

"WEST AUSTRALIAN" - 25/2/87



Gary France: "Percussionist's instrument is anything you can hit."

Teacher for jazz percussionists

FROM Room 24 the gentle music of an Oriental percussionist dances from a desk-top tape recorder.

Favourite manuscripts grip a music stand and an array of home-made rattles, mallets and shakers fill a wooden cabinet.

They are the pride of American percussionist Gary France, the new artist-in-residence at the WA Conservatorium of Music.

"A percussion instrument is anything that you can hit. From a piano to my desk top," he said.

His role this year is to teach jazz. His students, aged 13 to 30, including members of the WA Youth Jazz Orchestra, will learn about various styles of drumming, including Dixieland, pop, contemporary fusion and the music of the avant garde.

Though his appoint-

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ment is a first for the conservatorium, France said it was very common in the U.S. to have jazz specialists in each school district.

The 29-year-old from New York is keen to take percussion classes at Perth schools and to perform at local venues. Revealing a folder of plane tickets, he says he is also planning workshops and concerts in New Zealand and the Eastern States.

Mr France says his introduction to Perth has been "wonderful," though he misses one of his favourite percussion instruments, the marimba.

"It's a huge xylophone that you play like a piano with four mallets," he explained. One of his U.S. sponsors is making

plans to ship a marimba to Perth.

He says that WA's music industry seems very contemporary in its attitudes and abilities. "I've seen many good players and some very knowledgeable people here," he said.

France has a bachelor's degree, majoring in percussion performance and music education. At the North Texas State University, where he was studying last year for a Master's degree in orchestral performance and jazz theory, he was also teaching percussion and directing a jazz band.

He began drum lessons at the age of eight. Since then he has managed a hi-fi and stereo shop, travelled with a circus, promoted concerts, performed in China and organised a festive percussionist's day — an exercise which he hopes to repeat during his stay in Perth.