



The University of Vermont
Department of Music

Thursday, April 28, 2022, 7:30 p.m.
Music Building Recital Hall

UVM Percussion Ensemble
D. Thomas Toner, *conductor*

Spring Concert

Program

Guru-guru Marimba (2011)	Yasuhide Ito
Sequence	arr. Sowah Mensah
Ostinato – A – Koto (1997)	Troy Breaux
Minimal Time (rev. 2020)	D. Thomas Toner
Pattern Study #2 (1976)	Stacey Bowers
But what about the noise of crumbling paper... (1985)	John Cage
Sea of Tranquility (2019)	Nathan Daughtrey
Caprice (1994)	Shin-ichi Kaneda

Notes

When I heard the title **Guru-guru Marimba**, I thought it was a reference to the Sanskrit word for teacher, guru, that we tend to associate with India. However, my colleague Prof. Yutaka Kono told me that in Japan "Guru-guru" refers to something that is rotating or turning round and round, which is quite appropriate (as you'll see). The piece begins with one person playing the lowest of four parts (basically Soprano-Alto-Tenor-Bass). Once that part is finished, the person moves to the next highest part and a new player starts the low part. This continues until all four parts are heard – after which the first player literally rotates back to the bottom of the marimba and starts again.

Ghanian Master Drummer and composer Sowah Mensah was a UVM James Marsh Visiting Professor from 2006-2011. While at UVM, Sowah appeared as a guest lecturer in music, dance, sociology, anthropology, and religion classes, as well as performing his own compositions with the UVM Percussion Ensemble, Orchestra, and Concert Band. **Sequence** is a four-part piece Sowah created as a means of introducing students to the techniques and aesthetics of Ghanian drumming. The first part, "Follow the Leader," emphasizes the sound of the drums as well as the hand patterning. The second part is taken from Boboobo, a social dance of the Anlo-Ewe people of southeastern Ghana. The third part, "Call and Response," features a steady accompaniment in the lead drum and interaction between a soloist and the rest of the ensemble. The final section is taken from Gota, another social dance of the Ewe people.

Ostinato-A-Koto is inspired by Japanese taiko drumming – a style that blends the percussion traditions of the ancient Imperial court music known as Gagaku (the oldest continuing orchestral music in the world), and the folk music of the Shinto festival called "matsuri." A slow introduction leads to a large section in 7/8 time and the first ostinato, a grouping of the seven eighth notes into 3 + 2 + 2. Throughout the piece, the three sets of drums, along with the gong and bass drum, complement and contrast the metal timbre of the cymbals and brake drums. A second, slower section is a "masked" 4/4 - "masked" because the 3/16 phrasing of this ostinato is at odds with the natural phrasing of a 4/4 measure. A metric modulation leads back to a restatement of the opening material. The composer, Troy Breaux, is Director of Percussion Studies at the University of Louisiana - Lafayette.

As the name implies, **Minimal Time** was written for a concert I did with the SUNY Plattsburgh Percussion Ensemble for which we had minimal time to prepare and a minimal amount of space for equipment, so I wrote for just four instruments. The piece is modeled after the percussion music of Steve Reich (especially "Music for Pieces of Wood") that is known as Minimalism and is characterized by repetition and shifting rhythmic patterns. What is a bit unusual about **Minimal Time** is that it is groove-

oriented and performed entirely on instruments common to Latin American and African traditional music.

Pattern Study #2 is one of several pieces American composer/percussionist Stacey Bowers has written that do not have strict instrumentation. That is, they can be played by various sized groups with different configurations. Our presentation of the piece uses marimbas, xylophone, vibraphone, and bells. This piece begins with a short improvisation in Mixolydian mode (a major scale with the seventh note lowered a half step) out of which arises a bass line. The rest of the group then plays a series of melodies in different time signatures, making the ensemble independent from the bass line ostinato.

At one point or another, who hasn't thought "**But what about the noise of crumpling paper?**" Well, maybe not.... But composer John Cage (yes, the same person who wrote the infamous piece 4' 33" – in which the performer makes no sound) apparently did and he wrote a piece about it. Actually, the official title is a bit longer: "But what about the noise of crumpling paper which he used to do in order to paint the series of "*Papiers Froisses*" or tearing up paper to make "*Papiers déchires*?" The "he" in the title refers to Jean Arp, a well-known French abstract artist of the early 20th Century. Cage wrote the piece in 1985 to honor the 100th anniversary of Arp's birth. The piece is not written with traditional notation, but with symbols: a dot indicates a one-beat rest, a plus sign means to play a note, and half circles and full circles indicate sounds of paper or water (Arp was also inspired by water, especially flowing water from a river or creek). And because both Cage and Arp were interested in creating art through randomness, each player is allowed to interpret the symbols independently: each player picks the number of wood, metal, and/or glass instruments to play, as well as the striker(s), the speed at which they'll play, dynamics, the specific paper or water sound they will use, etc. Needless to say, each performance of this piece is unique....

At first glance, the contrast of the Cage with the next piece, **Sea of Tranquility** is considerable, as this piece is notated traditionally, written for specific instruments, is melodic, and the intention is for every performance to be as close to a perfect rendering of the notation as possible. On the other hand, for a standard percussion ensemble piece, "Sea of Tranquility" is calm and introspective, and the composer writes in the score that "delicate playing" is required of the performers – exactly like the Cage piece.

Caprice, by Japanese composer Shin-ichi Kaneda, is more like the louder, driving music one might associate with percussion ensembles. However, **Caprice** isn't entirely that way: it starts with a soft, slow introduction in the chimes that uses a descending scale motive heard throughout the piece, and its middle section is soft and sparse, with a waltz feel.

- DTT

Personnel

Cassie Heleba, '22, *Rutland*

Kidron Kollin, '23, *Union, NJ*

Michael O'Leary, '23, *Medfield, MA*

Josh Overton, '23, *Derry, NH*

Sophie Powell, '24, *Duvall, WA*

Bryce Rader, '22, *Montclair, NJ*

Jake Ten Eyck, '22, *Mansfield, MA*

D. Thomas Toner is a Professor in the Department of Music at the University of Vermont, where he teaches percussion and conducts the Concert Band, Percussion Ensemble, and Vermont Wind Ensemble. Dr. Toner was awarded both the Doctor of Musical Arts degree and the Performer's Certificate from the Eastman School of Music, a Master of Music degree and Artist Diploma from the Yale School of Music, and a Bachelor of Music degree from the University of Massachusetts/Amherst. An active guest conductor, he has conducted wind groups at the District level throughout Vermont (he is one of the few people to have conducted the Wind Ensemble in each of Vermont's six District Music Festivals), New Hampshire, and Massachusetts, as well as the Vermont All-State Band, Vermont All-State Orchestra, and the New Hampshire All-State Percussion Ensemble (three times). He has appeared as guest conductor of the Yale Concert Band, the SUNY-Fredonia Percussion Ensemble, and the Green Mountain Mahler Festival Orchestra. As a percussionist, Dr. Toner's eclectic career has included performances with the Clifford Ball Orchestra (for the rock band Phish), before Princess Grace and Princess Caroline of Monaco, at a world music festival in Bali, Indonesia, and with a native troupe in a torrential lightning storm in Ghana, West Africa. Dr. Toner joined the Vermont Symphony Orchestra at the age of 18 and became Principal Percussionist a few years later. In addition to appearing as a soloist with the VSO, he has traveled to China three times, presenting recitals and masterclasses at the Inner Mongolian Arts College in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia. He is a featured percussionist on numerous recordings by the vocal group Counterpoint, conducted by the late Robert DeCormier. Dr. Toner is an endorser of Grover Pro Percussion, Sabian cymbals, and Vic Firth.