

The Robert Hohner Percussion Ensemble

Robert Hohner, Director

Personnel

David Altwerger
Stephen Buckley
Kelly Cotter
Lori A. Gerard
Robert Hohner
Eien Hunter
Thomas Kozumplik
Stephen Lawhorne
Stephen A. Martin
Marc Palma
Randal Ripley
Nicholas Steward
Lorne Watson
Tobie Wilkinson

Brian J. Ambrose
Joseph J. Chvojka
John L. Gage
Nathaniel Heim
Michael A. Hovnanian
Seth Kilbourn
Aaron Lack
Michelle D. Martin
Peter O'Neil
Don Raaymakers
Andrew W. Ryan
Stephanie Terpening
Jeffrey A. White
David M. Zerbe

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OGOUN BADAGRIS by Christopher Rouse

Ogoun Badagris derives its inspiration from Haitian drumming patterns, especially those of the Juba dance. *Ogoun Badagris* is one of the most violent Voodoo loas (deities) and he can be appeased only by the sacrifice of human blood. This piece may thus be interpreted as a dance of appeasement. The four conga drums are the focal point in the work and can be compared with the role of the four most basic drums in the Voodoo religion - the be-be, the seconde, the maman, and the asator. The metal plates and the sleighbells are to a certain extent parallels of the Haitian ogan. The piece opens with a ceremonial call-to-action as the high priest shakes the giant rattle known as the asson, replaced here by a cabasa. Then the principal dance begins, a *grouillere*: this is a highly erotic ceremonial dance which is in turn succeeded by the *Danse Vaudou*, the point at which demonic possession occurs. The word "reler," which the performers must scream at the conclusion of the piece, is the Voodoo equivalent of the Judaeo-Christian *amen*.

Player 1: Cabasa 1, snare drum, Chinese cymbal, 4 timpani, suspended cymbal 1, 2 cowbells (damped), tam-tam

Player 2: Bass drum 1, 2 bongos, 2 timbales

Player 3: Lion roar, 4 congas drums, 3 wood blocks

Player 4: Bass drum 2, 3 tom-toms, vibraslap, maracas, large ratchet

Player 5: Quica, tenor drum, sleigh bells, slapstick, 3 metal plates, 4 logs drums, guiro, cabasa 2, suspended cymbal 2

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***SINFONIA IX* by Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy**

Written in 1823 when Mendelssohn was 14, *Sinfonia IX* is one of twelve string symphonies which he composed in a span of two years. Like many of Mendelssohn's earlier works, these symphonies were at first withheld from publication for various reasons. In Mendelssohn's words, "Though not an art work in the highest sense, it is still an exercise in forms and the representation of ideas." In this movement he utilizes three contrasting ideas: rhythmic, fugal, and lyrical. Unlike most of Mendelssohn's previous works, the influence of Mozart and Haydn is much less apparent. An example of this individuality can be heard in a distinct cadence that occurs twice in the movement. The movement modulates from C minor to C major and closes with an exhilarating presto section. The instrumentation includes thirteen marimbas with eighteen players.

***IONISATION* by Edgard Varese**

Ionisation is considered to be the first chamber work written entirely for percussion. The emphasis of Varese's percussion writing stems from his desire for new timbral possibilities and his shift of compositional focus on non-pitched elements such as timbre, rhythm, dynamics, and texture. In most of Varese's music the principal focus is on the general textural effect rather than on specific motivic or harmonic details, meaning that there is no clear distinction between melody and accompaniment. The individual notes are often not conceived as part of "lines" or "harmonies," but constituents of what the composer called "sound masses," whole configurations of notes that work together to produce a

generalized sonic character. Varese's percussion piece, *Ionisation*, is revolutionary in that it is entirely consistent with his other works. He was able to show that in a style wherein pitch is assigned a relatively secondary position, the compositional procedures used in a percussion piece can be basically the same as those of other works.

Edgard Varese wrote this percussion ensemble work in 1931, in Paris, France. It is written for 13 players utilizing 40 percussion instruments. *Ionisation* premiered March 6, 1933, at Carnegie Hall in New York. Varese once described *Ionisation* as "cryptic, synthesized, powerful and terse." Nicolas Slominski described the piece as follows; "The first subject [is] given out by the tambour militaire (while two sirens glide over the whole range in opposite directions like two harp glissandos), the second by the tutti of percussion instruments, the development section being built on contrasting metal and wood percussion tone color, and the coda... introducing tubular chimes and low register pianoforte clusters (like pedal points)."

- Player 1: Crash cymbal, bass drum, cowbell
- Player 2: Gong, tam-tam (high), tam-tam (low), cowbell
- Player 3: Two bongos, side drum, two bass drums
- Player 4: Field drum, tenor drum
- Player 5: Siren (high), lion roar
- Player 6: Siren (low), slapstick, güiro
- Player 7: Chinese temple blocks, triangle, claves
- Player 8: Snare-drum (with snares relaxed), maracas (high and low)
- Player 9: Tarole, snare drum, suspended cymbal
- Player 10: Cymbals, sleigh bells, tubular chimes
- Player 11: Güiro, castanets, celeste
- Player 12: Tambourine, anvils (high and low), grand tam-tam
- Player 13: Slapstick, triangle, sleigh-bells, piano

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Phone: (212) 358-5300
Fax: (212) 358-5301

***TULANG LINDUNG* by Cliff DeArment**

Tulang Lindung, or "Eel Bones," comes from the Balinese Gamelan Gender Wayang repertoire. The static traded eighth notes in the first section are meant to represent the vertebra of the eel while the melodic part portrays eels swimming through a wet rice field. Only the three variations of the first section comprise the formal *Tulang Lindung*. The middle is a series of *angkatan* (traveling music) which leads to the final two extended variations on the *Tulang Lindung* theme. This piece is the second of four movements from the *Pemungkah* overture to the Wayang Kulit Shadow Play. This arrangement is drawn primarily from "Sukawati style," a village well known for its fine Wayang Kulit and Gender Wayang. Gamelan Gender Wayang consists of two or four musicians, each playing a ten-keyed metallophone with tubular resonators. The scale is five-tone Slendro with two octaves to an instrument. The instruments are paired and de-tuned to produce a beating tremolo effect. Each instrument is played with two hands, holding mallets in a way that allows the player to damp the ringing bars with the heel of the hand. Lower octave instruments, called *pemade*, are considered the primary pair. The other pair, called *kantilan*, are one octave higher and doubles the parts of the *pemade*. The four staves of the *Tulang Lindung* score are the four hands of the *pemade* gender. The two interlocking parts are called *polos*, on the beat, and *sangsi* (*sahng-see*), off the beat. *Polos* actually means honest and *sangsi* means to go the other way. This arrangement approximates the Slendro scale of the Gamelan Gender in standard western notation for marimba, vibraphone, or a combination of both. The written key coincides with the range of traditional Gamelan Gender. Instrumentation includes four marimbas with eight players.

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***SECOND CONSTRUCTION (1940)* by John Cage**

Between the 1930s and 1950s, John Cage (1912-1992) spent a considerable amount of time writing for percussion. All of his compositions written between 1939 and 1952, in fact, were composed with a similar principle of rhythmic structure, one based on “spaces of time” rather than notes. It is exactly that approach that Cage uses in *Second Construction*. It has a sixteen-measure structure, divided 4/3/4/5 that is employed sixteen times. The structure is made very clear in the opening measure but ignored in the final six sections in favor of a fugal development of the opening sleigh bells’ solo.

As in the other two *Constructions*, this piece features many inventive and unusual sound colors such as gongs dipped in water, temple gongs, glass wind chimes, and most notably the prepared piano. The prepared piano in this case requires various manipulations of the strings, including hand muting, application of a steel slide, the insertion of a screw, and muting with a piece of cardboard between A₂ and Eb₃.

Player 1: Sleigh bells, glass wind chimes, Indian rattle, and small maracas

Player 2: Snare drum, tom-toms, temple gongs, small maracas, and large maracas

Player 3: Tam-tam, muted gongs, water gongs, thunder sheet

Player 4: String piano

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***QUARTET IN F MAJOR, OP. 18, NO. 1, Fourth Movement* by Ludwig Van Beethoven**

Published in 1801, the Quartet in F Major, Op. 18, No. 1 was written while Beethoven studied under Joseph Haydn in Vienna. The six Opus 18 quartets were dedicated to Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz, a Viennese nobleman of the time. The Quartet in F Major was considered to be the best known and best liked of the six because it was the longest and the most impressive. Opus 18 was written just as Beethoven was emerging from the stylistic constraints of Haydn and Mozart. Two features that signify this stylistic break are the bold exploitation of contrast and the motivic single-mindedness. Opus 18 was also written during Beethoven's early struggle with hearing loss. The energy and confidence of these quartets belie the deep emotional and physical struggle that Beethoven went through as he desperately tried to hide his growing hearing loss from his closest family and friends. In the fourth movement, Beethoven created a brilliant effect through thematic manipulation and an extraordinary control over rhythm. The first motif explodes into motion without any warning in the first violin and is immediately followed by an energetic second theme. The development is based on these two motives. This movement develops into a large sonata-rondo form that is characterized by a lyric theme, which is contrasted against repeated chords with sharp offbeat accents. The development contains a central episode in double counterpoint that is very dramatic. The coda later reflects this episode with its bright, mischievous counterpoint.

Player 1: Marimba

Player 2: Marimba

Player 3: Marimba

Player 4: Bass Marimba

***THE RAGTIME ROBIN* by George Hamilton Green**

George Hamilton Green was born in Omaha, Nebraska on May 23, 1893. A piano prodigy by the age of four and known as "the world's greatest xylophonist" by the age of eleven, Green began a recording and composing career that would span four decades. *The Ragtime Robin* is a jazz fox trot that leaves a lot of space for "noodling" - improvisation within the controlled style of ragtime music - and creativity. Originally written as a xylophone solo with piano accompaniment, this piece has been arranged for xylophone and traps with marimba accompaniment.

Solo: Xylophone

Player 1: Marimba

Player 2: Marimba

Player 3: Marimba

Player 4: Bass Marimba

Player 5: Six cymbals, hi-hats, piccolo snare drum, wood block, brushes, bass drum, bike bell, siren, police whistle, slapstick, temple blocks, and anvil

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(305) 563-9006

***FLUFFY RUFFLES* by George Hamilton Green**

As there was not a great abundance of music written exclusively for xylophone during the early twentieth century, George Hamilton Green and other xylophonists developed their literature through transcriptions and original compositions. Composed in 1919, *Fluffy Ruffles* is a one-step fox trot in the “novelty ragtime” style.

Solo: Xylophone

Player 1: Marimba

Player 2: Marimba

Player 3: Marimba

Player 4: Bass Marimba

Player 5: Bass drum, piccolo snare drum, tom-tom, floor tom, ride cymbal, three splash cymbals, hi-hats, tambourine, plastic candy container, spaghetti sauce jar, brake drum, beer bottle, broiling rack, three cowbells, and two jam blocks.

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Phone: (908) 774-0011

Fax: (908) 774-0033

***BACK TALK* by Harry Breuer**

Originally a violinist, Harry Breuer began playing the xylophone at the age of 13. He became a virtuoso on the instrument at a time when it was still quite a novelty instrument. He spent the majority of his career in New York City, playing for Radio, Television, commercials, and films. *Back Talk* was originally written for xylophone solo with piano accompaniment in 1934. In this piece,

Breuer uses rhythmic motives to create a dialogue between the soloist and accompaniment. The whole tone scale, which is a commonly used resource in his music, is very prevalent in this piece.

Instrumentation:

Solo: Xylophone

Player 1: Marimba

Player 2: Marimba

Player 3: Marimba

Player 4: Bass Marimba

Player 5--Bass drum, snare drum, mini hi-hats, 3 accent cymbals, splash cymbal, trash cymbal, wooden salad bowl, temple blocks, slapstick, duck call, squirrel call, siren whistle, bird whistle, slide whistle, frying pan, afuche.

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P.O.Box 10003

Van Nuys, CA 91410-0003

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