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History of the blues

Michael "Hawkeye" Herman plays the blues before a gym full of students at Franklin Middle School in Greeley. Herman is a professional musician based out of southern Oregon and has been playing the guitar since he was 13. Herman tours several states each year going to schools and teaching students about the blues.



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Guitarist visits area schools, shares music with students

BY MIKE PETERS
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Question: How in the world do you hold the attention of 600 squirmy, jumpy elementary and middle-school kids and get them to learn something at the same time?

Answer:

1. Play a guitar.
2. REALLY loud.
3. With BIG speakers.
4. With bass notes so intense that you can feel them in your stomach.

Michael "Hawkeye" Herman has been doing this at schools for 25 years now, sitting on a wooden stool, tapping his foot, strumming the guitar in front of a half-million kids around the world.

He's played the guitar for almost half a century, entertaining adults and kids and talking about

his love of the blues. "They listen because I have a guitar," he admits. "They learn about music, whether they know it or not."

Herman was at Franklin Middle School Monday morning and Jefferson Elementary in the afternoon. He'll appear at other schools in Greeley today and Wednesday.

"Music makes the day go quicker," he tells the kids, strumming out the bass notes from his guitar. "Music lifts the spirit. It doesn't matter what your job is — cleaning your room, raking the leaves — put on a Walkman and it'll go easier."

Monday morning Herman played and taught through three sessions in the Franklin School gym — with about 200 kids per session.

He strummed his way through the roots of the blues, up through rock-n-roll and even the classics. Herman grabbed the kids' attention and held it.

The message sunk in, especially with mem-

bers of the Franklin Jazz Band.

"What I heard was the history of the blues," said Thena Macias, 13, "and that it isn't always sad."

Hawkeye blasted through songs in rapid speed, going from the Folsom Prison Blues to Elvis's "That's All Right, Mama" to "Johnny B. Goode" and "Jambalaya."

"It was great," said Jose Vergara, 13. "I didn't know that much about the blues or how it was founded. Also, he was really good on the guitar."

Herman's tour of several states each year is usually paid on a federal grant. The grant paid for his trip to Fort Collins this week, and the Colorado Blues Society paid for him to come to Greeley, said Karen Lockman of Windsor, a member of the Blues Society.

And the whole thing was summed up by Mariah Foster, 13, who put it in simple terms: "He's cool."