

# Spotlight On

UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTH DAKOTA

## Rammel helps demonstrate the 'shape of sound'

**By Travis Gulbrandson**

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When most musicians want a new instrument, they go to the store and buy one, or have a professional builder make one to their specifications.

When Hal Rammel wants a new musical instrument, he makes – and sometimes invents – one himself.

Rammel was in Vermillion last week Thursday, June 13, to speak and play some of his creations at the opening reception of "The Shapes of Sound: Hearing with Your Eyes," an exhibition at the National Music Museum that features more than 40 unusual instruments.

"I was interested in approaching music in the way that I approached drawing, making a sculpture out of found objects, those kinds of things," Rammel said. "You take what you had, take what you discover, something that you come across by accident, and find form, shape and detail."

One instrument Rammel played Thursday was the "triolin," a nail violin he built in 1985 using an old chair leg he found in a Chicago alley and wood from the bottom of a

discarded dresser drawer.

"When I made my first nail violin, I didn't want to make a circular box," he said. "I thought a triangle was much more interesting. It was just a much more dynamic form."

Nail violins have been around since the 1700s and create sound when someone draws a bow across the nails, which have been hammered into place on a wooden box.

"It has very particular acoustics principles and limitations," Rammel said of the exotic-sounding instruments.

First, the bow has to be drawn near the top of the nail to elicit any noise. Also, a hammer is required if the musician wants to change the pitch of the nail.

"If you get it in too far, you have to back it off with a pliers, so ... you have some real challenges," Rammel said.

Rammel's "triolin" uses braising rods instead of nails.

"I decided at the beginning that I wasn't going to fix the rods at the back of the noisemaker, that they fit snugly in holes in the soundboard," he said.

After his work with the "triolin," Rammel decided to create an instrument using the



Hal Rammel plays an amplified palette at the opening reception of "The Shapes of Sound: Hearing with Your Eyes," an exhibition at the National Music Museum that is open through Sept. 3.

(Travis Gulbrandson/Vermillion Plain Talk)

same techniques, but which would make a louder sound.

That is when he began using amplified palettes, which use both wood and metal rods of different diameters and lengths to create varied sounds.

"They're not acoustic instruments – they have no resonator," Rammel said. "They're amplified through what is called a contact microphone, which changes vibrations into an electrical signal that can be run through some preamplification to enhance the presence that would not be audible to us – the low tones and higher tones that are in this instrument, but are not at an audible level."

The artist's palette was a "natural form" in terms of instrument-building, he said.

"It was perfect ergonomically," he said. "It's been refined over centuries, and I wanted a handheld instrument. It's also a really dynamic shape."

The amplified palettes aren't the only "dynamic shapes" on display as part of "The Shapes of Sound. There is a violin that looks like it could have been designed by Salvador Dalí, a drum shaped like a flamingo and cases filled with unusual harmonicas and whistles, among other items.

Dr. Cleveland Johnson, museum director, said the exhibit began as a result of a Dr. Seuss festival that was held in Sioux Falls.

"We managed to have a small presence there of instruments that were in the spirit ... of Dr. Seuss," he said.

At the same time, the museum was looking for a suitable summer exhibit, and these instruments seemed like a good place to start.

"There are so many amazing, interesting instruments in our collection, many of which are really hard to find a place for because the context isn't ever quite right," Johnson said. "And so, we found an opportunity to pull some of those instruments from the shadows, pull them out of storage and put them together in what you see before you."

Johnson added that he was glad Rammel could attend the opening and give visitors some insight into how these instruments came into being.

"Most of the names that you see appended to the instrument strips, most of those builders you see listed ... are just names to us," Johnson said. "How often do you get to meet a real instrument maker? If you're a specialist, if you're a player, maybe you get to

interact with someone every now and then.

"The wonderful thing about this relationship is that Hal, after a long career of building and exploring ... instruments, decided that his long oeuvre of instruments, his long career of building and creating beautiful, artistic instruments, really needed to find a permanent home," he said. "We're so thrilled that he chose the National Music Museum to get in touch with. We're happy his instruments have found a permanent home where they will rest for all eternity to be displayed and enjoyed, and shared with the public as often as possible."

Rammel said he has learned a lot from building instruments, in particular when they didn't turn out the way he had envisioned.

"I always tell my students to make something out of wood at home," he said. "Bring it in and we'll talk about what works and what doesn't work, because when things don't work and you examine that, you learn much more about it than if it worked."

"Making mistakes, making things that don't work is fantastic if you're not discouraged by it," he said.

### 1101 Announcements - Events

**CORNERSTONE CHURCH:** Located at the corner of Crawford & Cherry St. Celebration Service: Sunday - 9:00 or 10:30am; During school year: Impact for Kids (5-11), Wed - 6:00pm-7:30pm; For more information Check us out at Cornerstonesd.org or (605)624-8809.

**DALESBURG BAPTIST Church** 30503 466th Ave., Beresford, Pastor Darren Regehr. 9:45am, Sunday School; 11:00am, Morning Worship; Mid-week Services Wednesdays, 7:00pm. (605)253-2622.

**Dalesburg Lutheran Church:** 12 miles North of Vermillion on University Road. Worship Services 9:15 a.m. Sunday School 10:45 a.m. Website: www.dalesburglutheran.org

**Elk Point Baptist Church.** Sunday worship at 11:00am, Tuesday evening Bible study at 7:00pm. 101 North Green St., Elk Point, SD 57069. (605)222-1981

**FAITH FELLOWSHIP** of the Open Bible on Bypass 50 and Highway 19: Sunday Celebration 10:30 a.m. Pastor Tony Armbrust, 624-2921.

**FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH:** 401 Main Street, Makell, NE. Worship: 10am. Sunday School: 9am. Communion: 1st and 3rd Sundays. (605)658-0240 (home) (402)-692-3323 (church).

**Faith United Lutheran Church, ELCA,** 44874 303rd St/Po Box 168, Volin, SD 57072, (605)267-2277. **S u n d a y** Worship: 9:30am with Holy Communion the 1st & 4th Sundays. WOW Wednesday program beginning at 6:30pm for all children 3 yrs old - 7th grade, and confirmation classes for those in grades 8th & 9th.

**FIRST BAPTIST Church** Elmer "Sandy" Aakre, Pastor 624-6391 home, 624-4658 church. Time: 9:15 Sunday School, 10:30 Worship. Sunday Choir Practice, 11:50 a.m.

**GAYVILLE LUTHERAN Church:** Sunday School 10:15 a.m., Worship 9:00 a.m. Pastor Ralph Egbert.

**GOSPEL CHAPEL Church,** 708 Jessie St./Highway 12, Newcastle, NE. Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday worship 10:30 a.m.; AWANA Wednesday at 7 p.m., 402-355-2305. Pastor Chuck Myers, 402-355-1335.

**GRACE BAPTIST Church,** SBC, Pastor Steve Ford, 1102 E. Main. Phone 624-4949. Adult's and Children's Sunday School 9:30 a.m. Sunday Worship 10:45 a.m. Prayer Meeting Wednesday Night 7 p.m.

**IMMANUEL Lutheran Church,** Elk Point, SD: Worship Service 9:00 a.m., Sunday School 10:00 a.m.

## ANTIQU & COLLECTIBLE AUCTION

SATURDAY, JUNE 22, 2013 • 10 a.m.  
LOCATED: LAUREL, NEBRASKA – CITY AUDITORIUM  
Lunch Available



**AUCTIONEERS NOTE:** Join us for this interesting auction on June 22nd. Many more additional items that are not included in this listing will be sold as we have a load of boxes that have not been gone through as this ad is being prepared.

VISIT OUR WEB SITE FOR COMPLETE LISTING & PHOTOS  
WWW.MCHJAUCTIONEERS.COM

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Come early as we will sell box lots @ aprox 9:30 a.m.  
**ANTIQUES & COLLECTIBLES:** Oak China Hutch/Bookcase w/ beveled glass w/ 1 1/2" bevel on glass, single door, very ornate. (2)Oak High Back Chairs from lodge w/(2) oak matching side chairs. 3-Door Wooden Ice Box, painted. Oak Plant Stand. Slant Front Table Top Display Case, from general store. Oak Single Door Store Cabinet. Handmade Oak Gun Cabinet & Ammo Cabinet. Hat Box for gentleman's dresser. Oak Mission Style Foot Stool. Small Library Table. Primitive Rocker. Stools. Pigeon Hole Unit for roll top desk. Pine Carpenters Trunk. Primitive Wooden Tool Chest. New Haven & Ingraham Mantel Clocks, German Metal Helmet. Child Mannequin. Deco Boy Sail Boat & Dog Bookends. Palmers Candy Counter Jar. Friendly Tavern Laurel, Ne Trade Tokens. Enamelware. Wooden Duck Decoys. Wicker Doll Buggy. Cast Iron Door Stop. Aladdin Lamp & Lamp Shades. Hanging Light Fixtures. Old Light Fixtures. Crock Bowls. Mickey Mouse Drum Set. Cast Iron State Bank. Advertising Boxes/Crates Including: Minitowoc Products, Cudahy Packing Co., Yale Coffee, Iten Biscuit Co. - Omaha, Ne, Diamond Matches & Others. Sinton's Milk Bottle. 1926 & 1927 License Plates. Vintage Builders Woodwork Catalog (Farley & Loetscher Mfg.). Complete Works of Shakespeare 1914 Book. Zenith Shortwave & Standard Radio. Large Wooden Pulley. Metal Drawer Unit. Picture Frames. Glassware. Childs Tea Set. Tin Trucks & Toys. Tin Ceiling Tile. Collectible Wood Planes & Levels. Wooden Wall Telephone. 45 Records. Post Cards. PLUS Primitives of All Types.

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