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## HE HAD A HAMMER



Spencer Ainsley/Poughkeepsie Journal

Local composer and percussionist Joseph Bertolozzi used a variety of hammers Tuesday to play and record sounds on the steel of the Mid-Hudson Bridge in Poughkeepsie.

## Man's piece of music has really long bridge

By John W. Barry  
Poughkeepsie Journal

Using a laptop computer and a Hudson River span that opened when Herbert Hoover was president, a composer from Beacon on Tuesday recorded sounds of percussion made by banging on the Mid-Hudson Bridge with a hammer.

A sound engineer from Kingston and team of four from the New York State Bridge Authority helped Joseph Bertolozzi take a major leap in his bid to turn the bridge into a massive percussion instrument and incorporate it into a 2009 celebration of the Hudson River.

On Tuesday, Bertolozzi oversaw the hanging of microphones from 16 of the 144 pairs of suspender

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Joseph Bertolozzi

"He's being authentic in what he believes."

Eric Greene

ropes that hold up the roadway over which 40,000 cars travel daily. The microphones were affixed near the base of the 150-foot "ropes," which are actually made of steel. Initially, a mike was affixed halfway up the suspender rope, but this location was later dropped because the height was unnecessary for the recording.

The mikes are designed to pick up only vibrations, eliminating noise from traffic.

Today, Bertolozzi, sound engineer Ron Kuhnke and the bridge authority team will return to the span with recording equipment and percussion instruments and climb 135 feet down ladders to a bridge pier,

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### ALTERNATIVE INSTRUMENTS

The Mid-Hudson Bridge as a massive percussion instrument isn't the only instance of musicians using unusual items to make music. The off-Broadway show "Stomp," over the course of a week, uses some very unusual items to make noise:

- 30 brooms
- 8 lids
- 10 poles, each 6 feet, 6 inches tall
- 15 pounds of sand
- 200 liters of water
- 8 bananas
- 12 boxes of matches

Source: [www.stomponline.com](http://www.stomponline.com)

AT A GLANCE

### THE MID-HUDSON BRIDGE

**3,000 feet**

Overall length

**315 feet**

Tower height

**135 feet**

Clearance above Hudson River

**16 3/4 inches**

Main cable diameter

**August 25, 1930**

Opened

**\$5.9 million**

Original cost

Source: [www.nysba.state.ny.us](http://www.nysba.state.ny.us)





# Bridge: Musician planning for 400th anniversary project

Continued from 1A

which supports the span's west tower and sits in the river. Bertolozzi plans to swing a small log, to which lamb's wool has been affixed, into the bridge's western cross frame and record the resulting sound.

Bertolozzi in 2009 hopes to assemble a team of 16 percussionists to "play" the bridge as part of New York state's 400th anniversary celebration of Henry Hudson's sail up the river that would later bear his name; Samuel de Champlain's exploration of the lake that would bear his name; and the 200th anniversary of Robert Fulton's maiden steamboat journey up the Hudson.

All three will be celebrated in 2009 by the Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial Commission, based in Albany, with events slated from New York City to Albany. Bertolozzi's plan would let the public experience his event through speakers and video screens at Waryas Park in Poughkeepsie.

With the library of recorded bridge sounds he assembles this week, Bertolozzi will piece together, or compose, a song. He will use that composition to further pitch his Mid-Hudson Bridge percussion plan to the Quadricentennial Commission and potential corporate sponsors.

"We still have to wait and see, but I'm happy to know that Mr. Bertolozzi is out there, pursuing his dream," said Barbara Fratianni, executive director of the Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial Commission, who has been in contact with Bertolozzi about the proposal. "We will anxiously await the results."

Traveling vertically in a spider bucket Tuesday, bridge authority maintenance climber Dennis Haines rigged sound equipment more than 75 feet above the bridge's roadway and then banged on the suspender rope with a small sledgehammer. On the south walkway below, Bertolozzi listened through headphones while Kuhnke captured what sounded

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**Barbara Fratianni**

executive director,  
Hudson-Fulton-Champlain  
Quadricentennial Commission  
on Joseph Bertolozzi's plans to stage  
his bridge-percussion event

like Darth Vader, the science fiction villain from "Star Wars," walking through a cave on his IBM laptop computer.

Asked if he planned to head up in the spider bucket, Bertolozzi joked, "I don't have that kind of insurance."

Bertolozzi's two-day recording session, on a 3,000-foot-long span that cost \$5.9 million to build and opened in 1930, also includes banging on handrails, guardrails, spin-dles, grating and girders.

"This is exhilarating, this is so much fun," Bertolozzi said. "This is just great. This is life."

A handful of motorists seemed intrigued by Bertolozzi testing out the bridge sound with his hammers. But the majority of those who passed by in cars were oblivious, despite the composer's dancing that accompanied his playing.

Eric Greene of Cottekill, Ulster County, was walking on the bridge's north walkway Tuesday morning as Bertolozzi worked. He thinks the composer should be

## Playing the bridge

Composer Joseph Bertolozzi of Beacon hopes to play the Mid-Hudson Bridge as a percussion instrument as part of a state celebration of the Hudson River set for 2009.

On Tuesday and today, Bertolozzi and a team of Bridge Authority workers are hitting the bridge with hammers and recording the resulting sounds. Bertolozzi will compose a song from these recordings and use it to pitch his percussion plan to the Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial Commission, which is overseeing the 2009 celebration, and potential sponsors.

Bertolozzi hopes to have his song completed by mid-September. For information, also visit [www.josephbertolozzi.com](http://www.josephbertolozzi.com), [www.exploreny400.com](http://www.exploreny400.com) and [www.nysba.state.ny.us](http://www.nysba.state.ny.us)

commended for following through on such an ambitious plan.

"I think it's great," Greene said after learning of Bertolozzi's proposal. "He's being authentic in what he believes."

Permission allowing Bertolozzi to conduct this week's recording session and potentially stage something on a larger scale in 2009 came from the bridge authority's board of commissioners, authority spokesman Mark Sheedy said.

"This is about what I expected to see," Sheedy said of Bertolozzi's setup. "But it's what you hear, not what you see."

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