

Sandbox Percussion

Program & Notes for SACMS February 12, 2023

Bell Patterns Victor Caccese

may the devil take me Amy Beth Kirsten

Largo from Keyboard Concerto No. 5 in f minor, BWV 1056 J.S. Bach (arr. Caccese)

Music for Percussion Quartet David Crowell

1. Fluctuation
2. Sky
3. Oscillation
4. Landscape

Pillar V Andy Akiho

-intermission-

Gossamer Nick DiBerardino

Rational People Tawnie Olson

1. Muting
2. Trolling

Drumming part 1 Steve Reich

PROGRAM NOTES

Victor Caccese - *Bell Patterns*

Bell Patterns was written for percussion quartet, and is scored for one vibraphone and four tuned desk bells. The piece was composed using a simple numbers sequence. The complexity in rhythm and harmonic interplay that results however is quite fascinating. Each member of the quartet is assigned a different number (2, 3, 4 and 5). Different rhythmic cells are constructed using these numbers, and are then looped on top of each other.

While writing this piece I began to explore how two or more rhythms of different speeds could layer on top of each other to create composite melodies and rhythms. When two rhythms of different speeds are played simultaneously they often are characterized as sounding dissonant. This is also referred to as a polyrhythm. It was my goal with *Bell Patterns* to find the lowest common subdivision of four seemingly dissonant rhythms, and slow them down to the point where they all shared a similar consonant pulse. Further, when you assign certain partials of one player's rhythm to a bell sound for instance, and the

rest of their pitches on a vibraphone, you are able to more clearly perceive a macro and micro pulse happening simultaneously. The juxtaposition of these slow and fast rhythms is woven throughout the form and functions as the primary compositional structure in the work.

-Victor Caccese

Amy Beth Kirsten - *may the devil take me*

may the devil take me is inspired by the following passage in Cervantes' iconic work, *Don Quixote*:

Sancho Panza hung on his words but said none of his own, and from time to time he turned his head to see if he could see the knights and giants his master was naming; since he could not make out any of them he said,

"Señor, may the devil take me, but no man, giant, or knight of all those your grace has mentioned can be seen anywhere around here; at least, I don't see them; maybe it's all enchantment, like last night's phantoms."

"How can you say that?" responded Don Quixote. "Do you not hear the neighing of horses, the call of the clarions, the sounds of the drums?"

"I don't hear anything," responded Sancho, "except the bleating of lots of sheep."

I'm fascinated by the idea that one character's reality is so at odds with another's. This bears out musically by converting triangles into objects that are contrary to their true nature. They aren't resonant but are choked or muted. Perhaps this makes them untrue somehow. Perhaps the counterpoint of true and untrue sounds creates a kind of sonic enchantment reflecting the world between reality and fiction that Cervantes creates.

-Amy Beth Kirsten

J.S. Bach - *Largo from Keyboard Concerto No. 5 in f minor, BWV 1056* (arr. Caccese)

Even though Bach didn't write any percussion quartets, we learn so much by arranging and performing his music. This particular short movement has long been a favorite of Victor's. We began to rehearse this arrangement shortly after David Crowell finished his first quartet for us - *Music for Percussion Quartet* - and we kind of accidentally juxtaposed them one day. We could not believe how beautifully the two worked together, harmonically and aesthetically, and with David's blessing, we perform this short work as a kind of introduction to his piece.

-Ian Rosenbaum

David Crowell - *Music for Percussion Quartet*

Music for Percussion Quartet draws inspiration from the radically different environments I've lived in and experienced while traveling.

The 1st and 3rd movements, Fluctuation and Oscillation, both utilize polyrhythms throughout. Parts are interconnected, even as the clarity of their relationships blur and shift in focus. The urban dance of individual agendas, varying rates of movement, and differing levels of calm or high-pitched anxiety mirror the independent/co-dependent nature of this polyrhythmic interaction.

Sky and Landscape, on the other hand, come from the meditative calm of spacious, pure environments. These movements suggest a place for contemplation in quiet spaces of the mind. I have experienced this perspective most vividly when climbing mountains, looking up at the sky and out on to the landscape.

-David Crowell

Andy Akiho - Pillar V (2020)

Pillar V is a movement from Andy Akiho's extended work *Seven Pillars*, a 75-minute work that includes 7 quartets and 1 solo for each member of the group.

This movement is built around an ostinato that is 25 sixteenth notes long - 6 quarter notes + 1 sixteenth note, and the melodies and rhythms that surround the ostinato are based on multiples of 25. It's a rhythmic game with a hidden pulse - as soon as you start to tap your foot, the beat moves.

The pitch content for all of *Seven Pillars* is based on a scale that Andy created. The pitches in *Pillar V* are a hexatonic subset of that scale - this piece uses only six unique notes that are organized in alternating half steps and minor thirds.

--Ian Rosenbaum

Nick DiBerardino - Gossamer

Gossamer responds to Walt Whitman's "A Noiseless, Patient Spider," which reads:

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark'd where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark'd how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form'd, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

...till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere...

-Nick DiBerardino

Tawnie Olson - *Rational People* (2021-2022)

Chamber music is sometimes thought of as a conversation among equals; Goethe once described the string quartet as “four rational people conversing.” I am not sure that I’ve ever met a rational person, let alone had the opportunity to listen to four of them speak to each other, but Goethe’s comparison made me wonder what might happen if I let contemporary forms of communication inspire a piece of music.

Trolling can consist of nasty interruptions of online conversations, but also mere playful teasing. Muting people on social media insulates us from voices with which we disagree, limiting our understanding of the world while sheltering us from distress. Mobbing happens when rage spreads online and people attack an individual or group who has/have committed a real or imagined sin of omission or commission.

Perhaps the closest any of us comes to rational discourse is listening. It is difficult to allow others to express themselves without interruption, to repeat their ideas back to them to make sure we’ve understood what they’ve said, and to let go of our desire to offer advice or change their opinion. But it is one of the most important things we can do.

Rational People was commissioned by the Canada Council for the Arts, and is dedicated to Sandbox Percussion, for whom it was written.

-Tawnie Olson

Steve Reich - *Drumming part 1*

For one year, between the fall of 1970 and the fall of 1971, I worked on what turned out to be the longest piece I have ever composed. *Drumming* lasts from 55 to 75 minutes (depending on the number of repeats played) and is divided into four parts that are performed without pause. The first part [the only movement that you will hear on today’s program] is for four pairs of tuned bongo drums, stand-mounted and played with sticks; the second, for three marimbas played by nine players together with two women’s voices; the third, for three glockenspiels played by four players together with whistling and piccolo; and the fourth section is for all these instruments and voices combined.

While first playing the drums during the process of composition, I found myself sometimes singing with them, using my voice to imitate the sounds they made. I began to understand that this might also be possible with the marimbas and glockenspiels as well. Thus the basic assumption about the voices in *Drumming* was that they would not sing words, but would precisely imitate the sound of the instruments. The women’s voices sing patterns resulting from the combination of two or more marimbas playing the identical repeating pattern one of more quarter notes out of phase with each other. By exactly imitating the sound of the instruments, and by gradually fading the patterns in and out, the singers cause them to slowly rise to the surface of the music and then fade back into it, allowing the listener to hear these patterns, along with many others, actually sounding in the instruments. For the marimbas, the female voice was needed, using consonants like “b” and “d” with a more or less “u” (as in “you”) vowel sound. In the case of the glockenspiels, the extremely high range of the instrument precluded any use of the voice and necessitated whistling. Even this form of vocal production proved impossible when the instrument was played in its higher ranges, and this created the need for a more sophisticated form of whistle: the piccolo. In the last section of the piece these techniques are combined simultaneously with each imitating its particular instrument.

The sections are joined together by the new instruments doubling the exact pattern of the instruments already playing. At the end of the drum section three drummers play the same pattern two quarter notes out of phase with each other. Three marimba players enter softly with the same pattern also played two quarter notes out of phase. The drummers gradually fade out so that the same rhythm and pitches are maintained with a gradual change of timbre. At the end of the marimba section, three marimbas played in their highest range are doubled by three glockenspiels in their lowest range so that the process of maintaining rhythm and pitch while gradually changing timbre is repeated. The sections are not set off from each other by changes in key, the traditional means of gaining extended length in Western music. *Drumming* shows that it is possible to keep going in the same key for quite a while if there are instead considerable rhythmic developments together with occasional, but complete, changes of timbre to supply variety.

I am often asked what influence my visit of Africa in summer of 1970 had on *Drumming*. The answer is confirmation. It confirmed my intuition that acoustic instruments could be used to produce music that was genuinely richer in sound than that produced with electronic instruments, as well as confirming my natural inclination towards percussion (I became a drummer at the age of 14).

The transition from glockenspiels to the last section of the piece, for all instruments and voices combined, is made by a new musical process I call build-up and reduction. *Drumming* begins with two drummers building up the basic rhythmic pattern of the entire piece from a single drum beat, played in a cycle of twelve beats with rests on all the other beats. Gradually additional drumbeats are substituted for the rests, one at a time, until the pattern is completed. The reduction process is simply the reverse where rests are gradually substituted for the beats, one at a time, until only a section leads to a build-up for the drums, marimbas, and glockenspiels simultaneously.

There is, then, only one basic rhythmic pattern for all of *Drumming*. This pattern undergoes changes of phase position, pitch, and timbre, but all the performers play this pattern, or some part of it, throughout the entire piece.

-Steve Reich