



Music Goes Elementary

BY LANIE JONES
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The strangest sounds have been coming from Classroom No. 4 at Fremont Elementary School this fall.

Screeches and howls. Bell-like sounds from a metal garbage can turned upside down and topped with squiggles of welded metal. The cloppety-clop noise of a rubber mallet striking a homemade wooden marimba.

Since school began in September, the Old Town school's kindergarten through sixth graders have been learning to build and play musical instruments.

Not clarinets and violins, but things like the garbage can, which the children call Godzilla.

Or an aeromembranophone, a relatively simple instrument that any child can make. And a lot of children in experimental musician Jonathan Glasier's class have done so.

The aeromembranophone consists of a balloon stretched across a lid from a peanut-butter jar. The young musician blows on it, letting the air between the jar top and the balloon vibrate.

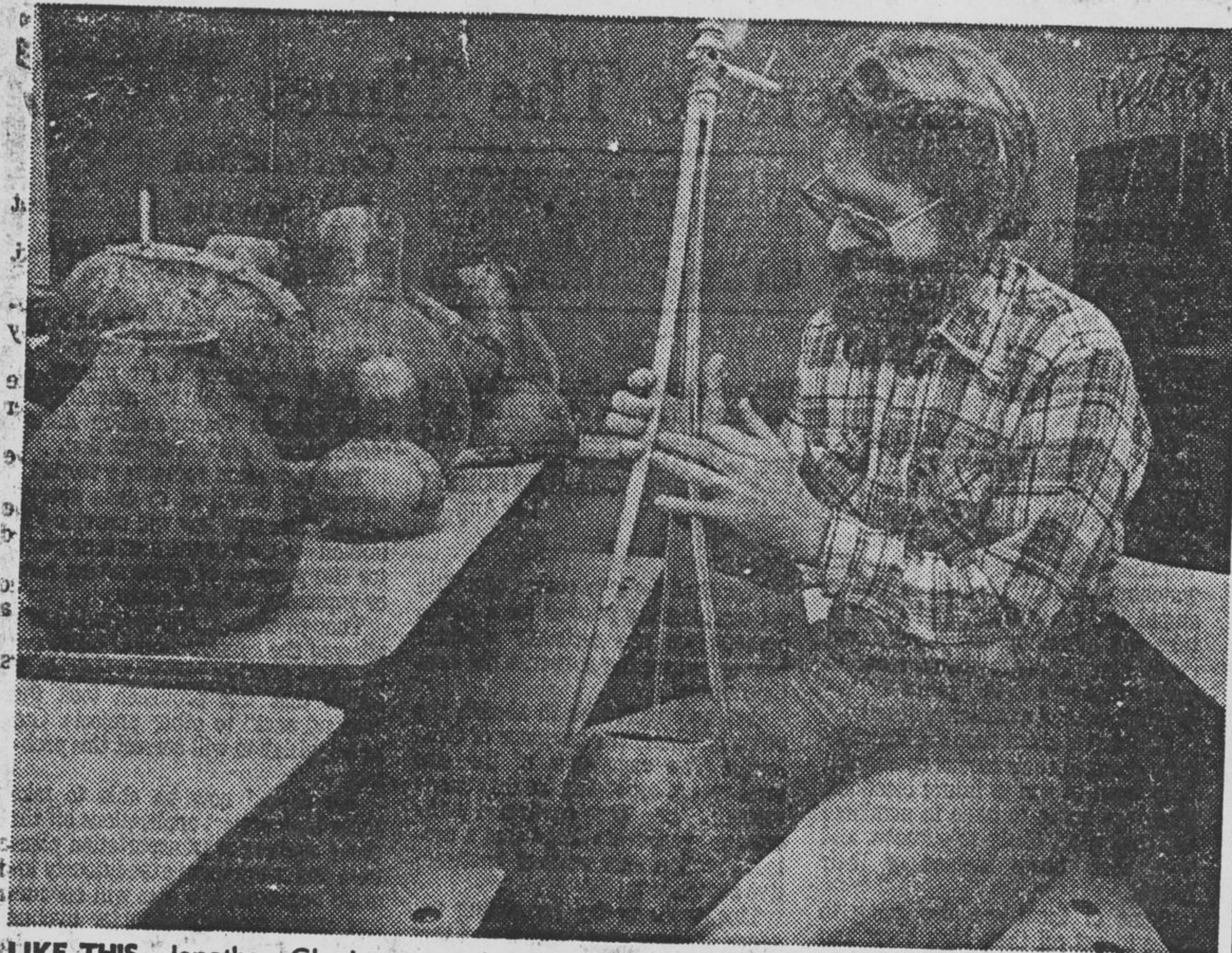
Billy Dolan, 8, was making one Monday. He was clearly delighted as he finished the instrument and Glasier demonstrated the result. With Glasier blowing, it made what Billy called "a sort of screeching sound."

Then it was Billy's turn.

"Blow on it now," Glasier directed. Billy tried, but at first there was no sound.

He then put his mouth slightly above the balloon and blew. And, sure enough, between breaths the classroom filled with a strange noise somewhere between a train whistle and a screech.





LIKE THIS—Jonathan Glasier, experimental music instructor at Fremont school, tries out a stringed "ektara." At left are other gourd instruments in various stages of completion.
Times photo by Robert Lachman

STUDENTS MAKE THEIR OWN KIND OF MUSIC

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He demonstrated the difference by first plunking with a mallet on a home-made xylophone — pieces of galvanized steel pipe resting on foam rubber — then giving the marimba a swack or two.

The sound from the xylophone — called a tubalong — is a "wet" sound, Glasier said. It is metallic, but more important it echoes, whereas the sound from the marimba, is a duller, wooden sound — "dry."

Before the year is done the children will be making and learning to play stringed instruments.

So far they have made balloon flutes — pieces of bamboo with a single hole punched in the middle and the ends tied closed with scraps of balloons.

There are other instruments, too. Drums made of hollowed-out gourds covered with rawhide, the rawhide affixed with carpet tacks.

And already some gourds have been turned into strange stringed instru-

ments — Fremont School versions of similar African and Central American instruments.

There is the kalimba, for instance, a metal comb-like piece attached to a hollow gourd. The metal forks are spring steel. "You can just take apart an old rake and get spring steel," Glasier advised.

He smiled when asked if his students were now likely to take apart any rake sitting around the house that was not in use.

The point of this year-long exercise, Glasier explained, is to get the children at this San Diego "magnet" integration school excited by music.

"I want them to get the idea that, 'Well, I can do it myself,' that you can make instruments from scrap, from salvaged materials, very inexpensively."

The children seem to have gotten the idea. "It's fun to make instruments," said Teresa Hampsted. "I just like it."

Amy Strantmann, 9, enjoys "to just try out the sound and see what the sound is." Especially, Amy said, she likes the mallets the children were building Monday.

This is indeed an unusual music class. A traditional music instructor comes to Fremont one day a week to teach those children with a special interest in music how to play conventional instruments like the trombone and clarinet.

The class was made possible by a \$3,000 grant from the Mott Foundation of Flint, Mich. That is paying Glasier's salary for two hours every weekday through December, but he said he enjoys the job so much he plans to continue through the school year.

In addition, \$500 was provided to cover materials. It is a small sum which Glasier and his students hope to expand by \$1,000 next Saturday by selling some of their instruments in Old Town's Squibob Square.

The sale — from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday — explains why Glasier has been working overtime this week and last and why his classes this week are working extra hard in instrument production.

As their 45 minutes of instrument-making ended Monday and it was time for another class, the six children let out a collective sigh of protest.

It was just too much fun to quit. Thomas Tracy, 8, summed up. "... Math and stuff ... I hate that. This I like. It's fun."