

Concerts showcase talent of composer Bob Becker

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Composer and percussion virtuoso Bob Becker had a busy weekend.

On Friday evening, the Virginia Symphony gave the U.S. premiere of his "Music on the Moon," with a repeat Saturday night. On both occasions, Becker was on hand to tell the audience about the work.

Saturday afternoon, he and five other musicians presented an all-Becker concert at ODU's Chandler Recital Hall, part of the Virginia Waterfront International Arts Festival.

The concert was an impressive demonstration of the talents of a man who has been called one of the world's great percussionists. Becker performed in all but one of the works on the program, and fully justified his reputation. The energy he brought to his performances was striking, especially considering his calm, outward demeanor on stage.

One had to admire the precision, beauty and security of his and his colleagues' playing.

All the music was written since 1990, so this was a unique opportunity to sample a truly contemporary composer. Becker's work reflects multiple influences — Eastern, especially Indian music, Minimalism, Impressionism. Color and texture are important aspects of his work. The often-short duration of sound produced by the percussion instruments is contrasted with the sustained and deep tones of the piano.

CONCERT REVIEW

Bob Becker, percussionist, at Chandler Recital Hall, ODU, Saturday afternoon.

At other times, one can hear "celestial" sonorities.

The form of the music is more difficult to appreciate, so first-time listeners might feel as if they are drifting along with the music. Becker relies on recurrent sequences and melodic ideas to give the audience points of reference.

Of the pieces performed, "Mudra" and "There is a Time" were notable. Both were among the longer works on the program and were originally written to accompany choreography. Perhaps this accounted for their highly dramatic nature.

"Cryin' Time" was the setting of a rather disturbing poem, in which the composer tried to evoke the feeling of a country-and-western song. It featured soprano Barbara Hannigan, whose clear tone and accurate intonation were welcome.

Also doing outstanding work in support of Becker were pianist Nikki Stoia, marimbist Christopher Norton, percussionist Rob Cross and timpanists John Feddersen and Eric Schweikert. All contributed strongly to a fascinating and unusual concert.