

History of the PAS Composition Contest

By Josh Gottry



Over the past 38 years, the Percussive Arts Society annual Composition Contest has recognized 190 outstanding new works for percussion and awarded approximately \$75,000 to 155 accomplished composers for their contribution to new literature for percussion. The PAS Composition Contest originally was conceived and established by the California PAS chapter in 1973, then sponsored by PAS as a whole beginning in 1974. The first year's prize money totaled \$900, but the contest has since expanded to two annual categories with \$4,500 awarded for six selected winning compositions.

COMPOSERS

Gordon Stout, Murray Houllif, William Schinstine, Christopher Deane, and Michael Udow are just a few of the household names in our percussion world who have been selected as winners in the PAS composition contest.

Over the life of this competition, 21 individuals have been selected as two-time winners and five composers have been honored three or more times. Alex Orfaly was selected as a first-place winner in 2010 and 2006 in the solo timpani category and was also selected as a second-place winner in 2002 for his work for timpani soloist with percussion. Ekhard Kopetzki is also a three-time winner with a first-place multiple percussion solo in 2002 as well as a first-place marimba solo and third-place percussion ensemble in 2003. William Hill placed first in the 1998 solo timpani category and earned a second place in 1997 and third place in 1998 for his percussion ensemble compositions. Guy Gauthreaux won first place in 1989 (suite for solo snare drum), third in 1998 (solo timpani), and second in 2002 (multiple percussion solo). Lynn Glasscock has been selected for honors a record seven times, earning one third-place, one second-place, and five first-prize honors. Glasscock was also the first-place winner in the original 1973 California PAS composition contest.

Three individuals have been honored to place twice in the same category in the same year. In 1983, Raymond Luedeke was selected as first and second place for his "Fancies and Interludes IV for Bass Clarinet

and Percussion" and "Fancies and Interludes III for Horn and Percussion." In 1996, Paul G. Ross earned first place and third place for his steel drum ensemble pieces "For the Day" and "Realization for Steel Band." In 2005, Nathan Daughtrey received second and third place honors for his percussion ensembles "Limerick Daydreams" and "Adaptation."

WINNING PIECES

Many of the winning compositions from the PAS Composition Contests are now equally as familiar as their composers. Pieces like Lynn Glasscock's "Between the Lines," David Gillingham's "Paschal Dances," James Cambell's "Garage Drummer," and William Schinstine's "Recital Suite for Snare Drum" are works most percussionists have played or heard performed.

While quality doesn't necessarily equate to popularity, several past winners are also among the best sellers. A cursory look at the "Most Popular" titles on the Steve Weiss Music website turns up works like Christopher Deane's "Etude for a Quiet Hall," David Skidmore's "Whispers," Robert Stright's "Six Poems," and Kevin Erikson's "In the Valley of Kings" all near the top of their respective categories. Topping out the lists of most popular PAS Composition Contest winners are Gordon Stout's "Two Mexican Dances" (#3 solo marimba), Guy Gauthreaux's "American Suite for Unaccompanied Snare Drum" (#8 solo snare drum), Eckhard Kopetzki's "Canned Heat" (#3 multiple percussion solo), and John Willmarth's "Bushido: The Way of the Warrior" (#5 timpani solo).

In addition to performances at PASIC for many of the past Composition Contest winners, PAS offers a listening room at the convention that houses scores and recordings of almost all of these outstanding works for percussion. Originally established through the work of James Strain and Rebecca Kite, this resource library had its debut at PASIC 2000 in Dallas and was expanded in 2001 by the PAS Museum curator and librarian Otice Sircy. All winning compositions from each year's competition are now automatically added to the PASIC listening room.

CATEGORIES AND JUDGES

The number of entries in the contest has varied each year, partly dependent on the categories offered. Recent examples of this variation include the 42 percussion ensembles submitted in 2005 as compared to only nine entries received for the Percussion Soloist with Band category in 2000. History would indicate that the two most popular categories for the contest are solo marimba and percussion ensemble.

The contest debuted with one category per year. The exception was in 1980 when prizes in three solo categories (drumset, snare drum, and vibraphone) were awarded. Starting in 1992, the competition was expanded to two annual categories. Those two categories now often include one solo and one ensemble category.

The Composition Contest Committee is responsible for selection of categories each year. Many categories (e.g., solo marimba) are rotated in frequently because of the popularity of the category for composers and performers alike. Other categories are determined based on the desire of the committee to expand repertoire in a particular area or to explore new combinations utilizing percussion. Some of the more unusual categories have included alto saxophone and percussion (2001), duet for voice and vibraphone or voice and marimba (2008), and multiple percussion with CD (2005).

The committee is also responsible for selecting a panel of judges (typically three to five individuals) for each competition. An effort is made to avoid using any judge more than once in a five-year period, but to select judges who are generally recognized as experts within the selected categories (either as composers, performers, or teachers). A sampling of judges over the past 15 years includes PAS Presidents Lisa Rogers, Gary Cook, Mark Ford, and John H. Beck, former contest winners Gordon Stout, Michael Udow, and David Skidmore, and other noteworthy names like James Oliverio, Bill Cahn, Elliot DelBorgo, and David Maslanika.

COMMITTEE

The PAS Composition Contest Committee, established in 1990, organizes and

administers the annual PAS Composition Contest. Activities include selection of categories and judges, administering the adjudication process (including rules interpretations), and writing reviews of winning selections for publication in *Percussive Notes*. Some of the activities are simply determined in response to the natural evolution and development of both the competition and the overall percussion music environment.

For several years, the contest was funded by Ludwig Music, providing a total of \$1,000 in prize money plus publication. Over time, Ludwig decided not to continue that arrangement, but the committee found several other publishing companies willing to be involved. These publishers were eager to offer publication of winning works, but feared the financial implications if they were responsible for supplying prize money. In 1991, the Contest Committee convinced the PAS Board of Directors to expand the contest to two categories and once again provide the financial awards. Over the following years, many different publishing companies guaranteed the publication of the winning pieces.

In the mid-2000s, with the increasing number of percussion publishers, specific composer and publisher relationships, and the legitimate opportunities for self-publishing, many composers no longer saw the guaranteed publication with a designated publisher as an incentive. In 2007, the committee determined to eliminate the publication component, following several instances where the winning composer elected either to self-publish or publish with a company other than the one selected by the committee.

The PAS Composition Contest Committee is also continuing to consider new ways to

further the spirit of its mission to promote quality percussion compositions and new composers writing for percussion. This year two committee members, Josh Gottry and Nathan Daughtrey, were selected to present a professional development clinic at PASIC entitled "The Composer Percussionist." Consideration is being given to ways to secure PASIC or state Day of Percussion performances for winning compositions, session opportunities for winning composers, and further exposure of new compositions and emerging composers in print publications.

FUTURE

The future of the PAS Composition Contest is certainly a positive one. Categories for upcoming contests are now posted several years in advance, giving composers more time to create outstanding new works for percussion. Participation in the contest is at a higher level than it was ten years ago, and most years see 50 or more entries in the two categories. The committee hopes to continue its mission to provide this incentive to composers, but also to create new avenues of exposure for winning composers and pieces. Ultimately, the Percussive Arts Society and general percussion community benefit from this competition as it approaches its 40-year anniversary. This contest has facilitated the creation of countless new works for percussion and brought additional composers to percussion. This has been and will continue to be a worthwhile investment of the time and resources that have been utilized to further percussion composition.

Josh Gottry serves as Adjunct Professor of Music at Chandler-Gilbert Community College (Arizona), teaching courses in percussion, music theory, and composition. He also

works with a number of private students as part of his percussion studio and presents clinics on percussion and composition as a Teaching Artist for the Arizona Commission on the Arts. Gottry's first composition, "Irrelevant" for solo marimba, earned him an ASCAP Young Composer Competition grant in 1995 and he has since been selected for numerous ASCAP Plus awards and created nearly 50 published works. His pieces are internationally performed and have been consistently recognized for their creativity, accessibility, and overall quality. He is President of the Arizona PAS Chapter, chair of the PAS Composition Contest Committee, and a member of the PAS Education Committee. PN

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