Drums galore at beat bash

Percussion Extravaganza
Percussive Arts Society
Australia
Elder Hall
Saturday, January 11

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It’s doubtful if the Elder Hall, in its 100-year history, has ever before played host to as many percussive instruments as it did for this concert.

There were drums of every size: bongos and congas, pottery goblet drums called “darbukas”, side, snare and tenor drums, tambourines, Ghanaian bells and huge bass drums, plus cymbals, gongs, marimbas and vibraphones.

It was the closing concert of a week-long event featuring 16 academic teachers, and around 80 students, from Australia and abroad. The concert began with Morning, by Gary France, an American academic and musician based at the Australian National University. His sound portrait utilised about 40 students with cymbals, gongs and xylophones placed throughout the hall and on stage producing a groundswell of softly shimmering and rustling sounds portraying the breaking of dawn.

A packed program followed, employing every conceivable percussion producer. It was surprising to hear such expression and tonal variety obtained solely from percussive instruments. The Ultimate Big Jam finale with over 60 players had France conducting huge rolling, multiple and accelerating Mexican waves of drums back and forth across the stage to stunning effect.