Classical guitarists strike chord with junior high students

Duo from Lawrence’s sister city of Eutin, Germany, to present concert on Sunday

By Karen Brit

While many junior high school students play Guitar Hero, they readily admit it’s nothing like playing the real thing.

After watching two talented classical guitarists perform, that notion was only confirmed.

“It was very cool,” said Alex Kong, a Southwest ninth-grader who plays the popular video game but not the real musical instrument.

Kong was looking forward to learning how during an upcoming unit in his music class.

“It was nice to see perfectionists do it before we get started,” he said.

Those perfectionists were Andreas van Zoest and Sandra Flessau, who are from one of Lawrence’s sister cities, Eutin, Germany. They played three selections Tuesday at Southwest Junior High School. It was one of many performances scheduled during their weeklong visit. Their final performance will be a public concert Sunday at Kansas University.

While it is Flessau’s first visit to Lawrence, van Zoest was here a year ago with his 27-member guitar orchestra.

Since then, there has been an interest in establishing an orchestra in Lawrence. He said anyone—from beginners to advanced—can play in an orchestra.

“I will try to combine this and make an orchestra. In Eutin, I have several orchestras, and they are making tours over the whole world,” he said.

“I hope it’s great fun for all people.”

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SANDRA FLESSAU, A STUDENT OF ANDREAS VAN ZOEST, at right, both of Lawrence’s sister city, Eutin, Germany, performed for students Tuesday at Southwest Junior High School, 2511 Iverness Drive.

GERMAN PAIR TO PERFORM WORKS BY VON WEBER, GRIEG

Andreas van Zoest and Sandra Flessau, of Eutin, Germany, will perform at 2:30 p.m. Sunday in Shawnee Recital Hall at Kansas University.

A donation of $10 for the public and $5 for students is suggested. The program will include excerpts from the opera “Der Freischütz” by Eultiple composer Carl Maria von Weber; the Divertissement opus 68 by the Spanish guitarist and composer Fernando Sor; the Holberg Suite of Edvard Grieg on the centennial of his death; “Cavalierine” by Jaime Zenninfra, a tribute to the film and Pierre Petit’s Toccata, with references to “Porgy and Bess.”

Van Zoest also is working on forming a classical guitar orchestra in Lawrence. For more information, send e-mail to vanzoest@t-online.de.

Guitarists from sister city visit junior high students

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He said starting a guitar orchestra is just like a choir or band. It’s a matter of fitting the parts together and “there’s always room to improve.”

Van Zoest teaches guitar and ensemble performance at the Musikschule Ostholstein in Eutin. His students are among the most accomplished in Germany.

One such student is Flessau, whom he started teaching about 10 years ago. She was a prize winner in the German national competition Jugend musiziert. Flessau said van Zoest is an exceptional teacher because he shows an interest in his students; it’s not just 30 minutes and then on to the next student.

“He wants us to play together and to play good,” she said.

Van Zoest has been working with his Lawrence host Marc Greenberg’s guitar quartet.

Greenberg, chairman of the department of Slavic languages and literatures at KU, said van Zoest is an effective teacher. For example, he said, he took 15 students this week at Deerfield School and taught them the basics of classical guitar in 10 minutes.

“He has a great deal of charisma and a very open personality. He connects very quickly with students,” Greenberg said.

“He’s got one of these friendly, inviting faces and voices, so he is very reassuring.

Although van Zoest works with children, he hadn’t heard of the video game that has them picking up plastic and pretending to be rock stars.

“It’s a game?” he asked.

However, he knows a lot about “Guitar Heroes,” a Grammy award-winning CD by the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet.

Flessau, 21, had heard of the game, but hadn’t played it.

“The physics student said she enjoyed playing classical music over rock because it offers variety and can be more challenging.

“I think younger people don’t listen to classical music very much, very often,” she said. “But I think it is more fun to play classical music than rock music because it is much more interesting. It’s much more than playing the same chords all of the time.”

—Assistant assignment director Karen Brit

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