Exploring the Diversity of Contemporary Western Classical Percussion Repertoire: Preparation Techniques and How They Influence Performance

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Abstract

Exploring the Diversity of Contemporary Western Classical Percussion Repertoire: Preparation Techniques and How They Influence Performance

Percussion performance has developed as a valid genre in Western Art Music only in the last eighty years. Over this period, both composers and performers alike have made the genre of percussion performance one of the areas to which contemporary composers have been attracted resulting in its increased audience appeal.

My research topic looks specifically at the range of techniques and decisions percussionists make in preparing for different performance situations and styles. These decisions include what grip to use, mallet selection, working alongside composers and their requests, and working with other instrumentalists such as chamber orchestras.

The question I am asking is how these preparation choices, through a pre-performance analysis of the work, can help to decide how the performer achieves the composer’s desired effects.

To approach this question, my performance-based research follows a process of preparing four different performances over a two-year span. Each one of these performances features music from different stylistic contexts, ranging from solo virtuosic marimba works, chamber works, and concertos written for marimba and orchestra. In basing my research on the study of these different performance situations, I will document the decisions that had to occur in an analysis of the work and how these decisions succeeded in the performance.
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<td><strong>Accent</strong></td>
<td>Stress placed on certain notes in a piece of music, indicated by a symbol printed over the note concerned. Emphasis or prominence given to a note or chord, as by an increase in volume or extended duration.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cadenza</strong></td>
<td>An extended virtuosic section for the soloist usually towards the end of a movement of a concerto.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Canon</strong></td>
<td>A composition or passage in which a melody is imitated by one or more voices at fixed intervals of pitch and time.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Chorale Mallet</strong></td>
<td>A loosely wrapped mallet made of a thick yarn to create a warm and vocal like sound.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Djinn</strong></td>
<td>An invisible spirit mentioned in the Koran that can have supernatural influence over mankind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gamelan</strong></td>
<td>A traditional Indonesian ensemble typically including many tuned percussion instruments including bamboo xylophones and wooden or bronze chimes and gongs.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interval</strong></td>
<td>The difference, usually expressed in the number of tones and semitones, between two pitches.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Key (bar)</strong></td>
<td>The wooden section of a marimba or xylophone that is struck with a mallet.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Michael Balter Mallets</strong></td>
<td>A mallet made from a green chord that is designed to be used on a vibraphone.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Motif</strong></td>
<td>A short rhythmic or melodic passage that is repeated or evoked in various parts of a composition.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Multi-Tone Mallet</strong></td>
<td>A mallet that can produce multiple tones.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ostinato</strong></td>
<td>A short melody or pattern that is constantly repeated, usually in the same part at the same pitch.</td>
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<td>Pedalling</td>
<td>Processes of pushing down the pedal on a vibraphone to create or minimalize resonance. The pedal controls a mute that is attached to all the keys.</td>
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<td>Polyrhythm</td>
<td>The combination or an instance of simultaneously contrasting rhythms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recapitulation</td>
<td>Restatement or reworking of the exposition in the tonic, constituting the third and final section of the sonata form.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recital</td>
<td>A performance of a program of music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubato</td>
<td>Rhythmic flexibility within a phrase or measure; a relaxation of strict time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sticking</td>
<td>The process of deciding what order the mallets strikes the instrument.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subdivisions</td>
<td>An administrative division of some larger or more complex rhythm.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Syncopation</td>
<td>A shift of accent in a passage or composition that occurs when a normally weak beat is stressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tachyon</td>
<td>A hypothetical subatomic particle that always travels faster than the speed of light.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Triplet</td>
<td>A group of three notes having the time value of two notes of the same kind.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VI 1 and VI 2</td>
<td>An abbreviation of Violin 1 and Violin 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variation</td>
<td>A form that is an altered version of a given theme, by melodic ornamentation and by changes in harmony, rhythm or key.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind Orchestra</td>
<td>A group of musicians playing brass and woodwind and percussion instruments.</td>
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