Rhode Island Composers Festival.

Heroux conducted the orchestra from the Providence artists' collective-nightclub AS220, which performed his "1stHand/2ndHand" at Brown University over the weekend. The festival continues Wednesday in the University of Rhode Island Fine Arts Recital Hall at 7 p.m.

What makes Heroux's piece so different?

Some members of the orchestra turn on radios to various stations when Heroux motions to them, while others play instruments from music books.

"I wrote the piece because I was interested in layering textures of different sounds and using sources in various ways," says Heroux, 31, who also performs in various ensembles at AS220, where he is vice chairman of the governing board.

There are creative licenses for the orchestra members, who can choose whatever radio stations they prefer and change them at any time. There is room for them to improvise if they wish, he says.

Heroux chose to use children's music books with selections from kindergarten to seventh grade, he says, explaining he wanted a piece that would be fun to perform.

"I have always been fascinated by the radio and its creative possibilities. This piece might be called an essay in creative radio play," Heroux says.

"1stHand/2ndHand" got its name from the two sound sources used in the piece: performers with books render the "first hand" and performers with radios provide the "second hand," he says.

"I'm having fun with it," Heroux says.

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Daily Times photo

In addition to his activities at AS220, Heroux is choir director at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in West Warwick and a music teacher at the church's elementary school, Notre Dame Regional School. He writes and arranges liturgical music for church choirs and folk groups.

Heroux recently wrote an original musical for the South County Players Children's Theater. He would like to do more composing and conducting in the future and has independently produced two nationally distributed recordings of songs he wrote and performed, he says.

To pay his room and board, he is store manager at Axelrod Music Inc., Wakefield. He plays and gives instruction on French horn, trumpet and bass.

Heroux graduated from Rhode Island College in 1979 with a bachelor of science degree in music education. He currently studies composition with Geoffrey Gibbs at URI and attends workshops that interest him.

"There is a wide variety of music in this state," Heroux says, adding some of the brightest musicians from the area will perform in the Composers Festival.

"I hope the people come out. It's really for everyone," Heroux says.