Music workshop inspires students
Tabitha Carranza, Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, February 26, 2018 3:36 pm

Music students had the opportunity to attend a composition and performance master class from one of music’s greatest composers Jack Van Zandt.

Van Zandt spoke about the Congo Pygmy people and their ritualistic performances of song and dance, and how it inspired his own style.

“It’s made me think about the function of music in human society, whereas in Western music we’re taught to write music for instruments in a concert,” Van Zandt said.

The master class was held last Thursday in the Music Recital Hall.

Van Zandt showcased a composition he wrote that was inspired by this type of music.

The performance used the sound of unique instruments including two toy pianos, a marimba and a vibraphone to create a tribal and dramatic piece.

Van Zandt stated his goal for the master class was to inspire students to come out of their comfort zone to try something new.

“I want them to be interested in the music of the world, not just the music of dead white European men, but the music of culture,” Van Zandt said.

Students also got the chance to perform personal pieces during the two-hour session, while also receiving advice from Van Zandt.

Third-year music education student Jack Keough played an original composition titled “December” on the piano.

Keough stated the soft and romantic piece was inspired by the time in which he wrote it.

“I wrote this about two years ago Keough said.

“So it’s actually kind of interesting looking back at it, because I was going through a little bit of a rough time.”
Van Zandt praised Keough’s piece saying his work was fit for both film and television.

Fourth-year performance student Joshua Tessler showcased a composition he wrote the night before titled “Mallard Valet.”

After some technical difficulty, the piece vibrated from his laptop speakers in a hurried crescendo played on the piano. Van Zandt commented on the piece’s steadiness and lack of movement, and advised Tessler to change the tempo.

Tessler stated the composition was something new he tried on a whim.

“It’s a little formal for me, that’s why I chose this piece, Tessler said.

“This is the first time I’ve ventured out there.”

However, Van Zandt complimented the piece for acquiring strong, basic notes to elaborate on.

According to Tessler, the advice he received from the seasoned composer was very insightful.

“My experience with Jack was fruitful,” Tessler said.

“While I had barely started the composition, I had gained the direction necessary to make the next step both as a cognizant performer, and as a coherent composer.”

This was not Van Zandt first visit to Cal Poly Pomona. In fact, he was a visiting artist at California Institute of the Arts during the Spring 2017 quarter.

Van Zandt stated he’s friends with piano studies professor Nadia Shpachenko, and has written numerous pieces of music for her.

In doing so, he’s been able to get to know her students as well.

Van Zandt also stated he loves to visit the CPP campus because of the music students work ethic.

“I’ve come to appreciate the high quality of music students here, and even though many of them are doing other things, they’re very committed musicians,” Van Zandt said.

Van Zandt has written numerous compositions for film, television, concerts and advertising.

To date, he has composed over 300 music works.

Van Zandt is also a published writer, music education reformer and promoter, professional music education consultant and program grant writer.

Van Zandt will be coming back to CPP for the Piano Ensemble Wednesday, February 28, where his composition “Arebati” will be presented.