

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Concert to demonstrate joy of drums

By Bernadette Cruise

THE FACE that has launched a thousand drum beats belongs to Gary France, head of percussion at the Canberra School of Music. As he beams at us from the cover of the Canberra Symphony Orchestra's brochure, he prepares to unleash still more in *Bang that Drum*, the third concert in the 2001 subscription series.

James Sedares will conduct while France is the soloist in William Kraft's *Timpani Concerto* on Wednesday and Thursday at Llewellyn Hall. This all-American program also includes Gershwin's *An American in Paris* and a double serve of Aaron Copland with *Appalachian Spring* and *Fanfare for the Common Man*.

Two excited students, who are also members of the CSO, are looking forward to the forthcoming concert. France, as soloist, will not be playing in the orchestral body, so they will get the opportunity to take over the percussion section.

One of them, Mary Broughton, feels ready for the challenge. "It's nice having an all-American program with pieces that are fun to play," she says. "Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man* gives me a great



big timpani part. I'll be able to make a lot of noise."

Mary left Queensland to take up post-graduate studies at the school.

Lisa Lai is an international student from Taiwan who is completing her second year of study at the school. Lisa has been allocated the car horn part in Gershwin's *An American in Paris* and this is her first concert with the CSO.

France explains the background to Kraft's *Timpani Concerto*.

"Although William Kraft is such a prolific composer, he delayed writing this work because he didn't feel he could bring the timpani to the front of the orchestra properly," France says. "He continued to refine his ideas until he came up with the answer."

Inside France's office nestle six beautiful timpani, their mellow calf-skin contrasting with the gleaming metal supports.



Scholl of Music head percussionist Gary France with students, left, Jacinta Dunlop, Mary Broughton and Lisa.

Picture: Martin Jones

"These timpani were purchased by the ANU last year and I flew to Holland to pick them out," he continues. "The covered bowls are made in one piece. They

ring very much like an inverted church bell. Because of the irregularities in the skin, a richer, warmer tone is produced."

The composer scored the three-move-

ment concerto for standard strings and woodwind, heavier brass and a generous ratio of percussion instruments.

"I'll be very busy as six timpani are used so you'll see me flying from one to another," France says.

France can't resist the urge to touch the luxurious skins.

"I start off playing with special gloves — rather like Michael Jackson's — and I have special materials for each finger. Then off come the gloves and I play with bare fingers, then different types of stick. It's quite a visual feast."

An additional audience surprise is in store as, in accordance with the composer's instructions, France places music scores on the drums while playing.

Fascinating all this will be to most patrons, but what of the few who still feel the need to cover their ears?

"You know, I think part of the reason people come to see percussionists is that they love to witness the flamboyance, exuberance and sheer joie de vivre of the players."

Canberra Symphony Orchestra presents *Bang that Drum* at Llewellyn Hall on October 3 and 4 at 8.15pm.