

IN THE NEWS

SCHOOLS

High school percussionist makes his dream come true

BY JESSICA ZUMMO
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Vernon High School's music director, Max Taylor, has always been proud of his students. Yet, this year, one particular student has far exceeded Taylor's expectations.

Brandon Ilaw, a 17-year-old

percussionist, has been accepted into the prestigious Boston Conservatory, located in Boston, MA.

Though the senior finds that he is more at home in the percussion section than anywhere else on stage, this has not always been the case. Unlike other future music majors his age who have been studying their instrument for the

better part of their lives, Ilaw, who will be graduating this year, has only been playing percussion for a year and a half. In that short time, he has established himself as a prominent musician in his field.

Ilaw's music career began at the age of four when he was trained as a classical pianist. After winning first prize at annual county competitions in piano for nine consecutive years, as well as having the opportunity to perform at Carnegie Hall's Weill Hall, his musical horizons continued to grow. Ilaw fell in love with all instruments and acquired a high level of proficiency on many stringed instruments including the cello, string bass, guitar, and violin.

Upon entering high school, he took every opportunity he could by playing with virtually every music ensemble offered within the school from playing guitar in the Jazz Express to playing in the pit orchestra for VTHS's spring musical productions. As a junior Ilaw auditioned for and was accepted into the NJSMA Region I Chorus as well as the NJMEA All-State Chorus.

However, about a year and a half ago, Ilaw truly found his niche: percussion. Whether he is behind a marimba, has a pair of crash cymbals in his hands, or is pounding away at the timpani, it is apparent that percussion is Ilaw's true passion.

After only two months of playing mallets, Ilaw auditioned for the All-Sussex County Honors Band

and was accepted as the first chair mallet percussionist. Since then, Ilaw has studied under the tutelage of Dr. Kenneth Piascik and has made incredible progress in this short amount of time, going from a person with absolutely no percussion experience to a musician that has performed with some of the top student ensembles in New Jersey.

After only twelve months, Ilaw has had the honor of being accepted as the 2nd chair mallet percussionist in the NJMEA All-State Band, as well as the 1st chair mallet percussionist in the North Jersey Area Band, NJSMA Region I Band, and the NJMEA All-State Orchestra.

Earlier this year, Ilaw auditioned at leading conservatories in order to continue his musical edu-

cation in the future. All of his efforts and hard work culminated in his acceptance to The Boston Conservatory where Brandon will be extremely fortunate to study under Samuel Z. Solomon as well as world-renowned marimbist Nancy Zeltsman.

When asked about his thoughts on the upcoming years, Ilaw simply said, "To study with others who love music just as much as I do...it's a dream come true. I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world."

Taylor will miss his extraordinary student. "Our department has been truly blessed to have had the opportunity to work with such a talented and wonderful student. We wish him nothing but the best as he continues his musical journey."

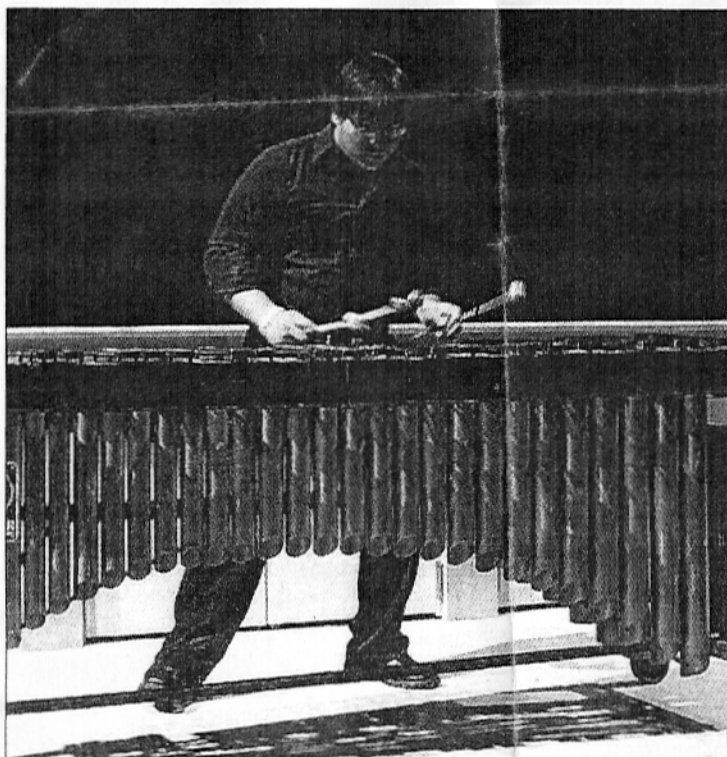


PHOTO COURTESY OF JEFF BRATH

Brandon Ilaw playing the marimba, an instrument he quickly mastered and played in some of the top student ensembles in New Jersey.