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Nationally known classical musicians gather at the Magic Mountain Music Farm in Morris for four-week sessions designed to fine-tune their practicing skills. This group of musicians is part of a 12 member panel that will perform at a music festival at 7:30 p.m., September 3 and 4 at the First Presbyterian Church in Gilbertsville.
(Photo by Jeffrey Morse)

Music in the valley ...

Nationally known musicians to perform in Butternut Valley

By **JEFFREY MORSE**
The Gazette

MORRIS

Professional musician Marvin Suson has stayed in Morris several times over the past 10 years. The Milwaukee-based violinist said Magic Mountain Music Farm offers him the perfect break from his every day life of paying bills and working with students.

Suson and 11 other nationally-recognized musicians have been living communally at the Morris Farm over the past month. Over that period, they have cooked, eaten, cleaned, talked and practiced together.

The musicians describe all of that experience as being important in their

preparation for a free music festival at 7:30 p.m., Sept. 3 and 4 at the First Presbyterian Church in Gilbertsville.

The two-night show will feature works from Bartok, Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy and Stravinsky.

The ongoing retreat, taught by former member of the Pittsburgh and St. Louis Symphonies Burton Kaplan, forces the musicians to focus attention solely on mastering the music they will perform at the festival. Violinist Erika Atchley said the interpretation of the music is hopefully the very best of what the musicians are capable of producing. Part of how this is accomplished is

focusing on how the musicians practice the material, dissecting the usefulness of each part of their study routine.

"Burton is bringing the art of practicing from the intuitive to the cognitive," Suson said. Kaplan does so by offering students an individualized lesson every other day, additional group or master classes daily and asking them to practice no less than six hours every day.

"He gives honest, straight forward feedback," Santa Cruz Symphony clarinetist Ginger Kroft-Barnetson said.

The musicians say they are forced to concentrate

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on improving themselves, while working and living with those they will perform with. Kroft-Barnetson said the result is a progressive, noncompetitive environment that tends to breakdown individualism and egos within the group.

"Here, as musicians, we really let our guard down," Kroft-Barnetson said. Suson said once that has happened, the group is able to move forward

with the progress of their music by making suggestions openly to one another.

"Burton really strives to create an atmosphere here that is noncompetitive. Here you become invested in everyone's improvement," the violinist said.

Suson said those improvements will culminate in exhibition at the upcoming music festival, showing those in attendance the best of what the group is capable of.