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2007 PAS Composition Contest Winners

BY DANIEL ADAMS

The 34th Annual Percussive Arts Society Composition Contest featured two categories: Unaccompanied Marimba Solo and Medium Percussion Ensemble (five to eight players). The contest was established to encourage composers to write innovative and effective works for percussion. Different instrumental combinations are featured each year.

The first-place winner in each category received a prize of \$1,500 while the second and third place winners received awards of \$500 and \$250 respectively.

UNACCOMPANIED MARIMBA SOLO

There were 32 entries in this category. The judges were Alice Gomez, Eric Hollenbeck, Rebecca Kite, David Maslanka, and Dr. John Parks.

First Place: *Fear of Silence* by Joel Harrison, New York, New York

"Fear of Silence," written for a low-C marimba, is the most chromatic and rhythmically complex of the three winning marimba compositions. Beginning at a tempo of quarter-note equals 140 and marked "energetically," it is written in 5/4 time throughout with three one-measure meter changes, two of which are silent and one which precedes an important thematic transition.

Although "Fear of Silence" demonstrates some attributes of ternary form, its most fundamental structural determinant is a developmental process based on three musical ideas. The first idea, introduced in measures 1–10, is a succession of repeated single strokes on the note A 220, based on duple and triple beat subdivisions with shifting accents. Developing this idea, the composer uses



repeated pitches as germinal resources for three-note cells that are gradually expanded to include additional pitches. In measure 48, for example, a passage of repeated sixteenth notes played on the lowest note of the instrument is expanded to include D-flat and E-flat, and, by measure 50, B-flat, B-natural, and A.

The second idea is a cascading melodic line that first appears in measure 11 and alternates with the repeated A in measures 11–19. Introduced as two-measure diatonic and mostly arpeggiated figures in the bass clef, these melodic lines become longer, increasingly chromatic, and wider in register. The third idea, introduced in measures 20–22, is based on rhythmically interlocking double stops played between the two hands. Consisting mostly of perfect fourths, perfect fifths, and tritones, the double stops become an essential part of the work's climax in measures 90–105, as quartal and quintal double-stops traverse the range of the instrument in a technically challenging and virtuosically impressive flourish. A modified restatement of the opening measures leads to a final section in which the melodic arpeggios similarly span the instrument's five-octave range.

Second Place: *Memento* by Ivan Trevino, Victoria, Texas

"Memento," scored for low-C marimba, was inspired by the composer's feelings of homesickness and his memories of loved ones. It is an introspective and contemplative piece with a wide gamut of moods and range of expression. The work begins with a prelude titled "Preclusion," dedicated to the composer's late grandfather. The prelude is marked "Heavenly, Molto



Rubato." It is written in four flats with several D-naturals and one G-flat, and its pitch organization is based on a fluctuation between modality and tonality. Nine measures of varying duration appear in the absence of a time signature. Three short irregular phrases of arpeggio-like melodies begin on the lowest note of the instrument and span approximately three and one half octaves.

The beginning of "Memento" is marked "Reflective, between wake and sleep," and commences in 12/8 with an initial tempo of dotted-quarter-note equals 72. Like "Preclusion," it is written in four flats. Its fluctuation of tonality and modality, however, is more expansive than that of the prelude.

"Memento" is based mostly on arpeggiated melodies, varying in tessitura and frequently interspersed with stepwise motion. Following a four-measure introduction, repetitious melodic fragments played in one hand are occasionally accompanied by double stops in the other hand. Unison double stops differentiate principal and subordinate notes in one single-line melodic passage. The rhythmic motion is mostly unrelenting, shifting between compound and simple meter. The form is based on a rondo-like succession of through-composed episodic sections, each with detailed descriptions such as "awake with a vivid sense of reality" and "Joyous Like an Anthem." Changes of tempo and texture are occasionally juxtaposed with recurrences of previously stated ideas.

A notable transition takes place in measure 72, as the key signature changes from four flats to four sharps in an enharmonic cyclic modulation that lasts for the remainder of the piece. The tonality following the key signature change is centered mostly around C-sharp minor with no accidentals. The piece ends with a four-measure coda based loosely on the opening materials. The composer has provided clear indications of four-mallet sticking patterns for the work's most challenging passages.

Third Place: *Abaca* by Guillaume Le Picard, Paris, France

This is the most diatonic, lyrical, and formally traditional of the three winning marimba pieces. Nevertheless, its rhythmic and metric elements are modern and challenging. “Abaca,” in E-flat major, is composed in composite ternary form with an introduction and coda.



Following a four-measure introduction in common time with a tempo of quarter note equals 52, a two-measure transition at a tempo of dotted-quarter-note equals 120 precedes the A section, which is written in 6/8 at a tempo of dotted-quarter-note equals 110. It is characterized by repeated phrases in a melody divided between the two hands and spanning both clefs. The key signature changes to four flats in measure 28, commencing with the second subsection of A, in which the pitch is centered mostly in D-flat Lydian. The theme continues in 6/8 with two meter changes, both consisting of a 9/8 measure followed by a 7/8 measure. The A section ends on a D-flat major seventh chord leading into a two-measure transition to B and a return of the initial key signature

Following a three-measure transition similar to that which precedes the A section, the B section begins in measure 53 and is divided into three subsections. The first subsection, in C minor, is the most rhythmically and polyphonically interesting part of the piece. It is constructed of two superimposed ostinato-like passages divided between the hands. Both are sequential and include literal and transposed repetitions of thematic materials.

The middle subsection resembles an interlude and is divided into two eight-measure periods. The first period is based on a sequential melody in 5/8, modulating from C minor to E-flat major with a measure of 3/8 at its final cadence. The second period, in contrast, is a chorale-like succession of rolled chords ending on an E-flat major chord. The third subsection, returning to the original key of E-flat major, contains ostinato-like passages similar in character to those in the first subsection. Following a *dal segno* return to the A section, “Abaca”

ends with a six-measure coda based on the beginning of the B section.

MEDIUM PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

Twenty-eight entries were received for this category. The judges were Michael Aukofer, Susan Powell, Steve Riley, Michael Rosen, and David Skidmore.

First Place: *Accidental Migration* for solo marimba and percussion ensemble by Kenneth D. Froelich, Fresno, CA

The title of this piece was inspired by “the excitement, stress, and fear” brought forth by unanticipated change. These emotions are represented in the music by abrupt changes of pulse, stylistic character, and melodic inflection. The term “accidental” refers to both the accidental arrival at a new location and, in a musical context, the constant expansion of melodic materials through the addition of accidentals. The composer describes the piece as “highly energetic and technically challenging” for the ensemble and virtuosic for the soloist.

“Accidental Migration” is scored for solo

marimba and six additional percussionists. Three percussionists play melodic instruments including glockenspiel, xylophone, amglocken, and one additional marimba. Tuned gongs or chimes may be substituted if amglocken are not available. The three other percussionists play chimes and an assortment of indefinitely-pitched wood, metal, and membrane instruments.



Although the term *concerto* does not appear in the title or performance notes, the formal design and instrumental texture of “Accidental Migration” resembles that of a solo concerto, complete with a *cadenza* immediately preceding the coda. The melodic instruments in the ensemble parts mostly accompany the solo part, but they occasionally join the solo marimba in contrapuntal

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passages. The indefinitely pitched instruments are mostly played in rhythmic unison with the melodic parts but occasionally display rhythmic independence. The solo part includes a few contrapuntal passages between the two hands and some melodic passages played in parallel double-stops, consisting mainly of thirds and fourths.

Composed mostly in 7/8, "Accidental Migration" begins at a tempo of quarter-note equals 144. Following a two-measure introduction, the principal theme is stated in the marimba part. Based on a synthetic scale with A as tonic, it is restated with variation and additional accidentals while the melodic instruments maintain a vamp-like chordal accompaniment. A rhythmic ostinato is introduced in the temple block part and subsequently becomes an important structural component of the parts played by the indefinitely pitched instruments. The developmental process commences through expanded register, meter changes, and increased chromaticism.

A second theme, based on the first tet-

rachord of a B minor scale, is introduced in measures 79–83. Like the first theme, it is repeated with variation and additional pitches. Development continues through frequent and abrupt alternation of contrasting musical structures, building to a climax of dense counterpoint between all parts, and leading to resolution via the cadenza and coda.

Second Place: *ExitIX Novum* by Peter Saleh, New Brunswick, NJ

"ExitIX Novum" is scored for solo percussionist with percussion quartet. The soloist plays a prepared tenor drum, vibraphone, and a pedal-mounted Chinese tom-tom. A bass drum may be substituted for the Chinese tom-tom, which is used mostly for occasional rhythmic punctuations. Originally designed by percussionist Bob Becker, the prepared tenor drum is actually a tightly-tuned snare drum fitted with a foam muffling ring under the batter head and devoid of snares. The prepared tenor drum is intended to imitate a tabla. In ad-

dition to Indian percussion, the composer also acknowledges Ragtime xylophone, rudimentary drumming, and second-line New Orleans jazz rhythms as inspirations for "ExitIX Novum."

Pitch organization is based on a combination of three octatonic scale structures, which renders an effect similar to tonal modulation. There are frequent meter changes and all parts demand considerable technical skills.

The percussion quartet includes a part for xylophone and finger cymbals, a multiple percussion part that includes a jembe, bass drum, woodblock, three suspended cymbals, three triangles, and two marimba parts, each written on a single staff line as



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Marimba I and Marimba II, respectively. Both marimba parts begin in bass clef, and the first part switches between bass and treble clef later in the piece. The marimba parts could conceivably be played using two mallets, but each would be better facilitated using two mallets in each hand. Although frequently played in rhythmic unison, the two parts also demonstrate considerable rhythmic independence. The four-octave xylophone part includes *ossia* passages for a three and one-half octave instrument. The xylophone and multiple percussion parts also include a few passages played on an “alto marimba” or “auxiliary marimba.” The jembe is the most prominent indefinitely-pitched ensemble part.

“ExitIX Novum” begins with a vibraphone solo consisting of both chords and melody. The soloist is accompanied by marimba, finger cymbals, bass drum, and suspended cymbal. A second, similar accompanied vibraphone solo occurs later in the piece. However, the solo part is dominated by the relentless rhythmic drive of the tenor drum, introduced in measure 23. Sticking patterns are indicated in some passages, and the part includes numerous accented and unaccented single strokes, rebound strokes, and flams.

For the first half of the piece the tempo increases incrementally and the ensemble accompaniment is texturally dense. The second vibraphone solo brings a brief repose. As the tenor drum returns there is an effect of acceleration through the rhythmic diminution of rapidly alternating duple, triple, quintuple, and sextuple rhythmic subdivisions. The accompaniment remains sparse, consisting of mostly marimba rolls. The sparseness of this section provides an impressive contrast to the increase in tempo and rhythmic activity in all parts as the piece is propelled to its frantic conclusion.

Third Place: *Xati* by Payton MacDonald, West Orange, New Jersey

The only ensemble piece for a homogeneous group of indefinitely-pitched instruments, “*Xati*” is scored for six tambourines. Tambourines of any type may be used, but all must have calfskin heads. The sizes of the instruments should be chosen to produce a graduation of pitch from high to low from Player One to Player Six. The instruments may be amplified if preferred. *Kanjiras*, *pandieros*, and *riqs* can be substituted for tambourines with appropriate adjustments of performance technique.

Knee and hand strokes are indicated on

different parts of the staff. The choice of whether to use the fist or the fingers is left to performer’s discretion in accordance with varying dynamics and articulation markings. Open and closed shake rolls, as well as thumb or finger rolls are indicated, and other detailed performance instructions are provided. The preparation and performance of the piece would provide a great review of tambourine techniques for percussion students.



The composer acknowledges the influence of South Indian Carnatic music and the formalized procedures employed by the late Iannis Xenakis, the inspiration for the first letter of the title. The remaining letters are derived from *jati*, the Carnatic concept of organizing polyrhythmic structures. Accordingly, the formal organization of *Xati* derives from the gradual transformation of repeated raga-like figures characteristic of Carnatic music and the calculated fluctuation of sonic density that was the basis of Xenakis’s works. In the absence of definite pitch and a within a limited spectrum of timbre, the composer attains sonic contrasts through three variables: the number of parts playing simultaneously, the range of performance techniques, and the spectrum and relative complexity of rhythmic subdivisions.

The rhythms of the first eight measures consist of quarter notes and eighth-note triplets. Over the course of the piece, the number of rhythmic subdivisions (based

mostly on prime numbers) increases while their durations simultaneously decrease in value. This process culminates at measure 75 in an eight-measure passage that alternates between 3/4, 2/4, and 1/4 meter. All parts contain either sixteenth notes in ratios of six, seven, nine and thirteen, or thirty-second notes in a ratio of 15 against 16. Dense polyrhythmic measures alternate dramatically with measures of silence. The texture of the next section is less dense, with durations of quarter notes, eighth notes and sixteenth notes in triple, quadruple, and quintuple beat subdivisions. By measures 88–89 the rhythmic texture is reduced to quarter notes, and a written instruction advises the performer to not “get softer as the texture thins.” The *finale* is similar to measures 74–82—a fluctuation between dense polyrhythmic textures and brief silent interludes.

2008 Contest Categories

The 2008 PAS Composition Contest will include the following two categories: I. Soloist with Percussion Ensemble (ensemble is four to eight players) and II, Duet for Voice and Vibraphone or Voice and Marimba.

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