



Everything Michigan

## 'The language of the drums': Percussionists learn jazz-drumming techniques during summer camp at Western Michigan University

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**William R. Wood | Kalamazoo Gazette**  
By



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Keith Hall instructs 30 students during the Keith Hall Summer Drum Intensive at WMU's Dalton Center.

**KALAMAZOO** — The Western Michigan University multi-purpose room was ringed with 30 drummers and drum sets spaced about 1 to 2 feet apart.

When the drummers played in unison — “spang-a-lang, spang-a-lang, spang-a-lang” — you could feel the notes in your chest.

“Most of all, have fun,” instructor Keith Hall said to the students. “And play with what?” “Confidence!” the students yelled.

Hall pressed on. “I don’t hear you.”

“Confidence!” the students yelled louder.

This was the Tuesday morning master class of the Keith Hall Summer Drum Intensive, a week-long camp that teaches jazz drumming.

There are many jazz camps in the nation and some rock drumming camps but few like Hall’s camp that specialize in jazz-drumming technique. Hall is a music instructor at WMU.

People will be able to hear the 30 jazz drummers for free when they play for the public at 8 p.m. Thursday and 9 p.m. Friday at the Union Cabaret and Grille, 125 S. Kalamazoo Mall.

### Keith Hall Summer Drum Intensive

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Keith Hall conducts a group session at the Summer Drum Intensive

The public exposure is one of the perks of participating in the camp.

"Try to speak the language of the drums like you speak the language of English," Hall told his students in the master class. "Try to be free with your drumming. Wait —some of you are slouching like crazy already. Sit up straight. Focus. Think about what's coming next."

Hall's camp, which costs \$425, started with six drummers four years ago. Hall advertised for the second year of his camp and got 13 students. Last year, he added dorm facilities for out-of-towners and a cafeteria component to the camp and got 20 students. Now, the current 30 students is the most the camp can handle, Hall said.

"It is insane, but beautiful at the same time," Hall said with a chuckle about the student response.

Students in the camp range from 12 to 58 years of age. All are from Michigan. Many students can hardly see above their drum sets.

"I play rock music mostly, but this jazz drumming helps improve my technique," said Jon West, 14, of Portage, as the master class ended.

Bill Fulton, 58, the senior member of the group, is a hospital nurse who plays the drums as a hobby.

During the week, the students are split into groups of five people and learn rhythm, technique and how to play together as a drum choir. The camp has



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Five of 30 students drum in unison as they follow Keith Hall's group instruction during the Keith Hall Summer Drum Intensive at WMU's Dalton Center.



eight staff members who help give the students individual attention.

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## IF YOU GO

**What:** Public performances from the Keith Hall Summer Drum Intensive, a jazz drumming camp.

**When:** 8 p.m. Thursday and 9 p.m. Friday, Union Cabaret and Grille, 125 S. Kalamazoo Mall.

**Aspects of note:** On Thursday, 30 student drummers will perform, one after another, with a jazz band and vocalist. On Friday, individual drummers will be featured as well as six five-member drum choirs.

**Cost:** Free.

**Contact:** 269-384-6756.

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Alex Snyder, 15, of Kalamazoo, third from left, plays together with 29 other students drumming in unison as they follow Keith Hall's instruction during the Keith Hall Summer Drum Intensive at Western Michigan University's Dalton Center.

Hall also just wrote a book, "Jazz Drums Now!" which he has been using at the camp. The book is so new that the students are some of the first people to use it.

After classes on Tuesday, students gathered, put their drum sticks away and enjoyed an evening at the Airway Lanes bowling facility in Portage.

"The students need one night to have fun or else, after all this instruction, they would be destroyed," Hall said.

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