

A MUSICAL APPROACH TO MARIMBA EDUCATION:
INCORPORATING GLOBAL HISTORY AND FOLKLORIC REPERTOIRE

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Table 1. Time Line of the Development of the Marimba Before its Introduction to the US

1545- The date of the oldest Chiapan marimba. Indians of the area called it *yolotli*.¹

1601- 10 or 12 keys were suspended on two sticks and performed sitting on the ground.²

1701- 17 keys, some with gourd resonators otherwise called *pumpas*. Musicians performed on these instruments standing up with the marimba extending from their waists by two extensions (possibly an arc). In addition, a strap that went around the player's neck supported part of the instrument's weight.³

1737- The marimba *sencilla* with gourd resonators and one keyboard was popularized. Legs supported the instrument. At this time *ladinos* and *mestizos* used to play the instrument at religious festivals.⁴

1840-50 25 keys were introduced to the instrument that had a cord running through the bars for a suspension system. However, the instrument rested on cushions rather than a leg support at this time. To create semitones, the players fixed pieces of wax to the bars to alter the pitches.⁵

¹ Kaptain, Laurence. *"The Wood That Sings": The Marimba in Chiapas, Mexico*. (Everett, Pennsylvania: HoneyRock, 1996), 14.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Kite, Rebecca. *Keiko Abe: A Virtuoso's Life: Her Musical Career and the Evolution of the*

1853 The Birth of John Calhoun Deagan in Hector, New York.⁶

1861- Manuel Bolan (Father of the Chiapan Marimba) toured the state and Guatemala playing marimba with Juan Zarate.⁷

1863-Manuel Bolan died in Jiquipilas.⁸

1865- Quadrangular resonators made of cedar wood were substituted for pumpos. Marimbas with 3 legs were played in folding canvas chairs.⁹

1870- The marimba had 5 legs, and were played by 3 players.¹⁰

1874- Saint-Saens composes *Dance Macabre*, the first use of the xylophone in the orchestra by a major composer.

1880- Wooden resonators were placed under each key. The marimba grew popular in Chiapas.¹¹

1880- J.C. Deagan begins improving the design of orchestral bells by adding more complex resonators.¹²

⁶ Kite, Rebecca. *Keiko Abe: A Virtuoso Life: Her Musical Career and the Evolution of the Concert Marimba*. (Leesburg, Virginia: GP Percussion, 2007), 287.

⁷ Kaptain “*The Wood that Sings*,” 14.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

1882- 25 keys were employed that were more narrow in design and cushions were no longer used. Four seated musicians played the instrument.¹³

1885- Benjamin Roque modified the marimba and introduced two keyboards, one hanging on top of the bottom one. Melodies were played in two keys: d minor and C major. This attempt was an antecedent of the instrument of Corazon de Jesus Borraz.¹⁴

1888- J.C. Deagan modernizes and begins manufacturing xylophones on a stand, using a keyboard layout, and most importantly, adds resonators.¹⁵

1894- Sebastián Hurtado tours Mexico and Guatemala as a marimbist.¹⁶

1895- The marimba was supported with five legs, the resonators were planned flat, and there were 27 natural keys.¹⁷

1896- Corazon Borraz in San Bartolome de los Llanos (today Venustiano Carranza) created the modern marimba with the invention of the second keyboard. This permitted the performance of all types of music.¹⁸

¹² Kite, “*Keiko Abe: A Virtuoso Life*,” 287.

¹³ Kaptain, “*The Wood that Sings*,” 14.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

1896- Sebastián Hurtado and Sons Marimba Band was organized. This group performs throughout Guatemala, playing traditional Guatemalan Native Central American music, light classical music, and dance music.¹⁹

1901- Hurtado came to the US to play a series of concerts with his recently invented chromatic marimba and J.C. Deagan was in the audience. Inspired, he started building marimbas, eventually collaborating with C.O. Musser in the design and manufacturing of marimbas in the USA.

1921- Francisco Santiago Borraz (of Venustiano Carranza) who resided in Comitán invented a smaller version of the marimba and called it a requinto.²⁰

1930- Maestro Crescencio Mancilla made resonators with a pyramid shape and improved the suspension system. He included two resonators for every key (he made only two instruments in this style).²¹

¹⁹ Kite, “*Keiko Abe: A Virtuoso Life*,” 287.

²⁰ Kaptain, “*The Wood that Sings*,” 14.

²¹ Ibid.

INTRODUCTION

Most aspiring percussionists devote a large amount of their time to the marimba, an instrument that, despite long history, has only recently become the cornerstone of percussion curricula in colleges and conservatories around the world. Under the umbrella of percussion performance, the study of orchestral repertoire is being phased out more and more, in favor of classical marimba repertoire. Some schools, like Boston Conservatory, now offer a degree for which students only study the marimba and its repertoire, that is, without studying any other percussion instruments in tandem.

Outside of the realm of academia, the identity of the marimba has been oddly impacted by globalization. Although there are more marimba-themed festivals in more countries worldwide than festivals dedicated the piano, the marimba's identity in each country is completely different. For example, in the United States, our "classical" marimba was modeled after marimbas from Latin America, specifically from Chiapas, Mexico. Since the introduction of the marimba to the United States in the early 1900s, the cultures and repertoire of Mexico and the United States have progressed separately, and the level of cross cultural exchange is low given the completely different styles of repertoire. This independent progression and isolation gives audiences and players in the United States the impression that the marimba is an unconventional and unpopular instrument, although the marimba is one of the oldest and most played instruments in the world.

In educational settings, the history of the marimba before it came to the United States is often not a core part of percussion curriculum. Its multi-ethnic heritage is deserted, and most performers are unaware of the history of the instrument before Musser and Deagan began manufacturing on a large scale starting in the early 1930s. Many students in the United States are introduced to the marimba by participating in their school marching band or indoor percussion ensemble, and then continue to study in college or conservatory. Because of the way that students are introduced, the culture of marching band gives the first example of what it means to be a percussionist and marimba player to younger performers. This creates an odd educational dynamic. Thanks to technically rigorous marching percussion programs, students are extremely proficient technically, but do not learn tools for expression that playing in a solo context requires. Unlike any other instruments, advanced percussion players may struggle with core concepts for a vocalist or string player, like shaping and expression. I have not been to many master classes that heavily discuss musical concepts and then discuss means of expression through technique; most of the time artists use master classes to dictate their “correct” technique. The way that we present the marimba in our culture is mainly as a technical spectacle, which is not as accessible to a much wider audience that comes to concerts to appreciate music and creative interpretation.

If you have ever been to a marimba recital at a local university or elsewhere, then try to recall the audience. If the concert you attended was in the United States, then most likely many, if not all of the members in attendance were also percussionists. Most marimba soloists make their living as educators rather than only as concert soloists. The most commonly known are those who develop the methods taught in academic settings, and most soloist’s careers consist of educational tours and playing festivals dedicated to the instrument. Part of the reason for the

increasing popularity of the marimba is that it is introduced to young percussionists in an academic setting in order for them to learn broad concepts of music requiring polyphony, specifically balancing melody and harmony. In the family of percussion instruments, the marimba gives the best opportunity for a single player to learn to balance many musical responsibilities. However, many programs have produced extremely technically and musically talented players who are released into the world only having only a very small audience of primarily other percussionists.

Not teaching the extended culture of the marimba in academic settings limits the ability of the instrument to be well received. By perpetuating the notion that marimba is a new instrument constantly seeking repertoire to justify it as a “classical instrument,” we have made it an underdog that is forced to compete with instruments like the violin, which have more extensive traditions in the context of western art music pedagogy. Educators must recount the marimba’s history in the context of innovation in the western classical atmosphere. Without this context, educators in the United States run the danger of producing copies of past players that perform repertoire, to put it quite bluntly, that not many non-percussionists are interested in. In order to preserve the story of the marimba, we must tell its complete story: a story beyond blurry exotic novelty.

Without knowing the history of the marimba beyond its culture in the United States, marimbists are unable to connect to the past, but more harmfully, they also are unable to connect to the wide variety of independently progressing global cultures, and thus, to the future. Without this connection, new pieces with a wide variety of influences are almost impossible, and even if written, unreachable by a global audience. The incomplete history of the marimba provided in many programs in the United States perpetuates a very small and somewhat elitist culture of

pursuing technical perfection in place of music expression in order to validate the marimba as a “classical” solo instrument. Consider some of the most popular pieces in marimba repertoire in the United States in the last 40 years. Stout’s *Mexican Dances*, the commissions and compositions of Leigh Howard Stevens such as *Velocities* and *Rhythmic Caprice*, and Andrew Thomas’ *Merlin* are all pieces that have gained extreme popularity and legitimacy in the western canon simply because they push technical boundaries and were at one time considered almost “unplayable.”

Not only is our education system isolating percussionists from understanding the pre-1890 history of the marimba and its culture, but also it isolates new marimba repertoire from all other musical repertoire even in the Western classical tradition. A typical student in the United States is likely introduced to a four-mallet solo that lays well on the instrument and teaches basic technique, and then gradually ups the ante from there, learning harder and harder “marimbistic” repertoire. This promotes an atmosphere in which composers cater to a certain teaching method and technical practice, which is the opposite of what should be happening. Educators in the United States should be preparing technical methodology in order to best accommodate our repertoire. Although this is great for technical growth, it is problematic for building general musical knowledge. In fact, marimba players often lack knowledge of standard repertoire in the realm of symphonic literature and masterpieces written for other instruments, a source that would help younger players develop their own musical persona. It is important for marimba players to develop knowledge of the great composers such as Bach, Brahms, and Beethoven beyond study in a theory class. Playing transcriptions of non-percussion works teaches a bodily knowledge and understanding of shaping certain lines in real time, and no music history class or intense listening can replace that experience.

Even when percussionists do play transcriptions, it's not necessarily for musical interest, but instead just another example of "proof" that the marimba deserves the most "serious classical" repertoire just like any other instrument in an endless quest for validation. When I play Bach in audition settings, I am always asked, "from the Leigh Howard Stevens edition?" These editions are well known, because they contain a series of technical additions and considerations by the author. Leigh Howard Stevens pioneered the use of a grip that he designed, and redefined the technical possibilities on the marimba. However, we must ask ourselves why it is so odd to play off of the same sheet music that violinists use, and if we are playing Bach to channel Leigh Howard Stevens, or if we are playing Bach to channel Bach. Playing transcriptions of Bach, for example, has now oddly become more of a statement of virtuosity or proof of technical advancement than of musical understanding. Shouldn't the desire to play music by the one of the most well known composers to an audience of eager listeners be enough? This attitude would contribute to a more open-minded audience of non-marimba players, rather than an audience of percussionists eager to see the next advancement in a crazed technical space race.

The importance of improvisation and spontaneous arrangement of any folk melody, an important aspect of the marimba's Central American tradition, is completely lost in the United States. Some of the greatest players in the United States can play some of the most incredibly difficult repertoire with ease, but would panic if asked to improvise an arrangement of a folk or pop song, even something as simple as "Happy Birthday." In other countries, especially in Guatemala and Mexico, the marimba is viewed as a communal instrument. People gather to play together, dance together, and express themselves. Percussionists are often criticized as being mechanical and non-expressive, and the way the marimba is presented in the United States only

promotes this unfair stereotype. Music must remain a way of communicating our deepest emotion and sentiments so that we can better understand and appreciate humanity around us.

In order to identify and fill holes in the lost history of the marimba, my thesis will examine the progression of the marimba from a folkloric instrument to an instrument played by a soloist on the concert stage in the United States, and how that evolution has affected the instrument's communal reception. Specifically, my thesis will focus on development, first in Africa, but then more extensively in Latin America (Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Chiapas, Mexico). Lastly, I will discuss how music commissioned and performed by the Hurtado Brothers, Clair Omar Musser, Leigh Howard Stevens, Keiko Abe, and other artists created a new culture for marimba playing in the United States far removed from the marimba's Central American and African culture and what impact this new identity has on the marimba's global audience.

Understanding identity surrounding the Marimba in Chiapas, Mexico and in Guatemala is key to understanding its history before the introduction of the marimba in the United States at Carnegie Hall by the Hurtado Brothers in 1901. Some groups in Latin American countries identify more closely with a theory of African origins (13th Century Mali)²², while others search for evidence of a Central American ancestor, hoping for nationalist purposes that the marimba is more closely related to a Mayan Teponaxli²³. Most, however, accept the most likely truth, that the marimba is from a multi-heritage blend. The marimba came to Central America through slave trade, and then developed independently in several different Latin American countries, adapting different levels of Latin American influence. For example, the culture in Guatemala and

²² Kaptain, Laurence. *"The Wood That Sings": The Marimba in Chiapas, Mexico*. Everett, Pennsylvania: HoneyRock, 1992.

²³ Ibid.

Mexico is much different from the more Afro-centric culture in Colombia. Understanding the marimba's history as symbol of Mexican and Guatemalan pride sets the stage for discussing the origins of performing Western art music on the marimba in a solo context, particularly during Chiapas's famous marimba competitions.

I will also discuss notable players and their commissioned works, considering how the marimba player's rapid technical evolution and lack of historical knowledge has perpetuated a race to play the impossible, rather than promoting a culture encouraging of musical development and communal reception.

ORIGIN

The history of the marimba is not particularly well known by students in the United States before its introduction to Western art music (perhaps with Paul Creston's *Concerto for Marimba* in 1940, or maybe even as early as the xylophone part Saint-Señ's *Dance Macabre*, 1874) and is certainly not discussed in depth in educational settings before the Hurtado brothers toured the U.S. with their chromatic marimba built around 1887.²⁴²⁵ It does not have a very strong presence in standard orchestral repertoire, and yet in the U.S., the marimba is often one of the primary instruments studied by percussionists at universities. Because the marimba was late to join larger ensemble works in Western art music practice, and because the more serious solo compositions in the western art tradition were written and commissioned only in the last 80 years, many treat the instrument as a novelty.

The marimba, unlike most other instruments studied in the classical tradition, is not a European instrument, but a Central American folk instrument with roots to the African Balafon brought to the US concert stage. Even though the modern marimba in the United States is a modified version of marimbas built in Chiapas, Mexico, and Guatemala in the late 1880s, there

²⁴ Blades, James. *Percussion Instruments and Their History*. Rev. ed. (Westport, Connecticut: Bold Strummer; 1992), 25.

²⁵ Moreno, Isreal, and Javier Nandayapa. "A Brief Marimba History." In *Método Didáctico Para Marimba*. (Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas: Universidad De Ciencias Y Artes De Chiapas, 2002), 9.

are many theories that attempt to clarify the origins and evolution of the marimba up to that point made by ethnomusicologists. Global origin theories point out the resemblance of the marimba to the “Pong Lang” in Thailand, the “Gamelan” in Indonesia, the “Mokin” in Japan, the “Jegog” in Negara, and many instruments in the Phillipines.²⁶ Despite these similarities, the most accepted view is that the modern marimba was invented and modified in Mexico and Guatemala with mixed indigenous South American and African influences, as summed up by David Vela²⁷.

In many percussion programs in the United States, the history of the marimba is often ignored before the 1970s, when the technical horizons of the marimba player expanded quite rapidly. Since the 1970s, the marimba has gone through a series of innovations in terms of repertoire, including two, four, and six mallet techniques. In fact, there are even pieces such as those by Ludwig Albert in Belgium that require eight mallets (*Marimba Moods* for Eight Mallets). Manufacturing has evolved as well; adjustable instruments, 5-octave range, and tunable aluminum resonators (replacing wooden ones from the folkloric tradition) have become the norm. As a result of these innovations, the marimba has been in the forefront of the evolution of percussion repertoire, university curriculums, competitions, and festivals around the world.

The origin of the word “marimba” is African. According to Ortiz in volume one of his series *Instrumentos de la música afro-cubana*, the word marimba comes from the Bantu language, with the suffix –imba meaning, “to sing.”²⁸ According to Kaptain, ethnomusicologist Gerhard Kubik shows that “-rimba” defines a single-note xylophone in Malawai or Mozambique, and that “ma-“ is a plural prefix.²⁹

²⁶ Moreno, “*A Brief History*,” 10.

²⁷ Kaptain, “*Wood that Sings*,” 97.

²⁸ Ortiz, Fernando. *Los Instrumentos De La Música Afrocubana*. Vol. 1. (Madrid: Editorial Música Mundana Maqueda, 1996)

²⁹ Kaptain, “*The Wood That Sings*,” 97.

In Joaquin Peña's *Diccionario de la música labor*, he states that the instrument's origin is in the Congo, and that the instrument arrived to the Americas by way of black Africans.³⁰ This instrument from Congo apparently used 16 different gourds with 16 different tones.³¹ However, the *New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* states that the first recorded oral reference to the marimba was in made in 13th century Mali in a document found in the 14th century.³² In Angoa, there is a town called marimba, and many African instruments including the Balafon (Senegal), the Ronat (Gambia), the Amandina (Uganda), the Bala (Ivory coast), and the Timbila (Sudan) suggest a common ancestor.

Both African and Central American marimbas/xylophones have vibrating membranes attached to their resonators, made of gourd or wood. African instruments use mainly spider cacoon (or cigarette paper in more modern times) and Latin American marimba makers commonly use pieces of pig or sheep intestine stretched across the opening of resonators to create a buzzing sound. Scholarship backs up the theory that the xylophones of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Southeastern Asia influenced the African xylophone, just as the African marimba influenced the Central American marimba. Scholars Vida Chenoweth and Robert Garfias also point to African origins of the Guatemalan marimba and a closer connection of Guatemalan players to the African Balafon playing.³³

Tracing a concrete origin is difficult, because in reality, the modern marimba found in the U.S. is a result of cultural hybridity. However, because of nationalist ideology protecting the

³⁰ Pena, Joaquín, Higinio Anglés, Miguel Querol Gavaldá, and Miguel Querol Gavaldá. 1954. *Diccionario de la música Labor, iniciado por Joaquín Pena, continuado por Higinio Anglés,.... Con la colaboración de Miguel Querol, y otros distinguidos musicólogos españoles y extranjeros. Tomo I [-II]*. Barcelona: Editorial Labor.

³¹ Kaptain, "Wood that Sings," 8.

³² Ibid.

³³ Kaptain, "Wood that Sings," 10.

marimba as a symbol in Guatemala and Mexico, some Guatemalan and Mexican scholars have offered theories that the marimba's origin is not strictly African, but in fact mostly Central American.³⁴ Although acknowledging that the marimba's origins are African, Garfias offers no explanation of why the instrument spread mostly to areas of indigenous peoples in the Guatemalan Highlands, and not to other regions of the Americas populated by Africans. There is documentation from prohibition records in 1769 that the marimba was played in Santiago de Apastepeque, perhaps making up a part of the narrow path of slave settlements on the coast of between Nicaragua and Costa Rica where the marimba traveled in order get to the Guatemalan Highlands.³⁵

Jesus Castill hypothesizes that the “Tun,” or the Mayan equivalent of the Aztec log drum “tepolnaxli” was the more direct precursor of the marimba in Central America. The other commonly cited evidence of a Mayan marimba ancestor is the Vase of Ratinlinxul. This 21 cm vase was found in the Ratinlinxul archeological zone in the Chama region of Alta Vera Paz, Guatemala, and comes from the Cixoy II. Chama 3rd period, 1000 AD. The vase depicts a procession headed by a noble, in which one figure is carrying an object hypothesized to be a

³⁴ Moreno, “*A Brief History*,” 11.

³⁵ Pellicer, Sergio. *Maya Achi Marimba Music in Guatemala*. (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2005), 71.

“Mayan marimba.”³⁶



Figure 1 Vase of Ratinlinxul

Most scholars support the African origin theory in favor of the Central American theory, arguing that the presumed “Mayan marimba” is actually just a seat used for religious purposes.³⁷ Other scholars that promote the idea of pre-hispanic origin of the marimba as an ancient national symbol are Devid Vela and Armas Lara, who have promoted the marimba as a symbol of the cultural identity of all Guatemalans. Selecting the poetic inscription for a national monument to the marimba in Quetzaltenango City, Guatemala sparked a controversy about the common heritage of Guatemalans related to the marimba. Critics complained that claiming the marimba as a symbol of national heritage covered up the country’s multiethnic heritage in order to glorify a non-existent unified indigenous race for tourists.³⁸

“(The marimba monument and inscriptions are) cathartic expressions of the Ladino who needs exorcism to alleviate himself from their shameful feelings of their collective subconscious (López Mayoral 1978, 334; Monsanto 1982, 61-72).”³⁹

-Isreal Ixcot

³⁶ Kaptain, “*Wood that Sings*,” 11.

³⁷ Moreno, “*A Brief History*,” 10.

³⁸ Pellicer, “*Maya Achi Marimba*,” 70-71.

³⁹ Ibid.

Many instruments inspired the creation of the Chiapan/Guatemalan marimba.

Ethnomusicologist David Vela's four interwoven origin theories neatly sum up the claims of many other scholars. He argues that African peoples were inspired to create their own version of the Malayan marimba, and that the instrument was brought to Central America by the slave trade. Once in Central America, indigenous Central American instruments added influence to evolve the instrument to its form at the turn of 20th century.⁴⁰

The marimba represents a symbol of identity among the people of Central America, southeastern Mexico, part of Ecuador, and Colombia. The great marimba makers, composers, and musicians of Central America are all mostly from Guatemala and Chiapas, where Israel Moreno describes the marimba as reaching, "its highest interpretive level and where the finest instruments have been made."⁴¹ The Guatemalan government has supported marimba music, causing it to spread across the country on the radio and on TV. This media influence has even introduced the Guatemalan marimba tradition to Belize, Panama, and Colombia, where it is not as popular but is still played in small more remote towns.

Before this outside influence, the marimba in Colombia was more similar to the African Balafon and not to the Guatemalan/Chiapan marimba. In Chiapas and Guatemala, the marimba is regarded as a symbol of national identity and highly valorized in their society whereas in Colombia the marimba is regarded as an instrument for poor Afro-Colombian people often marginalized by the rest of their society. Also in Chiapas and Guatemala, marimba music has been highly influenced by European music whereas in Columbia they have worked to nurture

⁴⁰ Kaptain, "*Wood that Sings*," 24.

⁴¹ Moreno, "*A Brief Marimba History*," 11.

African traditions, including singing in African languages, polyrhythms, simple melodies, and call and response.⁴²

The evolution of the marimba spans several continents and had a global evolutionary process that differentiates it from almost every other instrument. The origin of the modern marimba started in Southeast Asia, and then these instruments inspired the African tradition. Evidence points that the African marimba was brought by the slave trade to the Guatemalan Highlands and Chiapas, Mexico, where the this tradition was mixed with ancient Central American influence. However, all of these traditions have since then developed separately. For example, despite the invention of double chromatic keyboards, the single keyboard diatonic keyboard is still very popular in Guatemala. In Chiapas however, the double keyboard has been refined and is the standard.⁴³ This marimba double keyboarded (including the second keyboard with chromatic pitches, equivalent to the black keys on the piano) is the link between the folkloric marimba tradition and the classical marimba developed in the United States.

⁴² "Intangible Cultural Heritage."

⁴³ Pellicer, "*Maya Achi Marimba*," 70.

INSTRUMENT PROGRESSION FROM LATIN AMERICA TO THE US

Since the modern marimba's is most similar to the Chiapan marimba, Pineda del Valle's chronology of the Chiapan marimba is helpful to bridge the gap between international hybridity and national identity in the history of the instrument. According to Valle, in 1601, 10 or 12 keys were fixed with two cords suspended on two sticks and performed sitting on the ground.⁴⁴ According to Valle, some gourd resonators called pumpos were added around 1700, and musicians performed on these instruments standing up with the marimba extending from their waists by two supportive beams. These extensions were the precursor to marimba held up by an arc extending from the body. In addition to these extensions, a strap that went around the player's neck supported weight.

After the arc marimba (or *marimba de arco*), the marimba sencilla was popularized. The marimba sencilla has gourd resonators on each key. This instrument is supported by legs instead of the arc and strap system, but still only has one keyboard somewhat equivalent to the white keys on the piano keyboard. According to Valle, this instrument was popularized through festivals by both ladinos and mestizos at religious festivals. Between 1840 and 1950, 25 keys were introduced to the instrument. To compensate and to keep the keys tidy, a suspension system

⁴⁴ Kaptain, "*Wood that Sings*," 14.

with a cord running through the bars was adopted. However, the instrument rested on cushions rather than a leg support at this time. Wooden resonators were introduced in the shape of the older pumpos, and musicians played sitting down. To create semitones, the players fixed pieces of wax to the bars to alter the pitches.⁴⁵

In 1865, square resonators made of cedar were substituted for the older pumpos. Marimbas were still played in a sitting position, although at this time marimbas only had three legs. By 1870, many marimbas had 5 legs, and were played by 3 separate players. Only ten years later, the older resonators were phased out to make room for individual resonators on every key. Soon marimbas had even more and narrower keys that allowed for even more use of harmonies. Four seated marimbists replaced the necessity for wind players in marimba bands.

Benjamin Roque modified the marimba and introduced two keyboards, one hanging on top of the bottom one. Melodies were played in two keys: d minor and C major. This system did not work out, but one can say that this attempt was an antecedent and perhaps an inspiration for the instrument created by Corazon de Jesus Borraz.⁴⁶ In 1896, Corazon Borraz in San Bartolome de los Llanos (today Venustiano Carranza) added on the second chromatic keyboard, making repertoire with chromaticism and repertoire within all 12 keys playable. This was an important step for the marimba that allowed music from outside the realm of folkloric Chiapan music to be adopted into the culture of marimba playing. This broadening of repertoire opened up new ideas to Chiapan marimbists, who began studying more of the European classical tradition, including solfege, western harmony, and musicianship.

There are many other features added to the marimba that did not necessarily transition to the modern marimba. Crescencio Mancilla built resonators with a pyramid shape and improved

⁴⁵ Kaptain, "*Wood that Sings*," 14.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the overall suspension system. He also tried including two pyramid resonators for every key, but this development was relatively unpopular and he made only two instruments this way.

The marimba did not make it to North America until 1901 after being rescheduled from its original debut in Buffalo at the Pan-American Exposition, because of the assassination of president McKinley. By 1903, John Calhoun Deagan in Chicago was making xylophones and orchestral bells with chromatic keyboards and resonators that closely resembled those of Chiapan marimbas. After seeing the Hurtado brothers in their North American tour with their chromatic marimba, Deagan began to manufacture a chromatic marimba. Deagan collaborated with Musser, who 23 years later in 1933, conducted his 100 marimba players in Chicago, performing arrangements of major symphonic works, including Antonin Dvorak's Symphony No. 8, "The New World" (1893). These performances dramatically opened up the public to receive the marimba as a classical instrument and brought attention the instruments created by Musser after breaking away from Deagan's company.⁴⁷

Although many think of five octave marimbas as more modern, five octave marimbas did exist before Keiko Abe helped develop the YMH-6000 series with Yamaha. However, these marimbas were discontinued in the 1940s to preserve materials for the Allies during World War II. Brass resonators were replaced with cardboard tubes and Deagan stopped producing five octaves in favor of more portable three and a half octave marimbas.⁴⁸

Keiko Abe (born 1937) had a tremendous influence on the sound of the newer five-octave marimba. Her commissioners complained that their pieces could not have a full effect because of

⁴⁷ Kite, Rebecca. *Keiko Abe: A Virtuoso Life: Her Musical Career and the Evolution of the Concert Marimba*. (Leesburg, Virginia: GP Percussion, 2007), 287.

⁴⁸ "Milestones in the Recent History of the Marimba." Mostly Marimba. Accessed November 5, 2014. <https://www.mostlymarimba.com/inspiration-and-enlightenment/enlightenment/890-milestones.html>.

the unfocused pitch and sound of the Musser marimba that she played in her Tokyo Concert series for premiering new works. Also, Minoru Miki (*Marimba Spiritual*, 1983-1984) and Akira Miyoshi (*Torse III*, 1975) complained that the marimba lacked enough projection. With these criticisms in mind, Abe went the president of the Yamaha Company in order to start a project to create a new marimba with her specifications. This refinement was targeted to move away from the traditional folk sound of the marimba. Abe desired pure intonation and a timbre featuring brilliant and more brittle sound in the high range and richer and more supportive bass notes that would blend better in a chamber setting. Shigeo Suzuki, Yamaha's engineer in charge of this project, tested many different bar shapes and harmonic tunings and created the YM-4000 model (at that time this model was called the 4500, but is now renamed the YM-4000), which had much better tone quality but with limited range. Abe then requested an instrument with new harmonic tuning, adjustable resonators, and a four and a half octave range that was completed in 1973. Abe used this instrument in all of her recordings between 1973 and 1981. After a successful prototype of an add-on that made this marimba five octaves, Abe's doubts about the practicality of a five-octave marimba were dashed; Yamaha created the first five-octave concert marimba (the YMH-6000), in 1984⁴⁹. She considered helping to design an even larger marimba, but thought that the demands on the performer with such an instrument were impractical, observing, "Today, if a marimbist wants to have serious concert activity, he or she must use a five-octave marimba. For a range lower than five octaves, very special bass mallets are necessary. For a higher range, the xylophone is already available. I believe that, for the near future, five octaves will be the standard marimba range."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Kite, "A Virtuosoic," 208.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The evolution of the marimba was propelled by many of its great players, who helped design newer features based on their ideas about the ideal marimba's sound. Keiko Abe bridged the gap between the staccato projecting sound of the upper register on the xylophone and the open and resonating bass notes on the bottom of the five-octave marimba. The contributions that specific artists brought to the marimba will be discussed more in the depth in the following section, as artists often developed features that complimented the repertoire that they pioneered.

ANALYSIS OF REPERTOIRE

Because of innovations in technique, the marimba's repertoire has booming for the last 40 years. Focus on technique, perhaps to legitimize the marimba as western classical instrument, has generated a repertoire where technique dictates music, rather than the other way around. This is illustrated by the large amount of repertoire that is written by marimba players. Along with contributing to a large pool of technique-based music, commissioning works for marimbists by other marimbists does not contribute to diversifying interest among listeners and other instrumentalists. In many ways, this practice keeps the marimba community extremely isolated to only players and other percussionists.

Nancy Zeltsman, renowned marimba pedagogue at the Boston Conservatory and Berklee School of Music, comments that knowledge of non-marimba repertoire is essential for her students. She urges her students to, "be wary of technicality dictating music," and comments that the fascination over technique rather than musical objectives is widespread among young marimba players who tend to idolize the technical prowess of drum corps percussionists over that of musicians seeking more personal means of self-expression.

Music that was written in a common idiomatic marimba style, or minimalist textures of repeating ostinato phrases in order to create distinction between accompaniment and melody

without the convenience of sustained pitches or (usually) more than four voices, can be a powerful teaching tool for technique and basic concepts of balancing melody and harmony. However, these pieces often lack the variability or number of possible “characters” that teach harder concepts of pacing, breath, and balancing multiple inner lines.

In order to show the evolution of compositional techniques as influenced by performers, I have chosen a variety of repertoire to show differences between folkloric repertoire and current repertoire. I have chosen to show examples by Chiapan marimbist Norberto Nandayapa, Claire Omar Musser, Keiko Abe, and a few examples of modern works.

Chiapan solo repertoire is often very pianistic, relying on block chord accompaniment and using a single line melody. In *Aunque me lleve el Diablo*, a *zapateado tradicional* arranged by Norberto Nandayapa, there are several strophic sections, reminiscent of a folk song. There is

Example 1 *Aunque me lleve el Diablo* arr. by Norberto Nandayapa, mm. 1-10



an introduction that establishes a traditional dancing 3+3+2+2 rhythm before a short cadenza moment leading into an *a tempo* presentation of the first theme. A variety of different folk melodies are presented that are still highly rhythmic before a *lento espressivo* passage that, although unmarked, is rolled, or played with rapidly alternating strokes to create sustain and

direction as indicated by the slurs. The pseudo-rondo form of the piece continues with a few new developed simple melodies before returning to a cadenza passage, and then finally closing with an *accelerando* statement. This piece represents hybridized Central American folkloric and American classical marimba playing. Perhaps Central American traditional music wouldn't be written down with such detail, and many features of the composition, including the many cadenzas, are reflective of the western classical music tradition.

The first popular marimba solos that were conceived of as studies to teach players in the United States are Claire Omar Musser's *Etudes*, the most famous being those in C major and B major (both published before 1941). They approach the instrument pianistic-ally, using block chords for harmony and rarely relying on any series of rapidly alternating individual mallet permutations for developing texture. In many ways, this music uses similar techniques of balancing melody and accompaniment as Chiapan and Central American music, but in the format of a classical etude written in the harmonic language of American popular music at the time. Musser's *Etudes* use classical progressions but often draw on newer techniques associated with Jazz, such as tritone substitution. Musser still wrote to his student's limitations however, mostly using intervals in 4ths and 5ths in each hand, and very rarely using octaves. Hands rarely play patterns that are different, and Musser's etudes do not focus much on developing independent hand coordination. In this way, Musser's writing is similar to the Latin American writing that came before him.

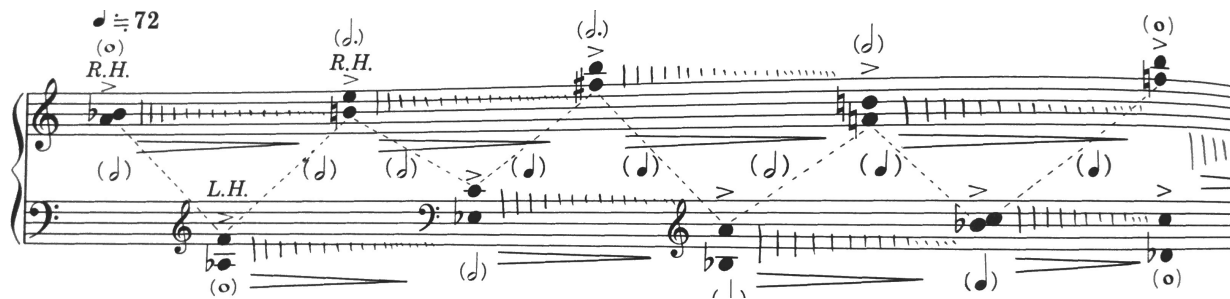
Keiko Abe is the first marimba composer to develop an entirely new language of composition for the marimba. She pioneered the use of many different previously unused extended techniques. Dead strokes, where a mallet is pressed against a bar and held there, create a more staccato sound. Hitting the shaft of the mallet against the edge of a bar creates a brighter

and more brittle timbre. Both of these techniques are found in *Dreaming of Cherry Blossoms* and *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*. These techniques unique to the marimba mark the move away from the genre of transcription into a time period of commissioned works that were technically demanding. Although Keiko Abe premiered many pieces in a series of concerts, namely in her concert, “An Evening of Marimba: In Search of Original works for Marimba” in Tokyo, Japan (1968-1971), she is perhaps best known as the forefront marimba composer who created a completely new sound for the marimba that can’t be replicated on another instrument.

Keiko Abe’s pieces often showcase a wide variety of characters. Frequent tropes of Abe’s pieces are dramatic, complex, and dissonant harmonic changes that create motion to repeated bass ostinato patterns. She uses many atypical dissonances in the context of previous marimba repertoire, including quartal harmonies, chromaticism, augmented fourths, and cluster chords. Many of her pieces are known for intricate repeated melody-accompaniment figures that are in split staves and that have complex melodies buried in intentionally rhythmically obscured patterns. These rhythmic ideas are meditations on wind blowing, flowers blooming, and other cyclical events in nature and create tension with syncopation. Abe frequently employs feathered beams and rapid tremolos to imitate ideas of sustain, and claims to have invented the technique of the “one-handed-roll,” where a player rapidly alternates two mallets in the same hand to create sustain, often in a melodic context while the other hand provides accompaniment.

Abe often used Japanese folk songs in her compositions. She has a composition titled *Variations on Japanese Children's Songs*, but also placed some traditional music in her other compositions. She uses “Sakura, Sakura” in *Dream of the Cherry Blossoms*. Abe uses other

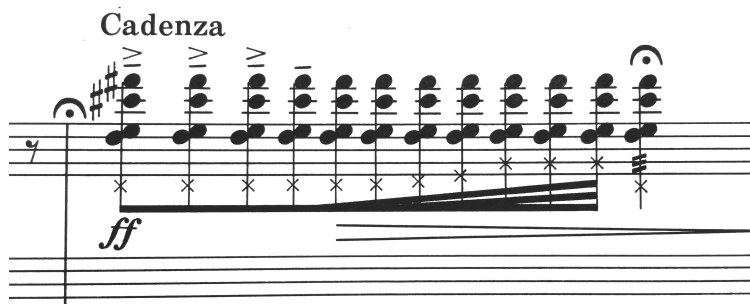
Example 2 Keiko Abe, *Variations on Japanese Children's Songs*. m. 91



Example 3 Keiko Abe, *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*, m. 11



Example 4 Keiko Abe, *Wind in the Bamboo Grove*, m. 43



Marimba de Amore.

all, groove.

Example 5 Paul Smadbeck, *Rhythm Song*, m. 19-27

20 Smoothly and Distantly

3 3 2 3 3 3

2 2 2

1 2

1 2

25

1x poco cresc.

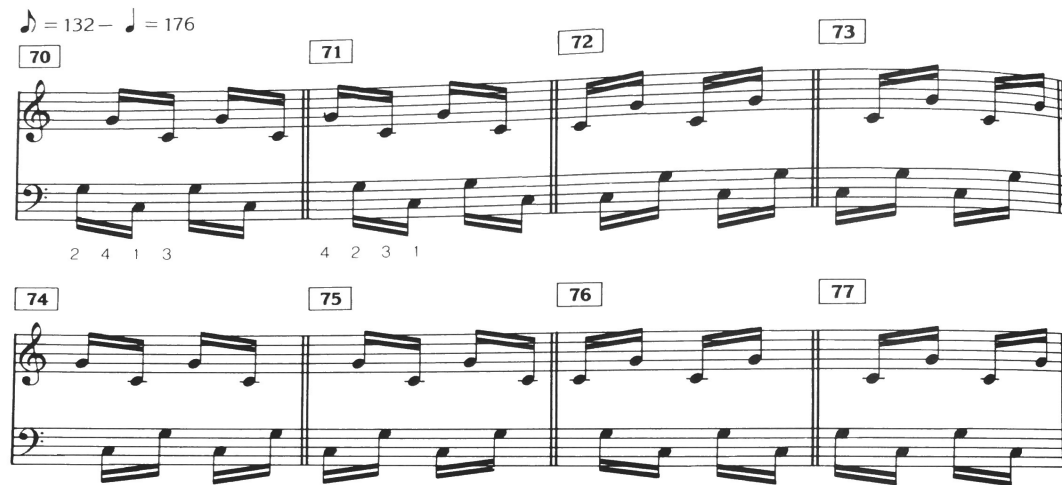
2x decresc.

piece. Many of these types of pieces just sort of “play themselves,” or are survivable and even moderately enjoyable even without too much concern to phrasing and shape.

Leigh Howard Steven’s *Method of Movement* is the most comprehensive technical guide to playing the marimba that is available, explaining in unprecedented detail all motor function dealing with any type of stroke and the mechanics of Steven’s way of holding the mallets. His approach and guide represent the most heightened state of the importance of technicality for marimba players. Using only this book for studying the marimba can promote a highly technical approach and accidental disregard for musical objectives. Stevens summarizes popular four mallet grips and the way they work and argues the advantages of his own in his book. pages 8-10 (25th anniversary edition). The technical evolution of the repertoire in some ways can be linked to new possibilities occasioned by technically advancing grips, which Stevens breaks down into 3 groups. In traditional grip, used by Keiko Abe, Stevens describes, “The shafts of the mallets are crossed in the palm of the hand with the outside mallet shaft under the inside. The grip operates on a spring-tension principle with fingers 3 and 4 supplying the interval closing energy, and the thumb and finger 1 supplying the interval opening energy.” In Burton grip, named after the jazz vibraphone player Gary Burton, “the shafts of the mallets are crossed in the palm of the hand with the outside mallet shaft on top of the inside. The grip operates on axle-type pivot principle with fingers 3 and 4 supplying most of the interval opening and closing energy (by pushing and pulling on the shaft of the inner mallet.” Finally, Stevens describes Musser grip, which he describes as the “father” of the grip that he uses as, “the shafts of the mallets are held in different sections of the hand with the inside mallet being controlled by the thumb and fingers 1 and 2, and the outside mallet being controlled by fingers 3 and 4. The grip operates basically on a

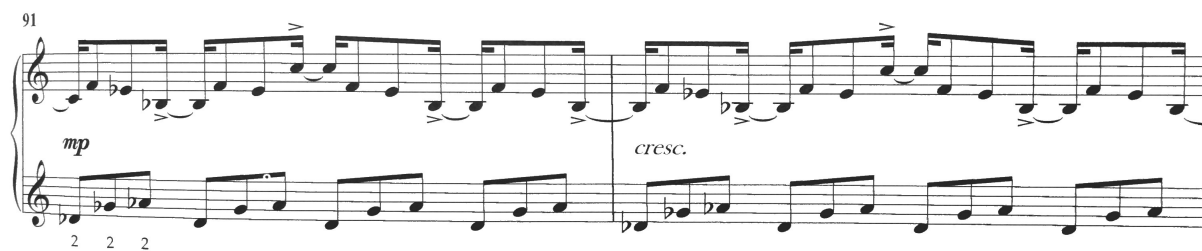
horizontal pendulum principle with interval opening closing energy being supplied in a number of different ways.”⁵¹

Example 6 Leigh Howard Stevens, *Exercise from Method of Movement*, Mm. 70-77



Stevens offers many insights into how these groups differ from each other in the opening of his book, and many of these insights explain some of the voicing choices that are made by marimbists who are also composers. However it is important to note that all repertoire can be played with any type of grip and that the progression of popular grips did not cause technically superior music but rather occasioned a more idiomatic style of writing. In fact, much of the argument in the percussion community about the efficiency of one kind of grip over another

Example 7 Joseph Schwantner, *Velocities*, Mm. 91-92



⁵¹ Stevens, Leigh Howard. *Method of Movement* 25th Anniversary Edition, 8-10.

highlights our over-concern with technical possibility. Although a certain amount of technique is required to present an idea clearly, there are many different players that use many different types of grips to the point of profound expression. Just because Stevens grip is the newest grip to the marimba scene, does not mean that is the only acceptable way to play the instrument. Pius Cheung plays Burton grip, and had no problem playing the entirety of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* on marimba.

Praise of pieces like *Velocities* by Joseph Schwantner, written in his classic moto-perpetuo style, the abundance of ostinato-melody pieces, the popularity of Stevens technique and the rigorous chase of technical refinement as outlined by *Method of Movement*, and the popularity of drum corps have certainly contributed to a technical "space-race" environment, where young percussionists are exposed to the most technical pieces in the marimba repertoire before being exposed to western classical music in general. For example, many young performers may be more familiar with Bach on the marimba in context of a transcription without listening and seriously considering how Bach pieces sound on the violin, cello, or harpsichord.

Ney Rosauero approaches writing for the marimba in a way that makes his music extremely accessible. His first marimba concerto is the most performed percussion concerto in the world and is praised by Percussive Notes as being "superbly written for the unique timbre and virtuoso technical qualities of the marimba." His compositions draw on concepts of jazz, including sections that outline chords and sound quasi-improvisatory.

Most importantly, his compositions contain aspects of Central American marimba playing, but also have technical passages that demonstrate new possibilities of four mallet playing that have risen to popularity. In this way, his pieces moved marimba repertoire in the future by referencing the marimba's past. Even if not entirely on purpose, this is the reason that

this is by far the most popular percussion concerto, even if criticized by naysayers as being overly simple. The fast last movement of his concerto has a pop theme that uses a the same 3 + 3 + 2 + 2 rhythmic structure popular in *zapateo*, or music that prompts of foot-stomping dance, just like the folkloric marimba example previously discussed. His music also borrows techniques from other instruments, but not for the sake of transcription. Instead he appropriates sounds characteristic of other instruments by using techniques that fall idiomatically on the keyboard. There are many instances of passages that resemble guitar finger-picking, but in a voicing that comfortably falls on the marimba and takes advantage of the ways that four mallets can move independently. Despite the strength of the concerto's cultural aesthetic, some players dismissed and criticized it as overly musically simplistic and underdeveloped in the context of other more difficult concertos that seek to validate the marimba as worthy of western classical study rather than to entertain wide audiences. Its popularity speaks volumes about what kind of music has wide appeal to non-percussionists.

Example 8 Ney Rosauro, *Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra*, Mvt. 2, Mm. 13-16.

The musical score for Example 8, Ney Rosauro's *Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra*, Mvt. 2, measures 13-16, is presented in two systems. Each system consists of a Treble staff and a Bass staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#). Measures 13 and 15 feature a complex rhythmic pattern with sixteenth notes and eighth notes, with a '6' above the staff indicating a sixteenth note. Measures 14 and 16 show a simpler rhythmic pattern with eighth notes and quarter notes. The score is written for two staves, Treble and Bass, in 2/4 time.

Example 9 Ney Rosauro, *Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra* Movement 4, Mm. 31-40.

Mark Ford compiled a list of the most important works that embody marimba playing in 2014 and presented the list at the 2014 Percussive Arts Society International Convention. Most of the composers whose works were placed on the list are marimbists, with the only exception to carry many votes being *Idle Fancies* by Paul Lansky.

Mark Ford's study brings to light an important question. What are the characteristics of the newest generation of marimba music and how do they relate to the past? Composers and

Example 10 Pius Chueng, *Etude in E Minor*, Mm. 109-110

performers Pius Cheung and Casey Cangelosi are in the forefront of marimba compositions in 2015. Their pieces have creatively innovated the genre by neglecting older stereotypes of what constitutes the technically adequate mallet percussionist in favor of individual artistry. Their pieces acknowledge the past by completely ignoring all previous technical conventions of what it means to be a marimba virtuoso in favor of creating a new and original sound. Pius Cheung borrows techniques commonly used on the piano to create textures on the marimba and breaks away from using ostinato patterns to create a rhythmic flow, instead using arpeggios and pianistic language.

These examples of repertoire illustrate the progression of how compositional ideas were technically realized in the transition between Central American marimba music and Western classical marimba music popular in the United States. Although the number of pieces written for the marimba has exploded since 1950, there is still a need for new repertoire that challenges percussionists to develop musical problem solving skills in an educational context.

CONCLUSION

All percussion educators are presented with a challenge to break away from habits that isolate our own instrument from other musicians and cultures. We are left with four main questions:

- Why is important to know the history of the instrument and its repertoire? What can be done to bridge the gap between the folkloric marimba music tradition and the classical “Western” tradition?
- How should percussion and marimba curricula be restructured in order to give students an opportunity to connect and create an awareness of the history of the marimba and its repertoire?
- How should educational methods be altered to promote developing habits of musical problem solving and thoughtful interpretation rather than only focusing on technical progress?

One way that we can break out of the habit of commissioning pieces that only appeal to percussionists is to commission pieces for the marimba that are written by non-marimba player composers. Currently, writing for the marimba is over-dictated by technical possibility, and compositions by non-marimba players will open up new ways for marimba players to view their own instrument and move around the keyboard. Creating classes and programs for composers

that teach the range and technical characteristics of the marimba will help encourage them to write new works. Because composers have only composed serious classical works for the marimba in the last 50 years, there are not many great resources designed to give technical specifications of the instrument to composers. Collaborations between marimba players and non-marimba player composers should be encouraged in order to create pieces that are balanced musically and technically.

The more composers reach to understand and apply techniques and ideas of other cultures in context of their own style, the more the percussion community can become linked. Pieces like Rosauero's concerto harken themes and ideas from folkloric marimba playing and are more easily discernable by wide audiences. I do not mean to discourage technically challenging pieces, but it is clear that composers often approach the marimba fearing accessibility and associating it with weakness, and strive to confirm the marimba's place in the classical realm with pieces that are much more difficult than they are interesting.

Performers learning the marimba should be required to be able to play folkloric music both from the marimba's history, but also simply music outside of the western classical canon. For example, many marimba players do not have experience improvising or collaborating with other players. Nowadays, a brilliant concert marimba soloist may not be capable of playing simple improvised melodies at any kind of social gathering. Such community involvement with marimba players is a cornerstone to its folkloric culture. Perhaps the reason that we have dismissed the role of improvisation within the marimba tradition in the United States is that we have allocated that skill set to the vibraphone player, which is an instrument entirely conceived of and built in the United States. Despite this cultural ownership, there are few notable programs where you can go to only study jazz vibraphone and certainly not as much solo literature or as

much attention to detail as far as technique.⁵² Playing the jazz vibraphone, although realistically a more employable skill in the United States and a confirmation of unique culture, is not nearly as encouraged as playing the marimba in academic programs.

These problems are not going without acknowledgment however. There are many method books for marimba that strive to teach technique with etudes that contain many musical ideas that younger players must decide how to convey. This type of “problem solving” practice is exactly what younger players need, and is even more important than technical advancement to learn with a mentor. A lot of the time, practicing technical movements can be tackled by a student alone in the practice room with a few pointers and corrections from a teacher in lessons. However, musical concepts require much more time, and separating the technical and the musical requires patient and constant peer review from a mentor.

Examples of method books that have musical as well as technical objectives are:

- *Marimba: Technique Through Music: A Collection of Etudes Designed to Develop Technique for the Intermediate Four-Mallet Marimbist* by Mark Ford
- *Four Mallet Music: For the Modern Marimba Player- A Collection of Original Marimba Solos for Beginners and Intermediate Players* by Juan Alamo
- *Four-Mallet Marimba Playing: A Musical Approach for All Levels* by Nancy Zeltsman

Also, teachers may find using method books for other instruments very helpful in their instruction, particular books that are written for more naturally lyrical instruments/voice. One book that is particularly useful is *Bona: Rhythmical Articulation*. This book designed for vocalists to learn to be more rhythmically fluent is a great resource for the already rhythmically fluent percussionist to become for lyrically fluent. Because the book was written for the

⁵² Gary Burton does have a book about playing 4-mallet vibraphone. Many of the techniques that he outlines inspired many of Steven’s ideas in *Method of Movement*.

limitations of a human voice, which really dictates much of what we determines any kind of musical phrase, it can be an extremely helpful tool for percussionists to learn how to emulate the nuance of breath control in their playing. As performer/educator Nancy Zeltsman says, “No two notes in a row should sound the same.”

All of these approaches are in line with continuing the spirit of the folkloric tradition. As far as getting in touch with folkloric marimba playing and the specific repertoire that is played in Chiapas, Isreal Moreno and Javier Nandayapa’s *Método Didáctico Para Marimba* or *Method for Marimba*. This book also contains valuable information about the history of the Mexican marimba.

Another forgotten focus of curriculums is transcription. Marimba players should be encouraged to play works for other instruments. The Bach *Cello Suites* and *Violin Sonatas* are very frequently played on marimba and are a great resource for learning to phrase music that doesn’t always lay on the keyboard beautifully. Playing pieces written for other instruments also presents students with a new interpretative challenge. Because of the different tonal attributes of different instruments, different instrumentalists may need to formulate different musical goals for the same pieces. Emulation of the original instrument is not always the answer for the clearest expression. Also, marimba players should also be taught approaches to arrange their own favorite music for the four mallet playing. This way, players can learn to apply idiomatic textures and techniques used on the marimba such as discussed in the repertoire section, but in a way that guarantees that the young performer will keep the original musical ideas of the transcribed song in mind. This also helps players get into the mind of their favorite composers. By learning idiomatic textures but with certain lines and ideas in mind, players learn that these sorts of 4

voice mallet permutations are vessels for conveying ideas, rather than devices that make it acceptable for a cycling rhythmic chord progressions to be called a piece.

The most important part of learning music in general that is overlooked, especially for percussionists and marimba players, is listening and being proactive about the different types of music a student listens to. The only way to develop musical sensibility is by listening to many different types of music and going to concerts as frequently as possible. This keeps students, who are often bogged down by deadlines and by living in the practice room in order to prepare for lessons and juries, connected to culture around them. Lack of concert attendance partially explains why percussionists can be so out of touch with basic knowledge of standard musical repertoire. Students should be required to listen to music as part of private lessons, and to discuss their ideas about each piece, specifically addressing what a piece is trying to convey or express and what technical or compositional tools the composer uses to achieve that expression. This practice should be entirely different from the study of standard percussion repertoire. Often there are so many pieces to percussionists should be familiar with that students learn composers and titles of works but do not really understand how they work enough to have ideas how about they would perform them if they learned them. Focus should be taken away from repertoire cramming, and put towards developing analysis skills, working with single pieces for extended periods of time, and listening to several different recordings. Percussionists must also devote a large amount of time to attending recitals by other musicians in order to understand and apply approaches that may be more idiomatic to other instruments. Gary D. Cook's book *Teaching Percussion* (3rd Edition, Schirmer Music/Wadsworth Publication) outlines a list of essential marimba recordings.

Percussion education programs in the United States do not prioritize telling the entire story of the marimba; one of its origins, and of the cultures that claim it as part of their identities. This lack of general knowledge contributes to the marimba's widespread influence, but shockingly limited reception. In order to be innovative, it is important to have a holistic knowledge of the past, refusing the harmful single United States story of the marimba in favor of a multi-cultural one. Ignoring or neglecting the past isolates the innovations of the present from a much wider international audience that is itching for new and exciting repertoire to a narrow one searching to validate the marimba as part of the Western classical music tradition. Also, only teaching a certain type of repertoire only written to validate the marimba as a classical instrument generates performers that are out of touch with the reality of global marimba playing culture. Because of a shortage of marimbists who only make their living by performing, the future of the marimba's reception will ultimately be decided by today's educators, and what values we convey as most important for young musicians.

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