

EXPANDED PROGRAM NOTES FROM A GRADUATE RECITAL PERFORMED
MARCH 20, 2009

BY

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A CREATIVE PROJECT SUBMITTED IN

PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF MUSIC

SCHOOL OF MUSIC
BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
MUNCIE, INDIANA

MAY 2010

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Introduction

On March 20, 2009, the writer performed a graduate percussion recital, presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in percussion performance (Appendix). The compositions included in this performance were by German, Japanese, Icelandic, and American composers written over a span of twenty-three years, from 1974 to 1997.

Like any work of art, each composition has a unique history. *Ilijas* and *Variations on Japanese Children's Songs* are based on Eastern European and Japanese musical tradition, respectively. *Carnival of Venice Fantasy*, on the other hand, was originally composed as part of an etude book for trumpet, and later arranged for marimba, as well as other instruments.

Without studying information about the composers, it is nearly impossible to fully grasp the compositions themselves. The composers featured in this program each have their own distinctive style. Keiko Abe bases her works on her own improvisations, while Nebojša Živković's writing tends to be heavily rhythmic and metrically complex. It is important for performers to be well-informed about the composers' styles and how they affect the notes written in the scores.

Related Literature

With the exception of Arban, the composers featured on this program are still actively composing, and have only recently been recognized as major composers for percussion. For example, Áskell Másson and Nebojša Živković's first works were published in the 1970s, and information related to them is limited. Information about

these composers will come mostly from program notes and electronic sources, and printed articles from journals such as *Percussive Notes* when available. Živković, Abe, and Leonard are sponsored by the Yamaha Corporation and maintain websites through the corporation from which additional information can be garnered. Although Keiko Abe and Stanley Leonard are more widely known, a limited number of articles are available in print or electronically about them and their compositions.

Procedures

As previously stated, the selections on this program were all composed within the last twenty-five years. Consequently, the research on these compositions and composers will come from electronic as well as print sources. After completing the research, detailed program notes will be written and will follow the order of the program. A biography for each composer will be given, including information regarding his or her compositional style. Following each biographical section, the featured composition will be discussed.

Nebojša Jovan Živković: Ilijas

Nebojša Jovan Živković (pronounced Neboyssha Yovan Chivkovich), a German composer, was born in 1962. He currently resides in Stuttgart, and maintains “a very rare tradition – that of combined composer and virtuoso.”¹ He holds masters’ degrees in composition, music theory, and percussion, and tours extensively through Europe, Asia, and the Americas. His 2009 concert series included performances in Japan, Bulgaria, Italy, the Czech Republic, and the United States, among others.¹ In addition to his exhaustive touring schedule, Živković has made a large number of television and radio appearances. He has released four solo CDs and he is heard on four others, including a recording of Darius Milhaud’s *Concerto pour Marimba et Vibraphone* with the Austrian Chamber Symphony Orchestra.¹ As noted before, Živković is sponsored by Yamaha, and performs on a custom 5-octave marimba based on the discontinued YM-6000 model.²

Živković’s music has been described as “new music with sparks and soul.”³ Self-described as “compositionally schizophrenic,” he lists many influences as being responsible for the wide stylistic range of his works: his German and Yugoslavian education as well as contemporary, folk, pop, and sacred music.⁴ He has composed over thirty works for percussion in addition to many works for other solo instruments, including cello, violin, and piano.⁵ His compositions for marimba range from simple

¹ Nebojša Jovan Živković, “Bibliography,” www.zivkovic.de (accessed June 12, 2009).

² www.zivkovic.de.

³ Nebojša Jovan Živković, “Nebojša Živković: Biography,” www.yamaha.com (accessed June 12, 2009).

⁴ Ben Toth, “Uneven Soul: A Conversation with Nebojša Jovan Živković,” *Percussive Notes* 35, no. 6 (December 1997): 47.

⁵ www.zivkovic.de.

tonal selections such as the *Funny Mallets* series to virtuosic, contemporary pieces, such as *Ilijas* and *Concerto No. 2*, featured on this recital.

Ilijas (pronounced eeleeeyash) is named for a small town near Sarajevo in the former Republic of Bosnia. The town was hard-hit by the Bosnian War, and survivors' stories inspired Živković to compose the piece. *Ilijas* is composed in ternary form, returning to ideas of the opening section at its conclusion.

The first section is rhapsodic and virtuosic, featuring unmeasured accelerating patterns in the left hand while the right hand sustains a one-handed octave roll. Živković's use of rhythmic freedom in combination with the marimba's full range results in a sense of the virtuosity typically associated with Franz Liszt's piano works. A majority of the chords are based on minor triads, resulting in a melancholy opening that comes to a close on two one-handed rolls, out of which the rhythmic ostinato of the second section emerges.

The second section is marked by the presence of an ostinato in the left hand. Frequent meter changes, a faster, steady tempo, and a driving right-hand melody in octaves create an intense change from the opening section. The melody consists of a pattern featuring a descending leap followed by an ascending step, resulting in a descending line that is repeated and varied. This main melody is interrupted twice by a fast, linear dancelike melody, dividing the section into three parts. Throughout the middle section, the theme of the second section is varied to become more complex and frenzied

The end of the second section consists of a large *ritardando* on repeated *sforzando* chords that resolve to the opening G-minor chord, bringing back the melancholy feeling of the first section. The accelerating chords return in the left hand

while the right hand again rolls on octaves. As in the first section, the end of the piece is unmetered, and Živković uses increasingly longer note values to slow the pulse to the final *morendo*, allowing the chords to die away to *pianissimo*.

Ilijas was written in a manner that makes it nearly, if not totally, impossible to perform the same way twice. While providing guidelines for the performer in the opening and closing sections, Živković allows a large amount of freedom for expression and personalization of his work. The resulting experience, with its exciting changes of style and mood, is one full of emotion that listeners as well as performers enjoy.

Stanley Leonard: *Fanfare and Allegro*

Stanley Leonard (b. 1931) began playing timpani with the Independence Little Symphony in Independence, Missouri, at the age of 14.⁶ Three years later, he began his career as a professional timpanist with the Kansas City Philharmonic. After studying with Edward Metzinger at Northwestern University for a year, he transferred to the Eastman School of Music to study percussion with William Street. Also studying at Eastman at the time were several men who would become major proponents of percussion and percussion literature: John Beck, Gordon Peters, and Mitchell Peters.⁷ Leonard graduated with a B.M. from Eastman in 1954. In 1956, he won the principal timpani position for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. During his time with the PSO, Leonard performed internationally in concerts, television programs, and over 50 recordings.⁸ He held the position for 38 years before retiring in 1994.⁹ Since retiring, Leonard has served on faculty at Carnegie Mellon and Duquesne Universities as Adjunct Professor of Percussion.

In addition to a highly successful performing career, Stanley Leonard has produced a large number of compositions and one method book, *Pedal Technique for Timpani* (1988). His book was one of the first to truly address the musical potential of the drums' pedals, as he looked to impress upon timpanists that "the pedals [are] a natural

⁶ Brett Dietz, "A Continuing Pursuit of Excellence: An Interview with Stanley Leonard," *Percussive Notes* 46 no. 3 (June 2008): 24.

⁷ Dietz, 24.

⁸ Stanley Leonard, "Stanley Leonard: Biography," www.yamaha.com (accessed June 12, 2009).

⁹ John Soroka, "Stanley Leonard: A Life in Percussion," *Percussive Notes* 33 no. 4 (August 1995): 58.

part of the total process of playing the timpani, as an integral part of...playing.”¹⁰ He has written many works for percussion ensemble as well as solo timpani and accompanied timpani, including *Fanfare and Allegro*, published in 1974. Many of his works can be heard on his two CDs, *Canticle* and *Collage*.

Fanfare and Allegro is a duet for four timpani and trumpet. The importance Leonard places on quick, accurate pedaling that would be brought to light in *Pedal Technique for Timpani* is evident from the very beginning of the piece. It begins with a slow unmeasured fanfare and requires very accurate pitch changes from the timpanist. The articulations are very *legato* with few places to dampen, leaving the accuracy of pitch from both performers very exposed.

The main body of the piece is a rousing Allegro with shorter rhythmic values, but requiring much faster pedal work. The Allegro is divided into three sections. The first features call-and-response mixed with the performers working together. The subdivisions are all based on the sixteenth note, creating a marchlike feel using material from the opening Fanfare. There are several scalar passages to be played on one drum or between two drums that require the performer to pedal quickly and accurately. The second section requires the timpanist to change mallets while playing, and utilizes a triplet subdivision. The timpanist is required to maintain a steady triplet pulse with the right hand on the highest drum while the left hand and feet work together to play and pedal a melody on the remaining drums. After a fast rhythmic passage featuring steady sixteenth-note triplets that leads to a long roll on the largest (32-inch) drum, material from the opening

¹⁰ Soroka, 58.

of the Allegro returns to finish the piece. The final measures are a challenge in intonation, containing six notes played entirely in unison by the two performers.

Keiko Abe: Variations on Japanese Children's Songs

Keiko Abe (pronounced KAY-ee-koh Ah-be) is one of the most recognizable names in marimba literature and performance [*sic*]. A native of Japan, she is well known as a tiny, shy woman whose compositions and performances exude nothing but confidence and strong personality. Born in 1937, she became interested in marimba at the age of twelve when she heard a performance by the Lecours Mission group.¹¹ After graduating from music school, she organized a trio of young women who played popular music and had a successful performing and recording career, but she soon felt limited by the literature and disbanded the group to compose her own music.⁷

As a composer, Abe became interested in improvisation, and attempted to follow artists like Milt Jackson and Lionel Hampton.¹² She soon realized that she needed to find her own style, and many of her works today have similar compositional elements that are widely recognizable as belonging to her. Her philosophy of improvisation and performance is largely evident in her compositions. "When improvising, you work with a presentiment of the sounds that are about to be created, and you place each phrase in relation to an intuitive and sensual conception of the musical structure."¹³ Many of Abe's compositions feature long pauses, uneven subdivisions, and many different timbres such as dead strokes or using the shaft of the mallet on the end of the bars. The changes found in her music may seem abrupt at first, but the overall phrasing and development become apparent to the ear.

¹¹ Rebecca Kite, "Keiko Abe's Quest: Developing the 5-Octave Marimba," *Percussive Notes* 36 no. 2 (April 1998): 52.

¹² Lauren Vogel Weiss, "Keiko Abe," *Percussive Notes* 32 no. 3 (June 1994): 8.

¹³ Weiss, 8-9.

Much of the development of the marimba itself as an instrument is to be credited to Keiko Abe. Her first solo recital was performed on a Musser 4-octave marimba, although at the time, she was working with the Yamaha Corporation to design and manufacture marimbas.¹⁴ Abe was very specific regarding her desire for a brilliant upper register and mellow low register, and from her suggestions, Yamaha produced the YM-4000, a 4-octave instrument that Abe began using for performances.¹⁵ As Abe composed for a larger instrument, Yamaha kept expanding the keyboard, resulting in the YM-6000 in 1984, and the 5-octave marimba became the basis for most major marimba works.¹⁶

Keiko Abe has been widely honored all over the world. She has received the Japan Fine Arts Festival Award six times, and was the first woman inducted into the Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame in 1993.¹⁷ She has served on juries for marimba competitions in Germany and France, and as Artistic Director for the World Festival in Japan, and the Percussion Festival of Japan Week in Korea.¹⁸ Abe's students include Evelyn Glennie and Takayoshi Yoshioka, major performers and composers in their own right, and she founded the Tokyo Quintet, an ensemble whose instrumentation has been imitated by the Pleiade Quintet and New York Quintet. She maintains a full teaching and composing schedule at Toho Gakuin School of Music in Tokyo while also touring and performing regularly.

In response to her success, Keiko Abe remains modest and gives credit to the marimba, describing herself as the vessel. At the PASIC Awards Banquet in 1993, she

¹⁴ Kite, 52.

¹⁵ Kite, 52.

¹⁶ Kite, 54.

¹⁷ Keiko Abe, "Keiko Abe: Biography," www.yamaha.com (accessed June 12, 2009).

¹⁸ Abe, www.yamaha.com.

remarked, “The marimba is very special to me. I listen carefully to understand its many possibilities...When I play, I have a great desire to find its expressive possibilities – knowing that at one time this most beautiful wood came from a living tree with its own history and experience. It is as if the marimba bar breathes like a living tree, and when I make music I want to breathe with it.”¹⁹

Variations on Japanese Children’s Songs is based on the songs and memories of Abe’s childhood in pre-World War II Tokyo. It is composed in three sections, and opens with an ostinato in the left hand over which the right hand slowly builds a melody. The melody grows and becomes more complex, melding more and more with the ostinato. There are occasional interjections of faster material, but Abe always returns to the opening melody.

The second section is an improvisatory cadenza-like section. Abe juxtaposes the extreme registers of the instrument, as well as an extreme dynamic range. Small motives are developed, then left for the next idea, requiring the performer to change styles quickly while finding a way to maintain a sense of continuity so that the flow of the piece is not lost.

The final section recalls the interjections of the opening. It abruptly begins at *fortissimo*, announcing to the listener that the piece is moving on. In this section, the opening melody and ostinato are used as interjections, bringing the piece full circle without an exact repeat. The two songs are varied and developed through the entire work, resulting in a piece that comes full circle while at the same time moves the audience from one place to another.

¹⁹ Weiss, 9.

The huge contrasts found in this piece are typical of Keiko Abe's work. Large leaps from one end of the instrument to the other, often within the same measure, are also common in her works. These leaps pose a special challenge to performers, as she often chooses fast tempi, making accuracy very difficult to achieve. She also uses major dynamic contrasts, moving abruptly from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo* as a way of drawing attention to particular lines or chords. Finally, Abe frequently writes a difficult ostinato in one hand while requiring the performer to play an intricate melody in the other hand. This is often done using asymmetrical meters, and the phrases generally do not fit the bar lines, resulting in a blurring of meter that can present a mental challenge for even the most adept performers.

Joseph Jean Baptiste Laurent Arban: *Carnival of Venice*

Joseph Jean Baptiste Laurent Arban was born in 1825 in Lyons, France. He began playing cornet very early, and entered the Paris Conservatoire in 1841. In 1869, he established a cornet class at the Conservatoire, where he was professor of cornet for five years.²⁰ He left to pursue a career as conductor of a French orchestra in St. Petersburg, but returned to the Conservatoire in 1880.²¹ Until his death in 1889, Arban devoted himself to teaching and finding ways to improve brass instruments.

Arban was known for being a “brilliant performer,” and his performances are credited with pushing the cornet to tremendous popularity in Europe.²² He is also known for being a systematic teacher who demanded his students be proficient at all aspects of the cornet, not only range or tone quality. In the preface to his instructional book, *Method for Cornet*, Arban writes, “It is not sufficient to phrase well or execute difficult passages with skill. It is necessary that both should be equally well done.”²³ This philosophy is the main reason Arban’s book has remained one of the standards of cornet and trumpet literature. It contains written instructions, as well as hundreds of exercises designed to facilitate range, dexterity, and tone, among other aspects of brass performance.

Fantasie and Variations on The Carnival of Venice is the eleventh etude in Arban’s method book. It is based on a theme in two parts that is stated, then undergoes a series of four variations, each designed to develop the performer’s proficiency at a

²⁰ Edwin Franko Goldman and Walter Smith, eds., *Arban’s Complete Conservatory Method for Trumpet* (New York: Carl Fischer, 1982), vii.

²¹ Edward H. Tarr. “Arban, (Joseph) Jean-Baptiste (Laurent),” In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, www.oxfordmusiconline.com (accessed 16 June 2009).

²² Goldman and Smith, vii.

²³ J.B. Arban, preface to *Arban’s Complete Conservatory Method for Trumpet* ed. Edwin Franco Goldman and Walter Smith (New York: Carl Fischer, 1982), iii.

specific technical aspect. For example, the third variation requires the performer to pay close attention to a wide variety of articulations. The difficulty of this piece lies in performing technically difficult passages without losing the musicality found in the opening statement.

This composition has become tremendously popular, and has been transcribed and arranged for many wind and keyboard instruments. The arrangement on this program, by marimbist Linda Maxey, opens with a statement of the theme using four mallets. Accuracy is absolutely essential during the opening segment, as the traditional tonality makes any mistake readily apparent to the audience. The variations feature very fast scalar passages using two mallets that require the performer to make large octave leaps and cross mallets while retaining the melody presented in the opening theme.

Áskell Másson: *Prim*

Áskell Másson (b. 1953) is a native of Iceland. He began playing clarinet in 1961, but went on to study percussion at the Reykjavik College of Music as well as privately with James Blades in London.²⁴ From 1973 to 1978, Másson worked as a composer for the Ballet of the National Theatre, and from 1978 to 1983, he was a producer at the Music Department of the Icelandic State Radio.²⁵ Since 1983, he has worked as a full-time composer, collaborating with artists such as Evelyn Glennie and Gert Mortensen.²⁶

Másson is a prolific composer, with nearly thirty works for and with percussion. He also writes for chamber ensembles and many other solo instruments, including clarinet, viola, piano, trombone, trumpet, and tuba. In addition, he has composed ten orchestral works and nine choral works, as well as a three-act opera, *The Ice Palace* (2001). One of his recent works, *Ora*, for six percussionists and orchestra, was named Work of the Year 2008 at the Icelandic Music Awards. Másson premiered *Klukkan* (The Bell), a piano and percussion duo, in February 2009, and is scheduled to premier *Cosmic Tree* in September 2009, and his oratorio *Cecilia* in November.²⁷

Prim is a piece for solo snare drum written for and dedicated to Gert Mortensen, head of timpani and percussion at The Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen, Denmark. Written in 11/8, *Prim* is a challenging work containing many intricate rhythms that are not only difficult to decipher, but physically difficult to play. *Prim*'s atypical rhythmic structure is a result of the underlying pattern based on the first 16 prime

²⁴ Áskell Másson. "Áskell Másson: Composer." www.askellmasson.com (accessed June 14, 2009).

²⁵ www.askellmasson.com.

²⁶ www.askellmasson.com.

²⁷ www.askellmasson.com.

numbers. He uses the 32nd note as the basic unit, and groups notes according to the pattern (1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 11, 13, 17, 19, 23, 29, 31, 37, 41, 43).²⁸

With regard to *Prim*, Másson states, “I continue my attention to the possibilities of the snare drum as a solo instrument.”²⁹ This exploration of colors produced by the snare drum leads to an incorporation of unusual techniques being put to use, the least of which being rimshots and turning the snares on and off during the piece. The performer is also required to hold one stick against the head of the drum and strike it in different places with the other stick to achieve various pitches. For another passage, the performer again places one stick on the head of the drum, but scrapes the other along its length. Perhaps one of the most interesting (and challenging) measures is written on two staves and requires the performer to play strict rhythms in one hand while the other allows the stick to rebound freely. The hands alternate performing this feat, with the challenge lying in achieving a continuity of sound without playing the rhythmic part incorrectly or playing metered rhythms with the rebounding hand.

²⁸ Áskell Másson. Program Notes, *Prim*. (Switzerland: Editions Bim) 1984.

²⁹ www.askellmasson.com.

Živković: Concerto No. 2 for Marimba and Orchestra Mvt. III

Concerto No. 2 for Marimba and Orchestra was commissioned by the Yamaha Foundation, and premiered by the composer and the Munich Symphony Orchestra in 1997. Of this work, Živković states, “I wanted to unite the quintessence of Nature and archaic elements (rhythm as the primal origin of all music, as the force that gives birth to music)...and a new articulation of tonality with the “classical” tonal language of this century to produce a music that DOES communicate with the listener.”³⁰ This ideal of a mixture of old and new becomes evident to the listener as Živković creates a sense of tonality by returning to the opening material several times in the third movement, while at the same time using complicate harmonies and chord structures to remind the listener that the concerto is still a very contemporary piece.

The third movement is the longest, most energetic, and most physically demanding for the performer. The concept of old and new is present in its combination of a form resembling a traditional rondo with contemporary aspects such as polyrhythm and polymeter.³¹ Živković places a cadenza in its traditional place, near the end of the movement, preceding a return to the main theme. He provides a written-out cadenza that is improvisational in style, using unmeasured passages similar to those in *Ilijas* that go through a series of developments much like Keiko Abe’s cadenzas. Although Živković does provide this cadenza for the performer’s use, he encourages performers to attempt to improvise their own cadenzas in the traditional manner.³²

³⁰ Nebojša Jovan Živković, Program Notes, *Concerto no. 2 for Marimba and Orchestra*, (Musica Europa) 1997.

³¹ Živković, Program Notes.

³² Živković, Program Notes.

The third movement alone is approximately 15 minutes in length, and much of it is played at *forte* or *fortissimo* dynamic levels. This, in combination with the indicated performance tempo of a quarter note equaling 200 beats per minute, results in a composition that is difficult not only from a technical standpoint, but also raises issues of stamina for the performer. The presence of octave intervals in the right hand through much of the piece, as well as quickly changing registers and moving about the keyboard, present challenges for the performer in regard to accuracy and retaining the tempo set at the beginning of the movement. The result is a highly energetic work that is engaging for both performer and audience, providing an edgy, fast-paced addition to the advanced percussionist's repertoire.

Conclusion

The works presented in this recital consist of advanced repertoire for the three main instruments of percussion performance. The marimba is represented by several different styles of literature, each of which presents its own challenges. Stanley Leonard is widely known as both a timpanist and composer, and *Fanfare and Allegro* is an exciting example of the musical and technical potential for timpani. Áskell Másson is a leading contemporary composer of music for snare drum, and his compositions require advanced playing techniques that are difficult to master, but result in a new dimension of snare drum literature. It is hoped that percussionists may benefit from the information in these expanded program notes and be inspired to perform the pieces on this program.

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