

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

Adaptations of Performance Techniques for the Total Percussionist

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for the degree of Master of Music in Music, Performance

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## Abstract

### Adaptations of Performance Techniques for the Total Percussionist

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Throughout much of music history, it was common for percussionists to specialize in one or two genres of music performance due to restrictions such as cultural relevance, geography, and the desire for simplicity. In today's eclectic music industry however, few musicians can go their entire careers without some level of exposure to multiple musical styles or genres. The advantage of this kind of exposure is that musicians expand the range of their overall capabilities. This inevitably empowers them to utilize the skills that they have learned in multiple styles in almost any musical setting that they may encounter. The purpose of this study is to improve one's ability to learn and master percussion repertoire more quickly and efficiently through the cultivation of skills and techniques in multiple styles of percussion performance. The focus will be on jazz (drum set/vibraphone), orchestral music, world music, and marching percussion. There will be an examination of multiple solo percussion pieces that incorporate different musical genres to demonstrate the importance of mastering the skills and techniques from these different genres. In addition to this preliminary research, I have interviewed two professional percussionists, each of whom have experience with most of the genres previously mentioned but focus their career on at least one of them. The purpose of these

interviews is to gain insight into how and why each percussionist uses the skills from each genre that they have studied in their field of specialization. The other purpose is to clearly define the advantages of being a well-rounded percussionist as opposed to an individual that only performs in one style or genre of music.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In today's music education system for percussionists, it is common for students to initially be taught three main categories of instrumental performance: snare drum, keyboard instruments, and timpani. Once skills on these instruments are gained, brief exposure is often offered in world percussion, drum set, and rudimental drumming. However, in the process of learning all of these instruments, I believe that there is something crucial missing from this system of basic exposure. There is not enough emphasis on the specific skill set that an individual gains from studying these different genres. This can include a specific type of touch, hand speed, or physical strength related to a particular genre or instrument. What is significant about this learning process is that techniques and skills that are used in one way in one genre can be utilized in a different way in a completely different genre. This means that students that study in only one genre of music will be at a severe disadvantage compared to students who have studied multiple genres because they will inevitably lack the benefits that other genres have to offer such as hand speed, ability to groove and blend with others, and versatility of touch.

Some of the most predominant musical genres that are taught in today's music schools are classical music, jazz, world music, and marching band music. Within each of these fields, there is a shared set of techniques and skills required to properly execute each style. For example, in a marching drumline setting, musicians are often required to play a large amount of notes at very fast tempos with a wide range of dynamics. This requires the musicians to have very advanced hand control because they are executing many common as well as uncommon rudiments within this context. Another notable feature of drumline technique is the ability to perfectly execute double-stroke rolls in the

context of fast tempos and while playing in unison with many other people. If an individual becomes proficient in either of these skills (advanced hand control or precision of double stroke rolls) in a marching band setting, they can apply this shared technique to several other genres quite effectively.

An example of a shared skill between the genres of marching percussion and orchestral music is found in the third movement of *Scheherazade* by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. There is a famous snare drum excerpt that requires the player to execute an open seven-stroke roll at a various quiet dynamic levels. Although this poses multiple challenges for most players, the inherent difficulty of the excerpt comes from the need to execute the open roll with great precision and clarity at a soft dynamic level. If the player has not spent a significant amount of time developing their double stroke-roll technique, then learning this kind of an orchestral excerpt will pose many more challenges and will take ultimately longer than if the player has already developed the technique in this area of playing. Another example of the blending of these two genres and techniques is found in the snare drum part of Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony #10. In the second movement specifically, the snare drummer is meant to represent a machine gun firing for various lengths of time by playing loud sixteenth notes at a quarter note value of 168. This movement requires extensive stamina and precision from the orchestral snare drummer, which can be mirrored in the technique of a snare drummer in a drumline setting. These are just two of the many examples that can be given for the relationship between these two genres.

In my recital for the fulfillment of my Master of Music in Percussion Performance degree, each piece contains a clear blending of genres, techniques, and skills that

ultimately helps to create the unique character of each work. The genres as well as the techniques of classical music, jazz, tango, and marching percussion are uniquely blended within the context of the solo recital piece. Because of this blending of genres, I had to utilize the skills relevant to all of these genres simultaneously in each piece. This created a situation in which I had to rapidly switch mindsets as I played each piece in order to bring out the style and character that each composer had in mind.

## Chapter 2: Prism

*Prism* is a two-mallet marimba solo written by Keiko Abe in 1986. It is a highly virtuosic piece that is based on the rhythmic motive of sextuplets, which pervades the entire piece. The piece itself is in a clearly defined ternary form with an introduction and coda to tie the sections together. This piece is constructed mainly around the key of G, although Abe constantly shifts between parallel modes G major and G minor. She also transposes these modes into different keys and creates sequences to create melodic variety. The main challenge with this piece is the fact that once the sextuplet figure starts halfway through the introduction, the performer does not stop playing sextuplets until the arrival of the coda. The only break that the performer gets is the few instances of rubato that Abe inserts in certain sections. This consistency of rhythm poses many challenges to the performer.

First, the performer must maintain rhythmic integrity by not letting the sextuplets sound like straight sixteenth notes. I accomplished this in my performance by placing a very subtle pulse accent on each of the major beats throughout the entire piece to maintain a clear, round triplet feel. Another problem is that Abe does not give an explicit tempo marking, but instead provides the expression marking *brillante*. Generally, this term means to play showy and very spirited in style. In this context, I interpreted this to mean that the sextuplets must maintain a high energy level throughout the duration of the piece. I then discerned that the tempo must be rather brisk in order to portray this kind of energy. I ended up playing at a quarter note value of 100 bpm for most of the piece, which conveys the right feeling and is still a comfortable tempo to play. Because the piece is meant to be played so fast, I decided to use a pair of medium-hardness

vibraphone mallets in order to get clear articulation out of the marimba and also because vibraphone mallets are generally shorter and lighter than marimba mallets, making it easier to be agile across the instrument.

The final challenge that I experienced with this piece was making sure that my wrists and arms did not tense up too much while I was playing due to the large amount of notes that I was required to play. Because the tempo is so fast and consistent, it was very easy for me at first to develop soreness in my arms, wrists, and hands. I alleviated this problem by making sure that I had done a proper warm up prior to playing this piece and by staying relaxed while playing. To ease tension on my body, I also made a note of not over-accenting any of the notes and playing the unaccented notes a little bit softer.

Warming up before playing also solved a lot of note accuracy issues because I was able to stay relaxed while moving my arms rapidly in different directions to reach some of the larger intervals. In another effort to preserve my energy while playing this piece, I took full advantage of all indications of rubato throughout the piece in order to give myself a few moments to relax my arm and wrists before resuming the brisk tempo. I also added short instances of rubato when it felt natural to me such as the beginning and end of the piece and right before a change to a major section. This added rubato gives the piece an almost improvisatory nature even though it is built up of a constant stream of notes.

Although *Prism* is a concert marimba solo, the way that it is written is very similar to the style of music that an individual would encounter while playing a keyboard instrument in a drum corps pit situation. Typically, keyboard instruments in a drum corps pit play a large amount of notes at a very fast tempo to create various tone colors amongst the rest of the ensemble. Most of the time, these kinds of situations require a high amount

of endurance from the performer similar to the endurance required to play *Prism*.

Although these two situations are very different in character, many of the same skills such as hand speed, endurance, and note accuracy are required due to the similar nature of the music. Because of these similarities, it would be advantageous to any percussionist playing this piece to have developed these skills in either a heavily stylized practice regime or in the actual activity of drum corps pit performance.

### Chapter 3: Verano Porteño

*Verano Porteño* is a tango composition that was originally part of a set of four pieces entitled *Estaciones Porteñas* written by Astor Piazzola. Pius Cheung arranged this particular piece as a five-octave concert marimba solo. *Verano Porteño* was originally scored for a tango quintet consisting of violin, piano, electric guitar, double bass, and bandoneón, which is an aerophone similar to the accordion that is used in most tango ensembles. Cheung incorporates all of these instruments into his marimba arrangement with various performance techniques that will be discussed later. In the description of the piece, Cheung says:

My arrangement for solo marimba originally began as a transcription of Piazzola's own recording with his quintet. However, the deeper I delved into Piazzola's recordings of his own music, the more I realized that being one person with limited experience with the tango genre, I will never be able to compare up to the original. Therefore, I decided to take more of an arrangement approach, taking the original theme of the piece and improvising with it on the marimba until I found something comfortable.<sup>1</sup>

The piece itself is in an A-B-A'-C form with the B section sounding more improvisatory in nature than the rest of the piece. It was difficult to decide on a definite tempo for the B section because the rhythms are meant to sound fluid and are extremely difficult to execute across all four mallets. The C section also acts as a coda while presenting a short amount of new material to the listener.

Piazzola's contribution to the genre of tango was both necessary and profound. He was responsible for creating what became to be known as *Tango Nuevo* (New Tango), which was named in reference to the previous traditional tango style.

Born in Argentina but brought up in New York, Astor Piazzolla was exposed to different musical styles during his early years such as jazz and art music. As a result, his music incorporated richer tonal harmonies and more rhythmic variety

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<sup>1</sup>Pius Cheung, program notes for *Verano Porteño*. (Editorial Lagos: Alfred Music, 2014).

and improvisational techniques compared with Traditional Tango. For its instrumentation, he incorporated the electric guitar and created a quintet (bandoneón, violin, piano, double bass and electric guitar) that came to be the standard instrumentation for New Tango groups.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most difficult aspects of learning *Verano Porteño* was bringing out an authentic tango style on a single instrument that was not designed for that particular style. In order to accomplish this, Cheung utilizes the sound of every instrument in a typical tango quintet in his marimba arrangement. Perhaps the most obvious instrument that is imitated is the double bass, which is represented by the outer mallet in the player's left hand. This mallet is responsible for much of the chord and tempo changes throughout the piece due to the walking bass line effect that it has in the low register of a five-octave marimba.

The next instrument that is portrayed by the marimba is the bandoneón. As one of the main voices in the tango quintet mentioned earlier, this instrument is represented by the player's two right hand mallets. This pair of mallets performs much of the virtuosic melodies that Cheung writes into the piece by moving with great agility across the middle and high registers of the marimba. Together, the four mallets also perform an effect called a dead stroke, which is the act of firmly pressing the mallets into the bars of the marimba so that there is no sound coming out of the resonators. This technique is designed to mirror the act of a guitar or bass player muting the strings of their instruments after strumming or plucking them to elicit a percussive effect out of the instrument. This technique is used extensively throughout the piece and is an essential part of the melody.

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<sup>2</sup> Gabriela Mauriño. "A New Body for a New Tango: The Ergonomics of Bandoneón Performance in Astor Piazzolla's Music," *The Galpin Society Journal* Vol. 62, (April, 2009): pp. 263-271, Accessed February 15, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20753637>, p. 263.

Another quintessential characteristic of tango that Cheung implements in his arrangement is the use of glissandos. He instructs the player to glissando from the high register all the way to the low register with all four mallets very rapidly as part of the main melody. This technique is also meant to represent the glissando capabilities of the guitar and violin, which were used in tango bands quite often.

In order to effectively bring out the character of this piece, the performer must have experience in any area of Latin music study. The reason for this is that amongst all of the characteristics necessary to bring out in the piece, perhaps the most important one is the interpretation of the rhythm. In the arrangement, Cheung writes rhythms that are strictly played in time as well as rhythms that are meant to sound improvisatory and rubato. This aspect of the piece is one of the most important things to consider because most types of global music such as flamenco, Afro-Cuban, and tango are based off of variations of a specific rhythmic pattern. In Western classical music, it is common for many young performers to focus on playing correct pitches while there tends to be less attention given to rhythmic precision. However, due to the fact that most types of global music are based in popular cultural traditions, rhythm tends to be the central theme of the song because it allows for non-musicians to follow a song more easily. In tango music, one of the most predominant rhythms is two dotted quarter notes followed by a quarter note in a 4/4 time signature.



Figure 1, mm. 1-4.



Figure 2, mm. 56-59.

In *Verano Porteño*, this rhythm acts as a very clear motif throughout the entire work while also posing some of the greatest challenges to the performer. Whenever this rhythm appears, it is done in conjunction with the dead stroke technique that was mentioned earlier in order to imitate the opening and closing of the bandoneón. This rhythm must be brought out very distinctly because it acts as an audible anchor for the player in order to maintain the momentum of the piece. At the end of the piece, the outer left mallet plays this rhythm as an ostinato while the other three mallets play a series of rapidly moving chords that contain the melody.



Figure 2, mm. 132-135.

This example in *Verano Porteño* is one of the reasons that a working knowledge of the importance of rhythm in Latin music is important for a percussionist playing in any genre of music. A percussionist playing in any genre whether it is classical music, jazz, etc. should be fully aware of the fact that rhythm is the backbone of any piece of music and must be observed or interpreted depending on the composer's desired outcome in order to bring the character of whatever piece of music they are playing into fruition. As a classically trained percussionist, developing this sensitivity to the importance of rhythm

was actually one of the most challenging concepts to deal with in my preparation for *Verano Porteño* because the notes and the interpretation of the rhythm were equally important in order to achieve an authentic tango sound.

This blending of genres and techniques can be found in many other pieces such as Leonard Bernstein's *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story*. There is a section of the piece in which the percussionists have to play many Latin percussion instruments in a mambo groove to accompany the rest of the orchestra. This requires the classical percussionist to be familiar with all of the different Latin instruments in addition to the Afro-Cuban style in order to be able to execute the groove successfully. In the actual music, a simple groove is written out but it has become common practice to create an original rhythmic pattern that creates more excitement. Since this piece is performed as a musical as well as a concert piece, a percussionist playing this piece in a theater pit would have to be able to play many concert as well as Latin instruments simultaneously. The need for this ability proves that percussionists must be versatile in terms of what styles and genres they are able to play.

## Chapter 4: 8 on 3 and 9 on 2

8 on 3 and 9 on 2 was written with the goal of combining the elements of marching percussion with the context of a formal recital piece that would challenge any percussionist, regardless of his or her level of experience. Two players perform the piece facing each other, sharing instruments just as they share in playing almost every rhythm in the piece<sup>3</sup> – Robert Marino

This piece is predominantly characterized by the skills required to play in a drum corps scenario. The characteristics that are presented in the piece are the skills of splitting rhythms between two players, playing fast and loudly across many drums, and executing many standard snare drum rudiments. These three characteristics represent the three main groups of a marching drumline, which are the bass drums, tenor drums (quads), and snare drums. This means that in order to successfully execute this duet, both percussionists must have some background in the field of marching percussion. Having only basic exposure to or practice in this area however would not be enough to achieve the proper execution of this piece because the skills that were previously mentioned are all gained through the experience of playing with other people in the same setting. To further represent a drumline setting, Marino scores the piece for two bongos, two roto-toms, eight concert tom-toms, and one kick drum, thereby replicating drumline instruments with concert percussion instruments.

There are many challenges in this piece but perhaps the most obvious challenge is the act of splitting complex rhythms between two players while playing at various fast tempos.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Marino, program notes for *8 on 3 and 9 on 2*. (Portland: Tapspace Publications, 2011).



classical or rudimental percussionist.<sup>4</sup> Although technique is absolutely necessary, the goal of learning proper technique should be partnered equally with developing excellent musicianship in order to apply the learned techniques to any genre of music. In *8 on 3 and 9 on 2*, at least half of the standard set of rudiments is used in rapid succession while executing various dynamic levels, crescendos/diminuendos, and while splitting them between another player. This requires both players to have not only a mastery of the rudiments themselves, but also a highly developed level of musicianship.

Although this piece seems like just a succession of complex grooves and fast passages across multiple drums, there are several aspects of it that require training in the field of classical music as well marching percussion. There is a portion of the piece where the tempo suddenly drops to a half time tempo of 60 bpm. During this section, each player is playing a sixteenth-note triplet in ascending and descending motion on each of their sets of concert toms to simulate a series of bass drum splits. However, the expression marking

for this section indicates the use of rubato by both players. This means that both players are splitting these rhythms in the absence of strict time, but are instead responding to one another's unique sense of tempo fluctuation. It is important to note that each sixteenth note triplet takes place in the time span of two sixteenth notes, forcing the players to have a very quick reaction time to constantly changing circumstances. This skill needed by both performers is not something that is typically gained through marching band experience, but rather through performing in a classical setting such as an orchestra or chamber group. This example is appropriate because classical music pieces typically go through multiple tempo changes and the way that an ensemble plays a piece could

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<sup>4</sup> Harry R. Bartlett, *Guide to Teaching Percussion* (Iowa, WM. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1971). p.5.

possibly vary from performance to performance or with different conductors. This requires the performers to be flexible yet have a strong sense of where the tempo always is at all times. It is because of this aspect of the piece that it is necessary for the players to have a background in both classical music and marching percussion as opposed to just one of these genres.

## Chapter 5: Blues for Gilbert

*Blues for Gilbert* is a concert vibraphone solo that is heavily influenced by jazz rhythms, harmony, and melody. The piece was written by Mark Glentworth to honor the death of his percussion teacher, Gilbert Webster at the Royal Northern College of Music. The piece is also written in A-B-A form with the middle section being at a medium swing tempo to contrast the beginning and ending which are set at slow, melancholy tempos. During the middle section, the left hand plays a strict accompaniment role by playing mostly double-stop chords against the right hand melodies. In contrast, the right hand often plays triplet style melodies against the duple accompaniment. The chords that the piece uses also firmly establish it as more of a jazz piece with classical elements. There is extensive use of major, minor, dominant seventh, and diminished seventh chords to create a variety of colors and moods to reflect the intent behind the pieces composition.

Part of this piece's difficulty is that it combines some western classical music traditions with some traditions of jazz, which creates many opportunities for the player to improve their skills as well as challenges them to utilize two different mentalities simultaneously. Some of the classical music elements include implementing rubato, difficult pedal usage, and a wide range of dynamics. In terms of jazz elements, besides the difficulty associated with recognizing complex chords, a more obvious challenge is encountered in the B section when the player is instructed to play in a swing style. Suddenly, rhythms such as a dotted eighth-sixteenth note figure must be played like a triplet instead of their traditional "classical music" interpretation. This is difficult because triplets played in jazz can be articulated in a variety of ways, which makes melodic phrasing seem ambiguous sometimes. One way that this is done is for triplets to

sometimes be played behind the beat as opposed to strictly in time. This is just one of the many challenges of rhythmic interpretation that a classically trained percussionist will face when learning to play jazz for the first time. To preface the student's actual performance of jazz tunes or solos, learning to sing swung rhythms would be a very effective way to internalize the swing feel and style.<sup>5</sup> If the rhythm cannot be verbalized using syllables that approximate the desired articulation, the performance will never be truly authentic.<sup>6</sup> These syllables, known as scat syllables, can help students verbalize rhythmic figures that they can then translate into their instrument.<sup>7</sup> Since the vibraphone is unique in that it is capable of producing a wide variety of articulations with the use of the pedal, the concept of scat singing can be particularly helpful for a student learning to play jazz repertoire for the first time on a vibraphone.

The benefits of this kind of shared technique are numerous. For example, there are many situations in classical music when the players are asked to play with a swing feel such as in "Cool" from the previously mentioned example of *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story*. There is a vibraphone part to this piece where the percussionist plays a swung fugue duet with the saxophone and the rest of the orchestra. In addition to the vibraphone player playing their notes swung, the drum set player must play extensively in the swing style at the same time and must also improvise several drum fills as though they are playing in a big-band setting. During every other section of this piece however, everything is played with a regular straight eighth-note feel. This requires the

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<sup>5</sup> Jerry Tolson, "Jazz Style or Articulation: How to Get Your Band or Choir to Swing," *Music Educators Journal* Vol. 99, (September 2012): pp. 80-86, Accessed February 22, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4169270>, pg. 81.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

percussionist to be able to articulate rhythms in the style of jazz as well as classical music.

In addition to this, George Gershwin's *American in Paris* contains numerous swung sections in which the percussionist playing the snare drum must also use brushes on the drum to emulate a jazz drum set player. As small as this part may seem, it takes previous training in some area of jazz in order to be able to execute proper brush technique so that the part sounds authentic. Although a percussionist can practice jazz articulations and rhythms on their own, they truly get a sense of the interpretation of rhythms by hearing other jazz musicians play along with them, which is why playing with others would be a more beneficial method of learning almost any style.

## Chapter 6: In a Landscape

A piece that differs greatly from his famous prepared piano works, John Cage's *In a Landscape* is a lyrical minimalist composition written for solo piano or harp. The arrangement that I have chosen to play for my recital incorporates a five-octave marimba, a vibraphone, and four crotales. The composition follows a micro-macrocosmic rhythmic structure of 15 x 15 (5-7-3) and utilizes a fixed collection of pitches throughout.<sup>8</sup> Considered a mode-based composition, the patterns alternate between a mode in B and a mode in G.<sup>9</sup> Originally, this composition was written to accompany a dancer named Louise Lippold. This dance was meant to reflect the meditative, almost impressionistic nature of the music.

In the original piano version, Cage instructs the performer to hold down the sustain pedal for the entire duration of the piece in order to obtain a variety of harmonics from the overlapping modes that are in use. To translate this to my instrumentation, I placed a heavy brake drum on the vibraphone pedal so that the instrument is sustaining through the duration of the piece. The arrangement that I played contains the same music as the original version, but has many of the right hand parts played on the vibraphone and crotales and the left hand parts played on the marimba.

John Cage was born on September 5, 1912 in Los Angeles. Given that he was born and educated in the United States, the supposition that John Cage's aesthetic outlook was nurtured and majorly influenced by his home nation is clearly evident.<sup>10</sup> However, if independence of thought and mind is a particularly (or even peculiarly) American

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<sup>8</sup> Thad Anderson, program notes for *In a Landscape*. (Leipzig, London, New York: Henmar Press Inc. 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> David Nicholls, *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). p.5.

character trait, then there was certainly a great amount of it in the family for Cage to inherit.<sup>11</sup> Cage had multiple spheres of influence when it came to his music including Buddhist traditions, impressionistic composers such as Erik Satie and Claude Debussy, and fellow American composers of the 20th century. With this in mind, it is not surprising that *In a Landscape* resembles Satie's *Gymnopédies* specifically due to the free-flowing, introspective nature of both pieces. A good example of the latter is found in the well-known first segment of the *Gymnopédies*, where the harmonic shifts between D major and D minor have no traditional grounding.<sup>12</sup> They instead function musically like the story Cage tells of the man standing on a hill, a story told at the end of "Composition as Process."<sup>13</sup> Three men go to the top of the hill to ask the man why he stands there:

"What reasons do you have for my standing here?" he asked. "We have three," they answered. "First, you are standing up here because it is cooler here and you are enjoying the breeze. Second, since the hill is elevated above the rest of the land, you are up here in order to see something in the distance. Third, you have lost your friend and that is why you are standing here alone on this hill. We have walked this way; we never meant to climb this hill; now we want an answer: Which one of us is right?" The man answered, "I just stand".<sup>14</sup>

Those harmonic shifts in Satie's music seemingly exist for the same reason; they just happen.<sup>15</sup> This brings to mind an important concept concerning minimalist music and specifically, John Cage's music. The idea behind much of his music is to make light of the fact that any combination of sounds can be considered music, regardless of its purpose or predisposition. This means for example that anyone can play any combination

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Cage, John. "Composition as Process." Lecture. Darmstadt, Ger. September, 1958.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

of sounds on an instrument and regardless of the harmonic or melodic stasis that occurs, that sound is still music.

Although *In a Landscape* does not contain intricate melodies or complex rhythms, there were several difficulties that I experienced when learning it that have more to do with the mental process involved in composing it. The first difficulty that I experienced when learning this piece is the idea of maintaining complete note accuracy throughout. Because this piece is based on two modes with a fixed amount of pitches, any pitches that are played that are not contained within the mode will create an unwanted dissonance that will disrupt the harmonic flow of the piece. This is an especially difficult task since the tempo of the piece is 80 bpm, which creates a situation in which every note must be played very slowly and deliberately. Another issue with the tempo is the fact that since the tempo is so slow, there is a tendency to gradually speed up out of either performance anxiety or concern for the boredom of the listeners. I personally felt both of these feelings while learning this piece especially while performing it in front of people as well as by myself in a practice room.

To overcome this need to speed up the tempo, I reminded myself that the piece is deliberately set a slow tempo because each pitch was meant to be given equal importance and value, which is similar to the philosophy behind the twelve-tone music of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Even though this philosophy is generally associated with many twentieth century composers, I believe that this mentality of patience in music can be applied to many genres in today's music industry because it means more than just resisting the urge to speed up. It is a much more introspective and meditative feeling that I believe

John Cage meant to evoke through *In a Landscape*, as well as similar pieces such as *Dream* and *Imaginary Landscape*.

The more I played the piece in front of people, the more I realized that I had to put myself in a state of mind that embraced the rhythmic and emotional stasis that is inherent in the piece as opposed to wanting to make the piece more active and interesting for the listener. If I were to succumb to this common emotional response while playing this piece even slightly, then I would not be in the proper state of mind to deliver the piece in the way that it is truly meant to be delivered. This monotony and lack of change is the reason why I believe that many musicians would experience difficulties when playing this type of music. This intense mental focus can also be attributed to virtually any genre because no matter what type of music an individual is playing, performance anxiety, doubt, and impatience will affect them at some point and in some form.

Specifically, I believe that this mental concept applies directly to jazz improvisation because when a player is improvising, they are reacting to the players around them in accordance with their own desires at each moment. In addition to this genre parallel, I experienced this level of focus and submission to variables when I was playing *8 on 3 and 9 on 2*. During this piece, I had to react to the other player while playing my own written part, which was difficult because each performance would be different based on a variety of factors. The success of the performance could be affected by emotional or physical fatigue or whether or not either of us had a chance to do a proper warm up that day. Playing *In a Landscape* has taught me the importance of complete mental focus on the musical moment that is currently happening and to be fully confident in the notes that I am playing at all times. This mentality has also improved my

ability to execute a performance of a piece with greater confidence and relaxation no matter how long or short the performance is.

There were other difficulties with this piece were somewhat more physical in nature. In order to play the three crotales required for this piece, I had to place them on small foam pads and then place those pads on specific spots on the vibraphone so that I could play them in unison with notes on the vibraphone. In this example, the top staff indicates the crotales part, the second staff indicates the vibraphone part, and the bottom two staves indicate the marimba part:



Figure 5, mm. 106-112.

Since this piece is designed so that the performer has to make numerous mallet switches in the middle of playing, each time I play crotales in the piece, I must put down one marimba mallet and pick up a medium-hard glockenspiel mallet with literally no break in the melodic sequence. I also had to angle the vibraphone perpendicular to the marimba so that I could reach all of the notes on both instruments with ease. All of these physical and spacial issues made it much harder to stay relaxed and maintain the tempo during the piece because there were several points in which my body had to be bent in uncomfortable ways in order to reach certain large intervals in the piece.

## Chapter 7: Frum: A Drum Song

*Frum* is a multiple percussion solo written in 1997 by the Icelandic composer, Áskell Másson. It is written for this combination of 13 drums: four concert toms, four octobans, four bongos, and a bass drum with a foot pedal. One of the main ideas behind this piece was the concept of different types of “attack” across the variety of drums.<sup>16</sup> This concept is important due to the fact that all four types of drums have a drastically different tone when struck and throughout the piece, they are played in rapid succession to create a kind of song-like quality, hence the subtitle, “A Drum Song.”<sup>17</sup> The piece is generally characterized by multiple constant streams of sixteenth notes with a multitude of sticking combinations across all 13 drums to create unique, melody-like sequences. Másson’s arrangement of this set of drums is somewhat choral in nature due to the fact that the estimated ranges of choral singers are reflected in the ranges of the drums. The bongos represent the soprano voices, the octobans represent the alto voices, the upper two concert toms represent the tenor voices, and the lower two concert toms and kick drum represent the bass voices. All of these voices are juxtaposed in different combinations throughout the piece to elicit different tone colors in the listener’s mind.

Generally speaking, this piece contains many techniques and skills that are required by drum set players of virtually any genre. Some of these skills include being able to play a rapid succession of notes across a multitude of different drums at once, hand and foot independence with the use of a kick drum, and the execution of complex polyrhythms across multiple drums all at once. Although the ability to play quickly across many drums was a characteristic of *8 on 3 and 9 on 2*, the difference with *Frum* is

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<sup>16</sup> Áskell Másson. “Áskell Másson talks about *Frum*,” YouTube video, posted by the Percussion Canon, November 7, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OyHeq4MYCA>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

that the drums are set from high to low starting from the right while in *8 on 3 and 9 on 2*, the drums are more similar to marching quads where there is one set of hierarchical drums in addition to the high drums being in the center of the set up. In *Frum*, this creates a situation in which the player always knows that a high-pitched drum will usually be played with the right hand and lower pitched drums are generally played by the left hand. This is easily relatable to one of the principles of drum set playing where the player is always encouraged to play the snare drum (highest pitched drum) with their less-dominant hand and as they play lower drums, they use their right hand to lead. This concept holds true for virtually every style including jazz drumming. In this way, it is important for the percussionist to have some background with some of the aspects of drum set playing just to be familiar with the skills mentioned earlier.

The main difficulty that came with learning *Frum* was the execution of multiple polyrhythms at once. The last, main section of the piece starts with quarter notes played on the bass drum in 6/4 time. Then the player must start playing a simple, syncopated pattern with two medium-hard mallets in the left hand on three of the drums. This pattern is filled in with sixteenth notes while the player must now play on the rim of one of the drums to create an alternate pattern that will also stay consistent. Several bars later, the right hand begins playing triplets on the low bongo drum that create a 3 x 4 polyrhythm between the left hand playing sixteenth notes. This triplet pattern is varied through the use of offset accents that create a 3 x 2 polyrhythm against the bass drum quarter note ostinato. Several bars later, the right hand begins playing a 5 x 4 rhythm in the form of triplets with a flam on every fifth partial of the triplets while the left hand and bass drum remain in their original patterns. Finally, the bass drum begins playing eighth notes to

further complicate the already dense set of polyrhythms that are in motion. This level of polyphony is meant to evoke the sounds of all the drums at once to juxtapose the four different kinds of attack that the piece is built off of.

I believe it is necessary to have a background in several different styles of percussion in order to successfully execute a performance of *Frum*. Since most of the piece is based off of rapid successions of 16th notes and 32nd notes across 13 drums, the player must already have developed the high level of hand speed necessary for this task. The player must also be able to rapidly switch between various sticking patterns while playing many notes simultaneously. These two abilities are best cultivated in the world of marching percussion due to the fact that playing loud and fast for long periods of time is one of the defining characteristics of the entire genre. The ability to alternate between various complicated sticking patterns is also a key characteristic of the world of marching percussion. Conversely, an individual specializing in orchestral playing could theoretically develop these skills in the form of a well-regimented practice routine, however the nature of most of the musical content in *Frum* is quite a bit more bombastic than most orchestral repertoire that a player would encounter in their career. This means that the player would be somewhat limited in their ability to bring out the true character of the piece during these fast sections unless they had exposure to this type of playing on a regular basis at some point in their development as a percussionist.

In addition to this set of skills, familiarity with various styles of drum set performance presents an advantage to the performer in the execution of numerous polyrhythms. Within styles such as Bossa nova, jazz, and Afro-Cuban drumming, there are common patterns that require the drummer to maintain a different rhythmic pattern

using all four of their limbs. For example, in a Bossa Nova groove, the bass drum is playing a dotted quarter note-eighth note figure while the right hand is playing constant eighth notes. In addition to this, the left hand is playing a highly syncopated rhythm, which creates an interesting groove with the bass drum rhythms. In *Frum*, this ability to coordinate both the hands and feet with different rhythms helped tremendously when learning the last page of the piece in which there are multiple polyrhythms happening at once. Without this kind of background in drum set playing, it would take the player longer to learn this part of the piece due to the unfamiliarity with hand-foot independence.

## Chapter 8: Bushido: The Way of the Warrior

The samurai of Japan were not merely trained assassins, but lived by a strict ethical code known as Bushido (literally meaning "the way of the warrior"). This code influenced all aspects of life and is comparable to the Western concept of chivalry. The samurai were, of course, fierce warriors but also strongly believed in honor, kindness, frugal living, and above all, loyalty to their lord.<sup>18</sup> – John Willmarth

*Bushido* is a timpani solo in three movements that was written by John Willmarth.

As the title suggests, this piece explore three different aspects of the Japanese samurai code of ethics: *Jin* (benevolence), *Meiyo* (honor and glory) and *Yu* (courage). Each of these three movements explores one or more aspects of traditional Japanese music. The first movement, *Jin*, is designed as a collection of different meditative sounds that are drawn from the timpani in several ways. The player is instructed to use slow glissandi, pitch bending, dead strokes, finger rolls, and their fingernails to create sounds that were more incidental in nature as opposed to sounds with a musical purpose. All of these techniques are also meant to show some of the different softer timbres that the timpani are capable of producing. The second movement, *Meiyo*, focuses on the melodic potential of the timpani and utilizes rapid pedaling to create an "Eastern" tonality with the pitches F, G-flat, B-flat, C, D-flat, F.<sup>19</sup> It is song-like in character and exemplifies the proud tradition and history of the samurai.<sup>20</sup> This movement also frequently uses the left hand as a pedal tone on F while the right hand plays the melody. The third movement, *Yu*, is representative of Japanese taiko drumming through its powerful accent patterns, fast rhythms, and dramatic climaxes. To aid in its representation of taiko drumming, Willmarth instructs the player to mute each drum at different intervals in the piece so that

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<sup>18</sup> John Willmarth, program notes for *Bushido: The Way of the Warrior*. Innovative Percussion, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

by the end, the timpani sound very similar to taiko drums being struck with hard, wooden sticks.

Since *Bushido* is a fusion between classical music and traditional Japanese music, there are several things that the player has to keep in mind while playing this piece. The third movement specifically requires a working knowledge of the style of taiko drumming. This knowledge is important because the musical tendencies of taiko drumming are translated to the timpani in various ways during this piece. Some of these musical tendencies include common accent patterns, ritardandos/accelerandos, and playing in mixed meters. All of these characteristics present unique challenges when played on the timpani as opposed to taiko drums. If an individual is not familiar with these characteristics in the context of taiko drumming, then they will not be able to bring out the character of this movement effectively because the music itself is essentially a representation of a group of four taiko drums on concert instruments.

Taiko has a rich history in both Japan and the United States. In their early stages of use, taiko drums were used for a variety of events ranging from intimate theater settings to battlefields. During the Nara and Heian periods (700-1185), taiko drums were used in *gagaku*, which is an elite and esoteric type of music performed in the Imperial Palace for nobles and aristocrats.<sup>21</sup> In this context, the drums played more of a supportive role with simple rhythms rather than being the main focus of the performance. Aside from this, taiko were also used in *kabuki*, which is another type of Japanese theatrical performance involving singing and dancing, and also during battles to intimidate enemies and issue commands to troops. After its centuries-long history in Japan as a solo or

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<sup>21</sup> Heidi Varian. *The Way of Taiko* (Berkeley, CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2005), 23.

accompanying instrument, taiko in modern times has found its most popular role as the lead instrument in the *kumi-daiko* or taiko ensemble.<sup>22</sup> A man named Daihachi Oguchi, who was a jazz drum set player during the postwar era in 1947, was approached by a relative with some taiko sheet music that he wanted interpreted. Being a drummer already, Oguchi envisioned the traditional solo score as a larger ensemble work and added new rhythms that he then divided into simple patterns, assigning a role to each musical voice.<sup>23</sup> He devised jazz kits of traditional instruments, using the big *o-daiko* as a kick-drum pulse, the smaller *shime-daiko* to carry the background rhythm, and the medium-size *chu-daiko* for the melody.<sup>24</sup> This combination of drums playing would eventually become known as the standard setup for taiko ensembles in the future.

In today's global music scene, taiko drums have risen rapidly in popularity since the establishment of the first American taiko group in the mid 20th century. Taiko have since been used extensively in popular music groups such as Coldplay and Thirty Seconds to Mars in order to evoke a sense of global community and partnership. Various classical and film composers have also incorporated the drums into their works to bring authenticity into their classical music compositions. There is even a popular taiko group called TAIKOPROJECT based in Los Angeles that specializes in blending traditional taiko music with popular music elements. No matter what the context, the drums have retained their original nature to evoke solemnness and power throughout hundreds of years.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 28.

## Musician Interview: Jim Babor

Jim Babor has been a member of the Los Angeles Philharmonic since 1993. In addition to his performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Babor regularly participates in concerts on the LA Phil's Green Umbrella series. His solo engagements have included performing the xylorimba solo in Olivier Messiaen's *Des canyons aux étoiles* with Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He has also performed with the Cleveland Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony, the Seattle Symphony, the Kansas City Symphony, and the New World Symphony. He has also been fortunate enough to perform with Sō Percussion. Babor has recorded for Deutsche Grammophon, Sony, Telarc, Teldec, and London Records.<sup>25</sup>

During my interview with Jim, I asked him various questions related to the benefits of having performance experience in multiple genres of music. In his case, this included mainly marching band, orchestral music, and a bit of world music exposure. Since his career mostly centers around orchestral music, I asked him how being well-versed in multiple genres has benefited his orchestral career. He responded by saying the following:

I specifically changed my technique to a lighter style one summer when I was getting my masters at CIM. I am still heavy handed which I attribute to the drum corps style. However, rudimental playing is key to any orchestral job and there is no substitute for some sort of a good marching program to learn rudimental playing. Drum corps also primed me for the discipline it takes to practice long hours. The basis of orchestral playing boils down to competence with rudiments and rudimental drumming. All solo material for auditions and almost every excerpt has rudiments that carry over from marching percussion. Although the touch is quite different for orchestral playing, the actual rudiment most times is the same. Knowing one style of playing helps master these rudiments for orchestral playing.<sup>26</sup>

Hearing this confirmed the notion that an individual can benefit greatly from translating techniques, in this case snare drum rudiments, into different genres with a completely different sense of touch and purpose.

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<sup>25</sup> Jim Babor, *Biography*. <https://www.laphil.com/about/la-phil/meet-the-orchestra>.

<sup>26</sup> Jim Babor, e-mail interview.

I also asked him if he feels that it is more advantageous for an orchestral percussionist to have had multiple experiences in different genres or to have the same amount of experience in just classical music. He responded by saying:

I think it is important to have multiple experiences in different genres of percussion even to be an orchestral player. Jazz, drum set, rock, steel drum band, gamelan, marching band, etc. are all important. They are only going to help your orchestral playing by helping you to be more flexible in your interpretation of parts and of the music itself. In the other scenario with only having orchestral experience, you end up with a one-dimensional player (a one trick pony). I would say that they would most likely be not as musical, not as flexible, and not as open to new ideas and techniques. All of these things are needed to succeed in the job and make your boss (the conductor) happy.<sup>27</sup>

In the preparation of all of my recital repertoire, I had to utilize many different types of touch and nuance in order to get what I believe to be the right sound out of the variety of instruments that I am playing. After hearing Jim's perspective on this matter, I soon realized that the large variety of musical environments that I have been exposed to throughout my development have assisted me in the interpretation of my recital repertoire. From the loud and aggressive nature of *8 on 3 and 9 on 2* to the tranquil, serene nature of *In a Landscape*, a good percussionist must be able to navigate many different styles because inevitably, they are going to encounter musical situations in which they need to adapt quickly and the acquisition of skills from these many genres will only aid them in their development.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

## Mike Smith Interview

Mike Smith is a diverse percussionist who has studied many styles of music, as the saying goes, “From Bach to Rock”. He is originally self-taught, eventually took private lessons, and began his formal education with music in Junior High School. He then attended and graduated from Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn, NY, which was known for its prestigious music program. Mike went on to the classical music program at Queens College in Flushing, NY and later transferred to Howard University, where he earned his Bachelor of Music degree. Mike has performed at Disney Hall with the Southeast Symphony, an 86-piece orchestra, playing the music of George Gershwin, as well as The Dorothy Chandler Pavilion several times in the opera *La Boheme* under the baton of the great Placido Domingo. Mike has traveled the world and worked with Alicia Keys, Macy Gray, Brian Mcknight, Jeffrey Osborne, George Duke, Patti Labelle, Marilyn McCoo, Sheila E., Mark Antoine, Horace Silver, and many more.<sup>28</sup>

The reason I chose to interview Mike is that he is a percussionist that has a variety of experiences in many genres of popular music. Because of this, his work forces him to constantly adapt his playing techniques to a wide variety of situations. When I asked him what styles of music he plays the most he said:

Jazz, Blues, Bossa Nova, Samba, and Show Tunes. I would not say that I “specialize” in any style, however, my passion and heart has always been first and foremost Latin and African percussion instruments, so this is what I decided to concentrate on as far as making a living playing music. As you know already, these instruments are used in many styles/genres of music.<sup>29</sup>

Next, I asked Mike if he could attribute certain techniques to multiple styles even if they do not translate the same way in a particular style. He said:

I have applied many of the drum rudiments played with drumsticks to the conga drums using my hands. The most common rudiments include single strokes, double strokes, five-stroke roll, triplets, flams, ruffs/draggs, and others. When you think about it, some type of rudiment is always used in any percussion instrument and as a percussionist, the majority of my work requires me to play multiple instruments with various rhythms simultaneously.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Mike Smith, *Biography*.

<sup>29</sup> Mike Smith, e-mail interview.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Hearing this information also made realize that not only must an individual know the stylistic tendencies of every genre, but they must also be able to play all of the instruments in those genres as well. Mike went on to describe a setup for a regular gig that he performs on:

I play the cajon that I am sitting on with a conga in front of me, a hi-hat played by my left foot, a mounted cowbell played by my right foot, a ride cymbal on my right and a crash cymbal on my left. With this setup, I have to play different rhythms on different instruments with all four of my limbs.<sup>31</sup>

I can directly apply what Mike told me to much of my recital repertoire.

Particularly in *8 on 3 and 9 on 2* and *Frum*, I am using many snare rudiments with several variations and also performing multiple rhythms at once. At the end of *Frum* for example, I have to execute four different polyrhythms at once while using my foot for the kick drum, which is a skill that is gained heavily through playing drum set and various Latin percussion setups similar to those that Mike described to me. In *8 on 3 and 9 on 2*, I am required to execute many drum rudiments in a very short amount of time. This demands my brain to be constantly thinking and focusing on multiple actions at once in order to be able to execute them properly. The last question I asked Mike was if he notices the benefits of knowing a genre when he is playing in a completely different genre. He said:

Yes, because I can play various rhythms and styles that will fit and coexist well in different genres. For example, I can play a Latin tumbao pattern on congas with Pop, World, R&B, Fusion, Contemporary, and many other genres and it will fit without taking away from the form/style of music. This applies to many other patterns and styles as well.<sup>32</sup>

Hearing Mike's insight helped me understand how percussionists must be able to navigate through different genres effortlessly especially in today's global music scene.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

What I understood from him is that he is able to play in virtually every genre of percussion music due to his mental and technical versatility. Having this versatility will allow an individual to not only pick up foreign genres easier due to the increased musical flexibility that comes with being well-rounded, but also adapt skills that are learned in other genres to a wide variety of musical styles.

## Conclusion

Through the analysis of my recital repertoire and my communication with two professional percussionists who come from different musical backgrounds, yet share much of the same perspective when it comes to their performance practice, I have further realized just how much time and training can go into a performance of just one particular piece of music. My recital program consists entirely of pieces that require me to be in tune with different stylistic tendencies constantly in addition to my own personal interpretation. While listening to both Jim and Mike's insight, I realized just how much of my performance was made possible by the variety of musical experiences that I have had throughout my entire career.

If I even remove one field of knowledge from my list of abilities, many pieces on my program would be exponentially more difficult to learn and to ultimately perform under pressure. I believe that the reason for this difficulty has to do with the fact that certain solo pieces are composed with very obvious musical influences from other genres. In order to truly bring out these influences through live performance, the performer must have gone through some kind of previous training that is related to the type of influence that is trying to be conveyed. A different way of approaching this concept would be to briefly examine the art of method acting. In this approach, actors immerse themselves in the lifestyle and idiosyncratic behaviors of the characters they are trying to portray with the hope that if they go through what their characters have gone through, then the result will be a more honest and authentic performance of the character.

For example, it would be extremely difficult to learn *8 on 3 and 9 on 2* without having encountered the heavy rudimental playing required in drum corps. Although this

piece can be learned through a very detailed and methodical practice routine in the area of rudimental drumming, this method would not yield the same results as would the act of playing in an actual drum corps setting. The reason for this is that there are certain environmental factors that one goes through when they are placed in this situation such as the need for high physical/mental endurance, and reacting to other players in the same vicinity. The individual with actual drumline experience ideally would have also played marching snare, quads, and bass drum at some point because the skills required for all three of these instruments is present in the piece in various forms.

Furthermore, it is my hope that by sharing this knowledge with students of all ages but particularly younger students, it will encourage them to play within many genres of music not only to appreciate the influence of multiple cultures and styles, but to also expand the range of their technical and musical capabilities as a percussionist. I believe this will better prepare them for their futures as performers and educators.

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