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Participants in this year's Round Top Music Festival practice a piece under the direction of guest conductor Ransom Wilson Tuesday afternoon at Festival Hill. The students have a different conductor each week over the six-week event.

Students learn, grow at annual music festival

By Melissa McCaghren
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Practice makes perfect, but for musicians who have received the opportunity to participate in the Round Top Musical Festival, they have the chance to take it even farther.

The 47th annual event is held over six weeks with a different conductor each week. This year's group features 88 musicians from 17 countries ranging in age from 18 to 28. The concerts began June 11 and will continue through July 15.

Musicians attend master classes throughout the day to hone their instrumental skills. They play a piece they've learned, and afterward the instructor will give them tips to improve. The faculty does have some international instructors, but most are from the United States.

In addition, they have private lessons, orchestral studies and performance opportunities.

The festival itself is highly competitive, and musicians must apply to attend. Tuition



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John DeMartino of Connecticut (left) watches as James VanDemark shows him how to finesse his double bass skills during a master class Tuesday afternoon at the Edith Bates Old Chapel.

for the students is \$5,500, and fundraisers are held to provide scholarships.

For the students however, the money is worth it to improve their skills and futures as part of an orchestra.

Mario Bastea-Forte of Albuquerque, New Mexico, who plays the cello, heard about the

festival and decided to apply.

"It's a competitive festival, so I was happy I got in," he said. "It's just good to learn the rep we're playing here. I can only learn so much repertoire at school. In my school, I don't play in the orchestra all the

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time so it's nice to learn more pieces and meet people who I wouldn't know otherwise."

Many of the students found the small concert hall in a town of 90 through fellow students and teachers.

For Juan Alonso, a native of Mexico who is in his second year in the master's program at the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music, the honor is even more prestigious. The festival selects a single tuba player each year, and he earned that honor this year.

"I was thinking, well it seems like a difficult thing to do since they take only one tuba for these festivals," Alonso said. "Fortunately enough here I am with these great musicians."

He applied after input from his teacher and a former festival participant. When he asked what he could do to improve during the summer besides practice, both mentioned participating in festivals, including Round Top being one mentioned.

"I asked what his thoughts were on Round Top, and he said it's just basically the best summers of his life," said Alfonso.

Alfonso said being accepted to the festival has helped him immensely.

"The faculty here was inspiring and very enticing for me just seeing that. Just two weeks already I feel I've grown so much as a player," he said.

"I would definitely really recommend Round Top for any musician really — not just tuba — but anyone who is really passionate about mak-



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Bradley Taylor of Las Vegas, Nev. warms up his cello before rehearsing in the concert hall Tuesday afternoon during the 47th annual Round Top Music Festival. He is one of 88 students from 17 countries participating in this year's event.

ing music and anyone who wants to propel their career as a musician, make that transition from student to professional."

Other students in the program are excited for the program because it offers them a rare opportunity they wouldn't get where they live.

"I had a teacher come — one of the cello professors is teaching here," said Bradley Taylor, cellist and a student at University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

"He came down to my school to give a master class, and I really enjoyed his

teaching so my teachers let me know he was teaching here so I applied.

"I really enjoy being around a lot of musicians who are actually interested in what they want to do and everyone here has goals for themselves about something.

"For example where I live a lot of people just aren't focused, they don't play very much, they don't really care about what they're doing very much. So over here it's a much better environment to thrive, practice, you're inspired by other people to practice."