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## **Local Composer Plans Musical Project of Towering Proportions**

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*Beacon resident Joseph Bertolozzi has his sights set on playing what could be the largest instrument in the world – the Eiffel Tower.*



Bertolozzi plans to use the Eiffel Tower as a giant percussion instrument

When Joseph Bertolozzi thinks about music, he thinks big. Big as in massive pipe organs and 60-piece gong sets. Bigger still is his most recent musical endeavor, a project that changed the definition of “heavy metal” for the entire Hudson Valley: turning the Mid-Hudson Bridge into a giant percussion instrument.

If that isn't big enough for you, the Dutchess County composer now has his sights set on an even higher target: the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France. Bertolozzi is currently working on a proposal to use one quadrant of the massive global icon for a live composition, complete with a small army of percussionists to help him pull it off.

You may remember stories from 2009 about the bold musician who harvested the clicks and clangs of mallets, hammers, and drumsticks hitting different parts of the bridge to create a radical new kind of music. With his project [Bridge Music](#), Bertolozzi literally turned the local landmark into the largest musical instrument the world has ever seen, compiling the raw percussive sounds into a harmonious blend of engineering and art for a studio album.



Joseph Bertolozzi climbing into the Mid-Hudson Bridge to record his album in 2007

“Everything has a vibrating property, and everything makes sound,” says Bertolozzi. “Giant structures are no different. I knew that if I could go up and play on the bridge stairs, suspension ropes, and handrails and catalog those sounds, I could compose music for it like I would for an entire orchestra.”

Although the bridge is his most recent instrument, he hasn’t always performed on such a grand scale. In fact, Bertolozzi began his music career at age nine after a day at home listening to biographies of famous composers. He knew instantly that he knew he wanted to be a composer. His parents sent him to piano lessons, and by the third lesson he had already composed a melody.

It was the first of many for Bertolozzi, who went on to learn the pipe organ and perform throughout the area in high school. His talents took him to Vassar College to study his dream, and eventually on the road as a concert organist. After a few years of travelling, Bertolozzi decided that he needed to take a break to focus on composition.

“I like performing, but composition is what interests me,” Bertolozzi says. “To me, writing music is manipulating textures and colors and trying to make something I feel is interesting and worthy to listen to.”

With that experimental mindset Bertolozzi took on new projects that ended up all over the world, from a concert piece played by the United States Military Academy band at West Point to an incidental score to “Waiting for Godot,” used at the 1991 Festival Internationale de Café Theatre in Nancy, France.

When his wife Sheila gave him a gong as a gift in 2004, it sparked something new in Bertolozzi. “I never thought about gongs and percussion before, but the more I did the more I loved it,” he says.

Bertolozzi collected an array of different percussive instruments to experiment with, from Chinese wind gongs to Turkish cymbals and even a giant symphonic gong from Canada. Before he knew it, he had over 60 instruments in his Beacon home. “I guess I might have

gone overboard,” he laughs. His interest soon turned into a new project, The Bronze Collection, with which he put his extensive collection to use.



A family enjoys a Bridge Music Listening Station on the Mid Hudson Bridge

It was only a few years later that Sheila inspired him to set his sights on something a bit larger. “One day, my wife took a mock swing at a poster of the Eiffel Tower hanging in our home,” he recalls. “I knew right away that I had to play it.”

Though he was excited, he knew his limitations. Bertolozzi had never been to Paris, and didn’t even speak French. He began thinking of a more local solution, and landed on the Mid-Hudson Bridge.

When he came to the powers that be with his idea for using the bridge as an instrument, it raised more than a few eyebrows. “The people at the Bridge Authority and the Dutchess and Ulster County governments deserve a lot of credit. They took what they thought was a crazy idea and said, ‘Let’s see what this crazy guy can do!’”

Although Bertolozzi had originally planned to gather a group of percussionists to perform live on the bridge, the cost was high and funding was low. He finally settled on collecting sound samples of himself “playing” the bridge and compiling them into an album, entitled Bridge Music.

The album was an instant hit with locals and national international audiences alike, attracting media attention and hitting #18 on the Billboard Crossover Charts. Today, you can hear Bridge Music at personal listening stations on the Mid-Hudson Bridge from April through October.

Now that Bertolozzi has mastered the art of playing beams, railing, and girders, it’s time for him to make noise internationally.

“I’ve showed it can be done so it’s time to pursue the original inspiration, the Eiffel Tower,” Bertolozzi says. “There was never a model for this. I always had to work from scratch, but now I have something to show people.”



Bertolozzi bowing the bridge's cross frame

Bertolozzi is currently working with Dutchess County Tourism to make the dream happen, and he is confident that it will. “It’s interesting on so many levels; musical, engineering, acoustic, scientific, public arts,” he says. “There are people in so many demographics who would be fascinated by a project like this, and I don’t see why it wouldn’t happen.”

And if it doesn’t happen? “It’s okay if it never comes to anything,” says Bertolozzi. “But it’s fun and great, so why not try? I’ve proved that a person can do this, and since I have this momentum I just want to keep it going.”

“I was lucky and hard working enough to make this happen, and a collateral benefit is that I was able to do it in my own hometown,” Bertolozzi continues. “I shared it with people I know and grew up with, and they were proud.”

“We can never say what’s next in the music world, but to me it’s important to have made a difference to the listeners in my own time and my own place.”

*For more information on composer Joseph Bertolozzi, visit his Web site at [www.JosephBertolozzi.com](http://www.JosephBertolozzi.com).*