

Schick / continued

"Freiburg is a beautiful city," he says. "It was great to be in the Black Forest and be so close to other European countries. It was a fascinating experience musically because other countries approach the playing of the same instrument in different ways — a slight change of the angle of the wrist, for example."

"I learned techniques I would not have learned had I stayed in an American institution. That's not to say it was superior, but it was just a different approach."

Soon the Fulbright year was over, and it was time to come home and look for a job. Schick had finished his degrees. And his wife, Wendy, who, according to the professor, "plays a major role in all of this," went to work on her master's degree in deaf education in Washington, D.C.

"I spent that time looking for jobs, using our savings and practicing like crazy. There are wonderful things about not having a job — like practicing 10 hours a day."

In 1983 a job offer came from CSUF. Schick needed a job and claims he would have gone anywhere.

"No doubt about it, we were broke, but when I think back on the good fortune I had in getting this job as opposed to some others, I feel very lucky. I have good students, good colleagues and a very supportive university structure."

This young professor sees CSUF as a medium-sized university that can offer the best of both worlds. Its global outreach is "fantastic" with ensembles in the School of Arts and Humanities touring all over the world.

And yet, it's not a university with 65,000 students, so it's possible for music students to have one-on-one instruction with a professor from the time they are freshmen. Students at much larger universities study with graduate assistants for two years, unless they are extraordinary talents.

"It's extremely important when students are choosing a school to know with whom they'll be studying," Schick explains, "because that's the person who will have more to do with the success or failure of their college career than anyone else."

With Steven Schick, teaching is a "family affair." He says it's one-on-one over the course of years and explains, "The student who played a recital last night, I've met with him every week for the last three-and-a-half years, so we know each other. I don't just have some passing interest in him."

As a matter of fact, Schick sees most of his students every day of the week, whether they're rehearsing in an ensemble, practicing a lesson or performing in a recital. He admits that the one-on-one relationship is very time-consuming but believes that's the only way students can learn to play an instrument.

"My job is to get students to love playing music," he says, "instead of playing just because they're fated to play the clarinet or the drums. A great deal of passion is involved in playing music on any instrument. The challenge is to let that passion bloom so students cease to be music majors and become musicians."

In 1988, Schick's own performing career included about 45 concerts. During his recitals, he plays as many as 40 instruments, including the kettle drums, assorted gongs, rattles and blocks, along with some familiar marching band instruments. Always on the leading edge, Schick plays a demanding repertoire of contemporary percussion music or, as he prefers, "the latest stuff."

"I take performing very seriously," he says. "It's a part of me that's essential — not only for my own personal well-being, but for teaching as well, because students need a role model."

"They need to know that I have to practice too — that practicing and learning don't stop when you get out of school. It's important to show students that a performer of an instrument who teaches at a university doesn't sit back and say, 'Well, I've got my gig now; I don't need to do anything else.' It's very important for me to be an active performer. I cannot separate the two."

Discovery . . .

He's performed in concert halls, traveled the globe and made many discoveries. The most memorable discovery was made in Poland.

"I imagined Warsaw to be as different from Clear Lake, Iowa, where I grew up, as Mars," says an enlightened Steven Schick. "... and then I met a percussionist who's my age. We had never met before, never corresponded, and immediately it's as though we've grown up next door to each other because we have this enormous musical link in common. It's an incredible connection between two people separated by innumerable boundaries — political, communication, etc. We had a fantastic time and our friendship continues."