

THE EMERGENCE AND EVOLUTION
OF A GENERALIZED MARIMBA TECHNIQUE

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I. INTRODUCTION

The emergence and evolution of the marimba in the United States constitutes a fascinating and unusual study; few Western acoustic instruments have developed a technique, pedagogy and literature in the short span of fifty years. Much has been written regarding the sources and history of the marimba from an ethnomusicological perspective, particularly in Latin America and Africa (1), but little has been described and documented tracing the development of the marimba in the United States during this century.

There are several directions a study of the marimba could take, including the physical refinements of the instrument itself, the development of a pedagogy for the instrument and a survey of the significant literature which has propelled the instrument into relative prominence. These areas possess a good deal of potential for research and description and, to varying degrees, have been addressed in part by articles written over the past twenty years in journals published under the auspices of the Percussive Arts Society. (2)

The focus of this study is to examine and describe the development of a generalized marimba technique which has evolved as a result of the nature of the major repertoire written for the instrument since 1940. (3)

In approaching this topic, it is essential to clarify what is meant by the idea of a "generalized marimba technique." In educated musical circles the term "technique" usually refers to the mechanical skills one must possess in order to master a particular instrument. Musicians spend hours practicing scales and exercises to develop facile technique. In the area of marimba study, a discussion of technique generally includes the two major areas of grip and sticking. Briefly, the grip is the specific way the mallets are held, along with the related use of muscles in the production of tone. Sticking involves the sequence of mallet usage and its eventual control. Both of these areas are important in the development of a competent performer, and their instruction and assimilation often depend on the influence of a teacher or prominent performer.

In contrast to this necessary, but specific and mechanical approach, “generalized technique” is more closely associated with a stylistic and musical evolution that is influenced by the nature of an instrument’s repertoire. How an instrumental technique develops is related to the demands that composers place upon performers. In a real sense, the perception of an instrument’s potential by a composer, whether in isolation or as a result of contact with a skilled performer, greatly influences the development of that instrument.

In the specific case of the marimba, the emergence of several concerti prior to an existing pedagogy served to strengthen the importance of those composers, who for varied reasons chose to compose a work for marimba. Thus, the initial approach to the instrument can be examined and described partially through these early works and the performers who first brought recognition to the marimba.

One additional observation should be made: this study illustrates that the maturation and gradual emergence of the marimba was accomplished as a result of independent and generally unrelated activities. Individual composers wrote distinctive works which contributed to the varied possibilities of the marimba and in the end, “confirmed the worth of the instrument—when it is championed in so many different places.” (4)

In order to provide a background perspective to this study, the precursors of Western marimba technique are briefly presented. These include the ragtime xylophone technique popular at the close of the nineteenth century and in the first two decades of the twentieth century and the North American manifestations of the popular Guatemalan marimba developments.

The central focus of this study begins with the work of three composers whose contributions allowed the marimba its initial exposure: Paul Creston, Darius Milhaud and Robert Kurka. Other influential figures, including Clair Omar Musser and Vida Chenoweth, as well as some lesser known individuals are also discussed.

Despite the fact that this study is concerned with the marimba in the United States, a brief examination of the Japanese approach to the marimba, focusing on the work of one of its pioneers, Akira Miyoshi, is included to understand more fully the technical approaches that emerged in Japan in the 1970's. To complete the discussion, some of the extended techniques that appear in recent compositions are presented to provide a complete view of the entire progression of a generalized marimba technique.

NOTES

(1) The most significant sources applicable to the history of the marimba are as follows:

Books:

Blades, James. "Percussion Instruments and Their History." New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1970.

Chenoweth, Vida. "The Marimbas of Guatemala." Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1974.

Jones, A.M. "Africa and Indonesia: The Evidence of the Xylophone and Other Musical and Cultural Factors." Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1971.

MacCallum, Frank. "The Book of the Marimba." New York: Carlton Press, Inc., 1969.

Nadel, Sigfried. "Marimba Musik." Wien: Holder-Pichler-Tempsky A.G., 1931.

Peters, Gordon. "Treatise on Percussion." Rochester: Eastman School of Music, 1962.

Solis, Theodore. "The Marimba in Mexico City: Contemporary Contexts of a Traditional Regional Ensemble." Urbana: The University of Illinois, 1983.

Vela, David, edited and translated by Vida Chenoweth. "Information on the Marimba." Auckland, New Zealand: Institute Press, 1957–1958. Original Title: "Noticias sobre la Marimba," (unpublished).

Articles:

Abe, Keiko. "The History and Future of the Marimba in Japan." *Percussive Notes*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1984, pp. 41–43.

Chenoweth, Vida "Defining the Marimba and the Xylophone Interculturally." *Percussionist*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1963, pp. 4–6.

Chenoweth, Vida. "Marimbas of the Congo." *Percussionist*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 1965, pp. 15–16.

Garfias, Robert. "The Marimba of Mexico and Central America." *Latin American Music Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1983, pp. 203–212.

(2) The Percussive Arts Society, a not-for-profit organization founded in 1961 is dedicated to education and communication within the field of percussion. The Society publishes both a research journal and a broader based magazine which addresses a wide range of subjects pertaining to all areas of percussion.

(3) The year 1940 is used because the first major marimba composition, "Concertino for Marimba and Orchestra, Op. 21" by Paul Creston was composed in this year.

(4) Interview with Vida Chenoweth, October 1987.

II. THE PRECURSORS OF WESTERN MARIMBA TECHNIQUE

Ragtime Xylophone Technique

The xylophone was the first mallet percussion instrument to appear in the United States. This was accomplished both by its inclusion in the symphony orchestra percussion section and also as a solo instrument in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century through the vehicle of popular music, which included marches, waltzes, polkas and novelty ragtime pieces.

The initial exposure and resultant popularity of the solo xylophone was primarily accomplished by recordings made between 1890 and 1930, although early vaudeville productions prior to that time utilized the xylophone as a novelty instrument. As the medium of radio emerged, live musical programs included solo xylophone performances, further increasing the visibility of the instrument.

From the perspective of performance practice, the xylophone was customarily played with two mallets, although Signor Lou Chiha "Friscoe" played the instrument with four hammers, this fact is documented by both photograph and recording as early as 1921. (1)

Most of the recordings of xylophone artists in the first two decades of this century illustrate a two mallet style that includes arpeggiated figures and some double stop passages. The level of technical facility varied greatly with the individual performers: Charles P. Lowe, a xylophonist who recorded for Columbia around 1902, utilized little embellishment in his primarily melodic playing, and his performance lacks the relaxed style heard in other recordings. (2) Vaudeville entertainer El Cota was highly esteemed by his colleagues and displayed a great deal of technical skill in the two recordings made for Columbia around 1911. (3) Another skilled technician was William Reitz who used many rapid arpeggios, trills, glissandi and grace notes in his playing. He was a very popular performer and made numerous recordings for the Victor Company. (4)

The most highly regarded xylophonist of this era was George Hamilton Green, who in 1917 made his first recording for the Edison Company. A superb musician, Green developed a highly technical style of playing that included a great deal of syncopation and accented double stops, yet was also very smooth and fluid. His recordings clearly illustrate a controlled, relaxed approach even in the most technically demanding passages. Additionally, his ability to improvise very complex obligato lines with freedom and ease was unsurpassed. This improvisational skill not only provided interest and energy to the music, but was also indicative of his creative and musical dexterity. (5) An early review of his playing stated, "He has begun where every other xylophone player left off. His touch, his attack, his technique and his powers of interpretation in the rendition of his solos are far different than other performers." (6)

As a result of the exposure to these early recordings, questions from interested listeners and readers began to appear in "The Metronome" magazine regarding the method used by George Hamilton Green in his ragtime xylophone playing. In the January 1922 issue, percussionist Carl Gardner is asked "Will you please tell me how I may learn to play a harmony part on the xylophone for dance work?...In fact I would like to know the system that George Hamilton Green uses in his records..." (7) A year later, a series of eight lessons called, "Harmony Ragtime for Marimba and Xylophone Players" was reprinted in successive issues of "The Metronome" magazine. This series was published by the National School of Vibracussion in Chicago which was under the auspices of the J.C. Deagan Company, a prominent xylophone manufacturer. (8)

During that decade, George Hamilton Green also wrote a progressive series of fifty individual lessons in which he emphasized good practice habits and technical control. In these lessons he methodically introduced scales, chords, double stops, grace notes and musical concepts in learning to play and improvise in the ragtime style. (9)

Thus, both written text and recorded examples indicate a performance technique that served as a foundation, or at least a point of reference for the mallet performers who followed. What cannot be proven is the degree to which later mallet players, especially marimbists, were exposed to and influenced by this highly developed performance technique. The fact of its existence does not demonstrate a connection,

although it should be pointed out that this music was part of a very popularized style that continued to grow due to its exposure on radio at a time when the radio was a very important part of everyday life.

Guatemalan Marimba Influences

Another precursor to Western marimba technique, though less known than the early xylophone developments, was the North American manifestation of the Guatemalan marimba music.

Despite numerous theories regarding the origin of the marimba, it is a commonly recognized fact that the marimba is an essential element of the musical life of Guatemala and has been since the mid-nineteenth century. The nature of marimba performance in Guatemala revolves around the concept of ensemble playing, typically with two instruments, each played by three or four players, depending on the size of the marimba. (10) Each player uses two or three mallets, according to their musical function in the ensemble: the melodic players use two mallets; the harmonic/chordal players manipulate three mallets, two in the right hand. (11)

This Guatemalan tradition initially came to the United States in the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1908 the younger members of the Hurtado family, a famous Guatemalan “marimbero” family, made a successful three year tour through North America. (12) Then, in 1915, the Guatemalan government sent them to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco where they gained additional fame. (13) Later that year, the Hurtado brothers recorded thirty selections from their repertoire for the Victor Company, (14) and also recorded for the Columbia Record Company under the name of the Royal Marimba Band. (15) Other evidence of the Guatemalan marimba phenomenon is found in recordings made for both Victor and Columbia by the Blue and White Marimba Band of Guatemala in 1916, following a successful concert played at the Hippodrome in New York earlier that year. (16) The Cardenas Marimba band, another group from Guatemala, also recorded for Columbia during this time. (17) The popularity of this marimba style is supported further by the fact that other marimba bands such as the Castlewood Marimba Band and the American Marimbaphone Band made recordings about the same time, although they were not from Guatemala. (18)

Due to the ensemble nature of the Guatemalan marimba style, it is unusual that a player gains fame as a soloist, but that is precisely what occurred in the case of Celso Hurtado and Jose Bethancourt. (19) Celso Hurtado toured and recorded with his brothers when they came to the United States and according to Vida Chenoweth was an exceptional soloist who used, among other techniques, a single-handed roll to accompany his right-hand melody in the Guatemalan style. (20) This technique, as will be shown later in this study, is significant as it provides the basis for an independence of musical line on the marimba. Bethancourt, a member of another important family of Guatemalan marimbists, also came to the United States and settled in Chicago, where he was influential in the development of the marimba there. He had his own radio program during which he played solo marimba music, and he also directed several marimba bands which performed in the 1950 Chicagoland Music Festival at Soldier Field, playing three Guatemalan works, "Chichi Chichi," "La Comparsa," and "Mambo Jambo" for a crowd of approximately 85,000 people. (21)

Thus, the appearance of the Guatemalan marimba style in the United States is yet another factor in the potential influence on Western marimba technique. While it is impossible to ascertain the degree of this influence, it is fairly certain that the radio exposure of Bethancourt in the musically active city of Chicago at a time when the marimba was beginning its rise toward recognition and the observation and later usage by Vida Chenoweth of Hurtado's technique are both significant developments to warrant an assumption of important influence.

NOTES

(1) The photograph referred to appears in an article in the February 1921 issue of "Along Broadway" (page 9) in which Signor Lou Chiha "Friscoe" is pictured behind a five octave instrument, labeled a xylophone, holding four mallets. According to William Cahn, in an article in the Spring/Summer 1979 issue of "Percussionist" (page 147), "Friscoe" recorded several four-mallet unaccompanied solos for the Edison Company. Cahn describes the style of "A Perfect Day," recorded in March of 1922, as "chords sustained by even, beautifully played rolls" and further indicates that "Friscoe" was the first to record this style of playing.

(2) William Cahn, "The Xylophone in Acoustic Recordings (1877–1929)," *Percussionist*, Spring/Summer 1979, p. 144.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 145.

(4) *Ibid.*, pp. 145–146.

(5) *Ibid.*, pp. 146–147.

(6) George Hamilton Green, "Instruction Course for Xylophone," p. 2.

(7) "The Metronome" magazine, January 1922, p. 63.

(8) The series was printed in "The Metronome" magazine between October 1923 and May 1924.

(9) George Hamilton Green's original "Instruction Course for Xylophone: A Complete Course of Fifty Lessons" was published in its entirety by Meredith Music Publications in 1984.

(10) More specifically, two instruments make up what is called the "marimba doble," and as a rule, four players play the larger instrument (marimba grande) and three are at the smaller one (marimba cuache). Further details are given in "The Marimbas of Guatemala" by Vida Chenoweth, pp. 19–24.

(11) Vida Chenoweth, "The Marimbas of Guatemala," p. 22.

(12) David Vela, "Information on the Marimba," p. 63.

(13) Frank MacCallum, "The Book of the Marimba," p. 24.

(14) David Vela, p. 64.

(15) Frank MacCallum, p. 93.

(16) William Cahn, p. 143.

(17) *Ibid.*

(18) Ibid.

(19) Vida Chenoweth, p. 20.

(20) Interview with Vida Chenoweth, October 1987.

(21) One of Jose Bethancourt's Marimba Band performances was held in conjunction with the Chicagoland Music Festival in August of 1950, the program of is listed on page 3 of the "Chicago Daily Tribune," Saturday, August 19, 1950.

III. THE FIRST CONCERTO

Paul Creston

The first major work composed for the marimba was the “Concertino, Op. 21,” written by Paul Creston in 1940. This concerto was commissioned by Miss Frederique Petrides, who was at that time the director of the 30 member all-girl Orchestrette Classique in New York City. (1) The circumstances of the commission also involved Ruth (Stuber) Jeanne, who was timpanist for Petrides’ orchestra and a skilled marimbist as well. Stuber had studied with Clair Omar Musser in Chicago and George Hamilton Green in New York and was the soloist for the premiere performance of Creston’s Concertino on April 29, 1940 in New York’s “Carnegie Chamber Music Hall.” (2)

Paul Creston, born in 1906, studied piano and organ but had no training in theory or composition. The “Concertino,” his only work for marimba, is three movements in a fast-slow-fast format. The rhythmic nature of the outside movements is strongly reminiscent of the aforementioned xylophone style, in that its motion is propulsive, utilizing syncopation, dotted rhythms, accents and double stops. The feature that distinguishes Creston’s two mallet outside movements from its xylophone counterpart is the character of the harmonies, which is less predictable than the tonal xylophone style. The slow and lyrical second movement is scored for four mallets except for the middle cadenza-like section which requires only two mallets. The harmonic vocabulary consists primarily of major and minor seventh chords, often in close position.

Vida Chenoweth recounts a conversation with Creston in which he described his approach to marimba technique. She explained, “he went to the piano and whatever he could do with four fingers or the pointer fingers of either hand became the technique that he used for the marimba.” (3) This approach would certainly explain the predominance of the close voicings in the second movement. It would also affirm the relatively limited tessitura of individual sections in the outside movements, as well as the gradual movement up and down the varied registers of the instrument, as opposed to the use of wide leaps which are found in later works written for marimba.

The overall impact of Creston's work was twofold. The commission and subsequent performance of this first marimba concerto brought with it the dubious characterization of the instrument as a "novelty," particularly in the context of the traditional classical concert season. While generally complimentary of Creston's composition, critics described the premiere as, "...an interesting experiment," "the novelty of the evening," and "...at first blush might read like a manifestation of the silly season" (see illustrations 1–3 for reviews of the premiere). This description, perhaps partially a result of the xylophone's novelty ragtime roots, followed the marimba for two decades as performers and composers struggled to win recognition for this newcomer to the concert hall.

The other aspect of Creston's influence is substantiated by the continuing popularity and success of the "Concertino." The work is fundamental in the teaching repertoire of the marimba, and it is performed more than any other concerto for the instrument. Creston's opus, therefore, is not only the first of its genre, but it has become one of the most significant as well.

Orchestrette Classique Closes Season

A concerto for marimba and orchestra was the most striking work given at the final concert of the Orchestrette Classique conducted by Frédérique Petrides in the Carnegie Chamber Music Hall on the evening of April 29. Paul Creston was the composer and Ruth Stuber soloist. The work turned out to be not nearly so bad as might have been expected and aroused considerable enthusiasm. Mr. Creston has made much of the solo instrument which, while lacking in sonority, has a very definite individual color. The program also included Beethoven's Overture, 'The Creatures of Prometheus', Barbirolli's Concerto for Oboe and Strings on Themes from Pergolesi, with Lois Wann as soloist; short dances by Béla Bartók, in one of which Hilda Barnett was violin soloist. Mozart's D Major Serenade and Haydn's 'Clock' Symphony completed the list.

N.



Frédérique Petrides

Illustration 1: "Musical America," May 10, 1940, p. 26.

CONCERT OFFERED BY ORCHESTRETTE

Concertino for Marimba and
Orchestra Featured at the
Carnegie Chamber Hall

RUTH STUBER IS SOLOIST

Creston Composition Dedicated
to Frederique Petrides,
Conductor of Program

By HOWARD TAURMAN

A concertino for marimba and orchestra—at first blush, that might read like a manifestation of the silly season. But don't laugh; it wasn't. Such a work by the American composer Paul Creston had its first performance last night at the concert of the Orchestrette Classique, directed by Miss Frederique Petrides, at Carnegie Chamber Music Hall. The soloist was Miss Ruth Stuber, who is a tympanist in the orchestra.

The program stated flatly that this concertino "is the only work ever written for this instrument in serious form." Until some musicologist produces evidence to the contrary, the claim will be considered justified. It may not be the last work, because Mr. Creston made it an effective vehicle for his ideas and because Miss Stuber played it with skill as well as art.

Composition Is Discussed

The marimba has its limitations as a solo instrument, but Mr. Creston wrote well within them. He is, moreover, a composer with ideas and invention. Of the three movements—marked "Vigorous," "Calm" and "Lively"—the first seemed the freshest and most original in thematic material. All three are worked out with technical assurance, with the marimba player receiving ample opportunity to display virtuosity. Mr. Creston writes with rhythmic bite and variety and, occasionally, with a delightful lyrical strain.

Miss Stuber, looking trim and chic in a fluffy yellow gown, was agreeable to behold as well as to hear. She made light of the concertino's difficulties. She managed a delicately graded tone, and she knew how to sustain a broad phrase and how to skip up and down the length of the marimba with grace and speed. The work was thoroughly prepared. Miss Petrides and her players joined with Miss Stuber in a smartly turned out interpretation. Mr. Creston was on hand to acknowledge the applause.

Barbieroll Work Played

Miss Petrides, who has built her chamber orchestra into a well-drilled, responsive ensemble, has made a habit of live programs. Last night she offered Beethoven's "Men of Prometheus" Overture, Op. 43; John Barbieroll's skillful Concerto for Oboe and Strings on Themes of Pergolesi, with Lois Wann as the oboist; Béla Bartók's Rumanian Folk Dances for Small Orchestra, Mozart's Serenade in D and Haydn's Symphony in D, known as the "Clock" symphony.

The Bartók dances have a lusty vitality. The seven movements are short and incisive and have a peasant-like earthiness. The Orchestrette, which is almost all female, may have looked polite and even demure, but the playing was appropriately gusty.

Orchestrette Classique Gives Its Final Concert

Concertino by Creston Is Feature
of Program

A stimulating and enjoyable concert was given last night at the Carnegie Chamber Music Hall by the Orchestrette Classique, in its final event of the season. This group of thirty players, under the skilled direction of Frederique Petrides, has done much to advance the cause of women instrumentalists. There are men in the orchestra—woodwind and horn players. But the roster is primarily feminine.

Last night's program included Beethoven's overture to "The Creatures of Prometheus," well played by the ensemble, and John Barbieroll's concerto for oboe and strings on themes of Pergolesi. The Barbieroll work, an agreeable trifle, enlisted the services of Lois Wann as oboe soloist. She played capably, but mechanical difficulties with a double reed prevent her from equaling her own past performances here.

Seven short Rumanian dances by Béla Bartók, scored for small orchestra, followed the oboe concerto. They proved to be incisive music, sparing in structure and generally successful. Of particular interest were the "Buciumesaha" section, with incidental solo by Hinda Barnett, the orchestra's concertmaster, and the first "Maruntele" which employed the old Balkan device of shifting three-four and two-four time.

Mozart's D major serenade and Haydn's "Clock" symphony were further works on a generous and well made program. But the novelty of the evening was the first performance of a concertino for marimba and orchestra by Paul Creston. This composition, commissioned by Miss Petrides, had been awaited as an interesting experiment. Actually, Mr. Creston surpassed expectations and produced a sturdy composition of inherent musical interest. The darting technique which is natural to the marimba carried the instrument through the sprightly first and last movements; while a haunting vibrato, often produced by clusters of mallets, brought color and atmosphere to the second division. Ruth Stuber, the soloist, played brilliantly, and she was expertly accompanied by Miss Petrides's Orchestrette Classique.

-R. L.

Illustration 2: "New York Times," April 30, 1940.

Illustration 3: "Herald Tribune," April 30, 1940.

Darius Milhaud

The second concerto for marimba includes a vibraphone and was written by Darius Milhaud in 1947. "Concerto, Op. 278 for Marimba and Vibraphone" (one performer) was commissioned by Jack Connor and had its premiere with Connor as soloist and Vladimir Golschmann conducting the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra on February 12, 1949. (4) In 1952, Milhaud revised the work for solo piano (and orchestra) and re-named it "Suite Concertante, Op. 278b." (5) Comparison of both scores reveals the original marimba/vibraphone score essentially intact as the right hand piano part; the remainder of the solo part is derived from newly composed left hand material, added octaves and expanded or re-voiced chords.

Concerning the circumstances of the commission, Connor selected Milhaud because he liked the composer's music and knew that he had previously written individual concerti for percussion, harmonica and clarinet, and he believed Milhaud would be receptive to the idea of writing a work for marimba. In response to Connor's written request, Milhaud replied that "he didn't think that the marimba would be well received in a concerto or other performing context." (6) Connor persisted and eventually traveled to Mills College in Oakland, California, where Milhaud was teaching. Connor played both the marimba and vibraphone for Milhaud, performing Bach, some jazz and other examples that Milhaud requested. After hearing Connor play, Milhaud agreed to write a work for him, the result of which was the "Concerto." Connor described the style as being, "a sort of French version of Latin jazz," which was, in Connor's view a distillation of what he had played for the composer at Mills College. (7)

Regarding the performance practice, Milhaud was quite specific about timbral variances, indicating precise mallet types in fourteen different places in the three movement work. (8) Midway through the first movement, Milhaud calls for a five measure passage (ms. 54–59) to be played with the hands (without mallets). Connor admits ignoring this indication when he performed it, as the sound did not project adequately. (9) In two separate places in the third movement, Milhaud calls for the marimbist to play briefly with the base end of the mallet (the shaft) creating an echo effect. The precision of Milhaud's indications demonstrate his willingness to explore new sounds. Credit can also be given to Connor, as

he undoubtedly used a variety of mallets in communicating the potential of the marimba and vibraphone to Milhaud.

Another aspect of performance technique that must be mentioned is this writer's overwhelming sense of the strong pianistic influence that Milhaud must have brought to the compositional process of this piece. This is evident in the consistent double staff scoring throughout the work. In the majority of instances, the use of double staves is clearly unnecessary, illustrated by numerous close position chords or double stops that could be more easily read on one staff (see illustration 4). Also, except for twenty measures, the entire solo part utilizes the same clef in both the right and left hand. (10)



Illustration 4: Milhaud, 1st movement, ms. 38–39; 51–52

With respect to the impact of the "Concerto, it is important to acknowledge Milhaud as the first major twentieth century composer to contribute to the limited repertoire of the marimba. However, despite his established reputation and prolific output, the critics in attendance at the premiere chronicled the event as "a generous measure of novelty," and described the composition as, "charming though slight" (see illustrations 5 and 6 for reviews of the premiere). Furthermore, both educators and performers have not provided Milhaud's opus with the exposure and popularity achieved by other marimba compositions.

Golschmann Offers Several Novelties

**St. Louis Symphony Presents
Works by Milhaud, Algazi,
And Mihalovici**

ST. LOUIS.—The St. Louis Symphony concerts on Feb. 12 and 13 at the Kiel Opera House presented Zino Francescatti, violinist, as soloist. His playing of Bach's A minor Concerto for Violin was excellent, as was Vladimir Golschmann's accompaniment. A novelty, Concerto for Marimba and Vibraphone, written by Darius Milhaud for Jack Connor, a member of the orchestra's percussion section, was also heard.

The orchestra, under Mr. Golschmann's direction, sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women, gave a special all-Gershwin program at Kiel Opera House on Feb. 9. The piano soloist was Abram Chasins. The program contained two Preludes, Concerto for Piano in F, An American in Paris, and the Robert Russell Bennett arrangement of music from Porgy and Bess.

Harry Farbman conducted the sixth Pop concert by the symphony, on Feb. 6, before a large audience. William Dorn, pianist, played the Rachmaninoff's Second Concerto with flexible technique and admirable feeling.

For the program of Feb. 4 and 5, Mr. Golschmann provided a premiere of Largo, a short work by Leon Algazi; and a first St. Louis performance of Prokofieff's Second Suite, Romeo and Juliet. Brahms' Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini, played by the young soloist, Seymour Lipkin, rounded out the program.

Rudolf Serkin, pianist, was the soloist on Jan. 29 and 30. His masterly playing of the Beethoven Concerto No. 5 was most enthusiastically received. Mr. Golschmann brought forth another first performance—of Sequences, in four movements, which Marcel Mihalovici originally composed as film music.

Illustration 5: "Musical America," April 15, 1949.

SYMPHONY SOLOISTS IN THREE CONCERTOS

Francescatti Plays Bach and
Prokofieff—Premier of Ma-
rimba-Vibraphone Number.

By THOMAS B. SHERMAN

A brace of violin concerti and a premiere performance of a concerto for marimba, vibraphone and orchestra provided the patrons of the St. Louis Symphony Society with a generous measure of novelties at last night's concert in Kiel Auditorium. Zino Francescatti, the major soloist of the evening, played the Bach A Minor violin concerto and Prokofieff's concerto in G Minor. Both compositions are part of the standard literature but they are given so rarely that even veteran concert-goers could approach them in a state of susceptible innocence.

Mr. Francescatti and the orchestra under Conductor Vladimir Golschmann delivered the Bach concerto with a close precision of ensemble and a glowing luster of tone. Line and perspective were virtually perfect in their formulation and the opposition in weight of solo instrument and orchestra could have served as a master demonstration of the dynamics of a concerto grosso. Mr. Francescatti's tone and style were superlative in their elegance. The fine incisiveness of the two fast movements and the breadth of the andante were wholly classic in their proportions and at the same time were warmed by a romantic feeling that was all the more searching for being restrained. In the slow movement Mr. Francescatti made subtle modifications of tempo that rounded the line without ever compromising the rhythm.

The Prokofieff concerto was—in modern terms—another combination of classic form and romantic lyricism. The andante assai, in particular, has fullness of bloom such as no other practitioner of the neo-romantic style can match. Again the performance had a fine clarity and a consistent rhythmic elasticity.

Mr. Francescatti shared his double ovation with the orchestra and Mr. Golschmann.

The Darius Milhaud marimba-vibraphone concerto—which demanded an athletic mobility as well as perfect marksmanship on the part of the soloist—was given what appeared to be a letter-perfect performance by Jack Conner of the orchestra's percussion section. The two fast movements—both tinged with the color and rhythm of Brazilian dance forms—were the most interesting. The vibraphone, with its more sustained sound, undoubtedly has many coloristic possibilities—but they were not fully explored even in the slow movement where it was used most effectively. On the whole the piece was charming though slight. But the audience obviously enjoyed itself hugely, for Mr. Conner's performance was both interesting to see as well as to hear. His timing was perfect. The concerto was specially commissioned by Mr. Conner.

The concert was opened with a handsome, sparkling and dramatically illuminated performance of the overture to Mozart's "Don Giovanni." Proceedings were closed with Wagner's "Tannhauser" overture. The concert will be repeated this afternoon.

Illustration 6: "St. Louis Post-Dispatch," February 13, 1949.

Robert Kurka

The style and the demands of the third concerto under consideration in this study differ tremendously with what has been previously discussed. In 1956 Robert Kurka completed his “Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra” and dedicated it to Vida Chenoweth who premiered the work on November 11, 1959 in Carnegie Hall with the Orchestra of America under the direction of Richard Korn. (11)

Kurka, born in 1921, studied composition briefly with Otto Luening and Darius Milhaud, but was primarily self-taught. (12) The circumstances surrounding the composition of the “Concerto” focus on marimbist Vida Chenoweth and her efforts to persuade composers to write new works for the instrument. She remembers reading an article that appeared in Life Magazine in May 1956 which summarized the careers of the nine most promising composers in the United States. That list included Robert Kurka. (13) Chenoweth’s New York manager was a friend of Kurka, and he arranged for the composer and marimbist to meet. As a result, Kurka agreed to write a work for marimba. (14) Before beginning composition of “Concerto,” Kurka spent several sessions observing Chenoweth’s practice. She recalls him saying, “just go through as many pieces of music as you can. I just want to watch and listen.” After she finished, his primary comment was that he didn’t realize the marimba was such a visual instrument. (15) Kurka composed the first two movements as a unit and gave them to Chenoweth so she could begin working on them. She recounts, “I told him I was having a dreadful time covering that amount of territory at that speed. I remember how very pleased he was that I was having such a struggle, especially with the double notes that crossed hand-over-hand and then back-and-forth, bass to treble. He enjoyed that—the more visual it was, the better he liked it.” Because of the extreme difficulty, he offered to make changes, but Chenoweth replied, “it is terribly hard, but it isn’t impossible.” (16) The third movement was written later after he was already sick (with leukemia), and he never had the opportunity to hear it.

For anyone who has performed the “Concerto” or had the opportunity to see a live performance of the work, the visual aspect is clearly evident. Wide, abrupt leaps require extreme physical agility and control, which is further complicated by the fast tempi (see illustrations 7 and 8). Some marimbists, in their attempt to simplify these types of difficulties have suggested that the player use four mallets instead of

two in the first movement to minimize the disjunct motion. (17) While this is indeed possible, the composer's concern for the visual effect should be a strong influence in any technical decisions.

Kurka's delight with the visual aspects of the marimba also is evident in the slow second movement, where the four-voice chords are very widely spaced, resulting in strenuous reaches for each hand, as well as between the hands (see illustration 9). The affect of this wide spacing is not only to challenge the physical grace of the player, but to create a unique timbral color formerly unexplored in the solo literature.



Illustration 7: Kurka, 1st movement, ms. 27–30



Illustration 8: Kurka, 3rd movement, ms. 327–331



Illustration 9: Kurka, 2nd movement, ms. 76–81

Without minimizing Kurka’s compositional talent, it is this writer’s viewpoint that Vida Chenoweth’s influence was extremely significant, in that her diligent pursuit of every detail of the score in spite of its excessive difficulty contributed to a final result which pushed marimba repertoire and performance technique into a new realm. This is supported by several critics who indicate that Chenoweth had little problem executing any aspect of the work, and furthermore, she did not have to compromise to achieve her artistry. (see illustrations 10–14 for reviews of the premiere). This perspective provides an answer to those who characterize Kurka’s work as, “unmarimbistic....notes that do not fit into the common sticking procedures....the marimbist could possibly leave out or drop a few notes..to achieve..flow or balance.” (18) As one reviewer summarized, “the score makes virtuosic demands on the soloist and Miss Chenoweth...with uncanny skill... gave the work a superb premiere.” (19)

Concerto For Marimba Has Premiere Here

ORCHESTRA OF AMERICA

CARNEGIE HALL.
Conductor, Richard Korn; soloist, Vida Chenoweth, marimba player. The program
Pattee for Orchestra, "A Victory Ball,"
Ernest Schelling
Concert for Marimba and Orchestra
(first performance) Robert Kurka
Symphony No. 3 (first performance),
Charles Wuorinen
In Memoriam Douglas Moore
In Memoriam: The Colored Soldiers who
Died for Democracy, William Grant Still
Chant of 1842 Paul Creston

By Jay S. Harrison

Concertos for Marimba are no more often encountered than pterodactyls in Times Square, but one of them turned up last night at a Carnegie Hall concert presented by the Orchestra of America under the direction of Richard Korn. The work, composed by the late Robert Kurka, was given its world premiere with Vida Chenoweth as soloist, and the piece, quite frankly, provided the only breeze in an evening that was otherwise mighty stuffy.

The marimba—for those so grossly miseducated as to have no knowledge on the subject—is an instrument of the xylophone family which is hit by mallets of wood, felt or wool. Tubular resonators, attached to the underbelly of the "keyboard," amplify the sound of each struck slab, the color variety thus available to the performer being far greater than one might imagine. Depending on the mallets used and the skill of the player, the marimba has a timbre span ranging from a gentle and luminous tap-pop to a sound not unlike that created by whacking two milk bottles together. In any case, the instrument is an exotic one and hearing a lengthy piece written for it is, as I have said, something of an occasion.

To his credit, Mr. Kurka located innumerable means of displaying the marimba at its best, and his concerto is everywhere lively and zestful. It is mostly diatonic, filled with smart and leaping tunes, and it exploits the agility of its soloists to the utmost. Fortunately, Miss Chenoweth is a real-life virtuoso who, no matter what the demands made on her, missed not a note and managed, further, to wring every possible shade of sonority from the wooden keys laid out before her. There was exhausting bravura to her work and genuine musicality as well. It was a star performance and a bewitching one—no question of

The other new work of the evening, Charles Wuorinen's Symphony No. 3, is a hulking blockbuster of a piece that is rather more pretentious than it is successful. It is over-scored, lousy of rhythm and its aggressive chunks of harmony are effective on first hearing and diminish in vitality in direct proportion to the number of their repetitions. But what is most seriously wrong with the work is that it clamors for attention and thereupon rewards it with nothing more than dense orchestral onslaughts. Still, Mr. Wuorinen is young, and at twenty-one cannot be expected to have learned that the composition of symphonies requires more than the ordering of noisy, disparate elements. Indeed, there were flashes in his work that told of a volatile imagination and a keen ear for texture. Doubtless, in time, these gifts will ripen and develop.

The playing of the Orchestra of America, which is largely a pick-up group, was quite first-rate and Mr. Korn had vigor to his beat and authority to his interpretations. On the whole, the program, which was given in observance of Veterans' Day, was rather soggy and spiritless, but the renditions themselves were in no part to blame for this.

Illustration 10: "Herald Tribune," November 12, 1959.

Music: Unusual Concerto

Kurka's Work for Marimba Performed on Program by Orchestra of America

By HAROLD C. SCHONBERG

ADD to unusual concertos: one for marimba and orchestra. It was played last night in Carnegie Hall by a personable young lady named Vida Chenoweth; it had been composed by the late Robert Kurka; it was receiving its first performance, and it was programmed by Richard Korn, who was leading the Orchestra of America in its second concert devoted to American music.

The 1935 edition of Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians cautiously describes the marimba as "a curious instrument (said to possess great musical capabilities) in use in the southern part of Mexico . . . a large table-like frame, five or six feet in length, on legs, supports a graduated series of strips of hard and seasoned wood."

As played by Miss Chenoweth, the instrument decidedly does possess musical possibilities. Kurka's concerto is tuneful and attractive—a bit haphazard in style perhaps, what with jazz elements, diatonic harmony, a first movement featured by wide-ranging skips that had nothing in common with the other movements—and Miss Chenoweth succeeded in making music out of it, not indulging in a stunt.

She also is quite a showman, one who gracefully poses before the instrument, who hammers away prettily

and who has the balance of a ballet dancer. Apparently she is an expert virtuoso: no false notes were detected, her rhythm was superb, her confidence epochal.

The other first performance of the evening was Charles Wuorinen's Third Symphony, a work that shows a decided advance over his Second. It sounds more mature; and if it lacks melodic personality, at least it has control and is the product of a good technician. It is dissonant although tonal, abounding in complicated rhythms and revealing in a juiced-up orchestration.

Also on the program were Douglas Moore's "In Memoriam," Ernest Schelling's "A Victory Ball," William Grant Still's "In Memoriam" and Paul Creston's "Chant of 1942." (The evening was listed as a "Veterans Day Program.")

The Schelling was especially interesting. A generation ago it was fairly popular, but within recent years it has dropped from the repertory. There is good reason for its disappearance; it is a thoroughly second-rate piece. But it was rather nostalgic to hear; and if nothing else it served to throw some light on the listening habits of a previous era—which, after all, is what Mr. Korn's series is all about.

Mr. Korn led his orchestra with clarity, and his players produced a mellow tone. It would appear that they have got over the rigors of the opening concert.

Two by Americans

Manhattan concert audiences last week heard fine performances of two unusual compositions that were widely different in style but unmistakably American in origin.

The Orchestra of America, founded two years ago to perform nothing but American music, presented the world première of Robert Kurka's *Concerto for Marimba*. Composer Kurka, Chicago-born son of Czech parents, went to work on his 22-minute concerto in 1956 at the suggestion of Marimbist Vida Chenoweth, completed the piece a year before his death of leukemia in 1957 at 35. Last week's performance, conducted by Richard Korn, featured Marimbist Chenoweth as soloist. A small woman (5 ft. 2 in.), she seemed dwarfed by her instrument—a 6-ft. table-like frame supporting a graduated series of hardwood strips with a row of tubular resonators attached. But when she started to flail away with both wool and rubber-tipped mallets, Marimbist Chenoweth proved herself a virtuoso. Scampering from one end of the instrument to the other, she produced flurries of bell-like tones in a surprising dynamic range. As for the piece itself, it proved to be tuneful, crisply rhythmic, shot through with jazz echoes and a spirit of jaunty sophistication. It proved again that Composer Kurka had one of the most promising original talents in U.S. music.

Illustration 11: "New York Times," November 12, 1959.

Illustration 12: "Time Magazine," November 23, 1959.

Orchestra of America Gives Second Program

Orchestra of America, Richard Korn, conductor. Vida Chenoweth, marimbist. Carnegie Hall, Nov. 11:

"In Memoriam"Douglas Moore
Fantasy, "A Victory
Ball"Ernest Schelling
Symphony No. 3Charles Wuorinen
(First Performance)
Concerto for Marimba and
OrchestraRobert Kurka
(First Performance)
"In Memoriam: the Colored
Soldiers who Died for
Democracy"William Grant Still
"Chant 1942"Paul Creston

This appropriate "Veterans' Day" program, chosen by Mr. Korn for the Orchestra of America's second concert in a series of five devoted to the performance of neglected works by American composers, was even more rewarding in the listening than it promised on paper. Since the orchestra's debut concert last month, Mr. Korn has welded his forces into a unified and cohesive whole.

The new Wuorinen Symphony is a block-buster of a piece—its opening chordal blast all but blew the roof off the building. The 21 year old composer, I gather, is one of today's "angry young men". If he makes the orchestra sound at times like the bloated "mammoth" organs that were once so popular, his symphony is written from an original and arresting angle. Composed in the summer of 1959, it is built on a pitch sequence and a chord progression. Divided into two parts separated by a pause, the same thematic material is used in each with different treatment. The first is a set of variations, and the second a modified rondo. The work ends quietly with a coda that is based on a "fragmentary quote from a piece by Josquin des Près written in memory of his teacher Okeghem". Sombre in mood, it made a fitting memorial piece for the occasion.

The Kurka Concerto for Marimba, the other new work, provided the leavening lightness needed to allay the general sombre mood of the eve-

ning. Written in 1956 for Vida Chenoweth, the concerto exploits the instrument's fascinating tonal and rhythmic possibilities to the full. Exotic colors, haunting melodic bits, jazzy rhythms and acid harmonies are interwoven into a score that fairly scintillates. It also makes virtuosic demands on the soloist and Miss Chenoweth, moving back and forth with the ease and grace of a ballet dancer while manipulating with uncanny skill one, two, three and four mallets at a time, as the occasion demanded, gave the work a superb premiere. Miss Chenoweth has not only circumvented the instrument's limitations, she has raised the marimba to concert hall status, and in doing so has also placed herself in the front rank of young American concert artists.

The Moore, Still and Creston works impressed one as sincere and often moving outpourings of men who were inspired by idealism no less than the horrors of war. Neither of them attempted to capture the sardonic cynicism engendered by war itself, as Ernest Schelling did in his "A Victory Ball". This may be only a period piece, but it is unique of its kind. Schelling's Fantasy is not only a compelling nightmare of a score, but it builds up to a terrifying climax in which the gay waltz tune of the whirling victors is embellished with the most mocking of martial trumpetings and drummings, as the spirits of the dead soldiers enter to join in the madcap revels. If any work deserves a place on a Memorial Day, or Veterans' Day program, this is it.

—R. K.

Orchestra of America (CARNEGIE HALL, N.Y.)

Unusual music doesn't often get a hearing nowadays, and so the second concert staged by the new Orchestra of America under Richard Korn at Carnegie Hall last week (12) had about it an exciting and different quality. The most interesting selection was the late Robert Kurka's Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra. It was performed by Vida Chenoweth.

The marimba, which roots in southern Mexico, is a type of xylophone and the tones are obtained from strips of wood fixed to a large frame. Miss Chenoweth coaxed from this instrument an astonishing variety of sounds in a concerto that ranges over a wide assortment of moods and certainly is offbeat to the core. This is "modern" music with a special and, in its way, very attractive quality.

The other "first" on the program was Charles Wuorinen's Third Symphony, mostly a-tonal in its approach and not an easy work to listen to. Orchestra played well together under Korn's energetic and sympathetic direction. Ensemble produced a fine tone and came through with precision and subtle shading. *Hift.*

Illustration 13: "Musical America," December 1, 1959.

Illustration 14: "Variety," November 18, 1959.

One other observation should be noted with regard to the status of the marimba. Critical accounts of the premiere include phrases, “add to unusual concertos...” and, “concertos for marimba are no more often encountered than pterodactyls in Times Square...” (20) These statements prolong the notion of the instrument as a novelty; however, also evident in these reviews is a sense of increasing respect as the “Concerto” is favorably compared to the other works on the program. Admittedly, this tribute is due more to Kurka and Chenoweth than to the marimba itself.

NOTES

- (1) Shirley Hixson, "An Interview with Ruth (Stuber) Jeanne," *Percussive Notes*, Fall 1975, p. 22.
- (2) *Ibid.*
- (3) Interview with Vida Chenoweth, October 1987.
- (4) "St . Louis Post-Dispatch," Sunday, February 13, 1949, p. 16A.
- (5) Paul Collaer, "Darius Milhaud," p. 450.
- (6) Ron Fink, "An Interview With Jack Connor, Marimba Virtuoso," *Percussive Notes*, Winter 1978, p. 26.
- (7) *Ibid.*
- (8) Specific mallet types include (English translation): linen thread mallets, medium rubber mallets, hard rubber mallets, yarn mallets, with hands (without mallets) and with base end of mallets.
- (9) Ron Fink, p. 26.
- (10) The following measures utilize both bass and treble clef: in the second movement, measures 58–60, 98–99 and 139–142; in the third movement, measures 21–24, 27, 89–92, 95 and 103.
- (11) "New York Herald Tribune," November 12, 1959, p, 18.
- (12) Jeffrey Levine, "Robert Kurka," *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. 10, 1984, p. 319.
- (13) "U.S. Composers in a Bright Era," *Life Magazine*, May 21, 1956, p. 146.
- (14) Leigh Howard Stevens "An Interview With Vida Chenoweth," *Percussive Notes*, Spring/Summer 1977, p. 22.
- (15) Interview with Vida Chenoweth, October 1987.
- (16) *Ibid.*
- (17) David Eyler "Robert Kurka's Concerto for Marimba Orchestra," *Percussionist*, Fall 1979, p. 25.
- (18) *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- (19) "Musical America," December 1, 1959, p. 37.
- (20) "New York Herald Tribune," November 12, 1959, p. 18.

IV. TWO INFLUENTIAL FIGURES

Clair Omar Musser

While the previously discussed composers contributed greatly to the growth of the solo marimba in its embryonic stage, recognition must also be given to the initial teachers and performers, whose insights and skills provided the basis for the establishment of a generalized technique.

Clair Omar Musser is perhaps the most important figure in the development of the marimba during this century. His diverse accomplishments involve almost every aspect of the marimba, including marimba design and manufacturing, organization of marimba concerts, teaching, performing, composing of original music for solo marimba and transcribing of music for solo marimba and marimba ensemble.

Musser was born in 1905 and was involved with the marimba at an early age. By 1930 he established himself in Chicago and was associated with the J.C. Deagan Company, first as a salesman and subsequently as their chief designer of marimbas. Later he formed his own company and continued creative work on the instruments that still bear his name.

One of Musser's first instrument designs was the massive Marimba-Celeste (see illustration 15) which was described as follows: "a wood bar percussion instrument, five octaves and two notes in range covering both xylophone and marimba registers, along with two octaves of vibra-harp placed in a third rank giving the general appearance of a gigantic three manual pipe organ console. In addition, there are microphonic pick-ups in the lower register connected to an amplifying system and two immense horns. There are pedals to control the volume and duration of the tone." (1) Musser premiered the Marimba-Celeste in Chicago's Orchestra Hall on May 9, 1930, playing a program of nineteenth century music in which he was assisted by members of the Chicago Symphony and by Annabel Robbins at the piano. The headline of the review stated, "Marimba-Celeste Offers Novelty," and the reviewer, while noting Musser's agile technique also mentioned the need for original music for the instrument (see illustration 16 for review of the concert).

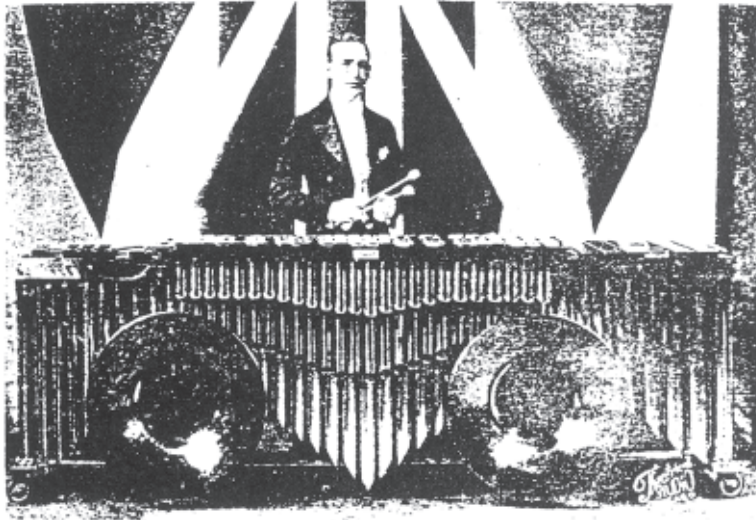


Illustration 15: Marimba-Celeste

**MARIMBA-CELESTE
OFFERS NOVELTY AT
ORCHESTRA HALL**

BY EDWARD MOORE.

Something out of the usual in concert instruments was heard in Orchestra hall last night, when a recital upon the marimba-celeste was given by Clair Robbins Musser, who accepts billing as the world's greatest percussion artist. He was assisted by an orchestra drawn from the Chicago Symphony and conducted by Edward Collins, also Annabel Robbins, pianist.

Miss Robbins was the first to appear, an artist technically efficient to the point of brilliancy, in études by MacDowell and Moszkowski and a waltz by Conductor Collins. Then came Mr. Musser, accompanied first by the orchestra, then by Miss Robbins, in a series of varied works.

The marimba-celeste is a grown-up though younger sister of the marimba, with added pedals, resonators, and various devices for varying the tone of the instrument. Apparently its greatest need at present is music written especially for it. What was played by Mr. Musser is subject to the limitations of all transcriptions. Sometimes the change from one instrument to another goes well, at others it shows plainly that the composer had the first instrument in mind when he did his composing.

He played the "Mignon" overture, several works by Chopin (written for piano), a pleasant piece by Victor Staub, and the Weber-Liszt Polonaise Brillante, also a solo intended originally for piano. He did not include the "William Tell" overture, but that is a work intended for soloists of the undeveloped marimba. Both marimba and marimba-celeste are instruments which, with their variety of hammers, as well as the improvements on this one, give a chance for variety of tone, and, when played with the agile technique displayed by Mr. Musser, are capable of many legitimate musical effects. But either needs its own music.

Illustration 16: "Chicago Daily Tribune,"
May 10, 1930.

Musser's organizational and persuasive abilities are clearly evident by his involvement in the promotion of the marimba. Following the first American attempt at a marimba ensemble organized and directed by John Deagan (fifteen players and marimbas) in 1930, (2) Musser directed an ensemble of 100 players and marimba in daily concerts for the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago (Chicago World's Fair) between August 19 and 25, 1933. (3) Two years later Musser formed the 100 member International Marimba Symphony Orchestra and led the group to Europe, where they performed at the Salle Rameaux in Paris and at the Brussels Exposition in Brussels. (4) Shortly after that, on May 16, 1935, the same ensemble played a concert in New York's Carnegie Hall to a large and enthusiastic audience. The program included Chopin's "Prelude in e minor," the first two movements of the Franck "Symphony in d minor," Richard Wagner's "Pilgrim's Chorus" from "Tannhauser," as well as other arrangements of works by Dvorak, Rubinstein, Elgar, Thomas and Rosales (see illustrations 17–19 for reviews of the concert).

**International Marimba Symphony
Heard**

Conducted by Clair Omar Musser, the International Marimba Symphony, composed of fifty men and fifty women players of the percussion instrument of ancient lineage, gave a concert at Carnegie Hall on the evening of May 16 before an enthusiastic and good-sized audience. The real symphonic intentions of the group were shown in the program which included two movements of the Franck Symphony, the Largo from the New World Symphony, the Pilgrim's Chorus from Tannhäuser and other substantial works by Chopin, Rubinstein, Elgar, Thomas and Ketelby. Rosales's Boléro was played for the first time.

Vital and sonorous tone, highly accurate intonation and ensemble, and an extensive gamut of dynamic effects made of this performance an impressive demonstration. The marimba has a definite function among legitimate musical instruments and it should be retrieved from the relatively minor and ignoble position it currently occupies. Perhaps such ensemble recognition as this will be its salvation. R.

Illustration 17: "Musical America," May 25, 1935.

A Marimba Symphony.

The International Marimba Symphony Orchestra, with a personnel of 100 players, gave its first New York concert last night in Carnegie Hall before a large and enthusiastic audience. Clair Omar Musser is the conductor of this organization, which has recently been touring Europe.

The program had considerable variety, from two movements of the César Franck Symphony and the Pilgrim's Chorus from Wagner's "Tannhaeuser" through a group of arrangements of music by Chopin, Rosales, Ketelbey, Thomas, Rubinstein, Elgar and Dvorak. It gave admirable opportunities for the display of virtuosity and of varied and brilliant tone-color by the assembled instruments.

Mr. Musser's orchestra, which seeks to restore the classic marimba to its place as an ensemble instrument, is made up of fifty men and fifty women. It uses specially designed and fabricated marimbas valued at more than \$100,000. The marimbas of the orchestra heard last night were said to weigh more than twenty tons.

The marimba is one of the three oldest instruments in use. Various specimens go back more than 4,000 years. It is believed to have been used by the Hindus, Chinese, in the Dutch East Indies, Java and later in South America in its original or subsidiary form. The instrument first was brought to this country in the nineteenth century.

The perfection of intonation of the ensemble, its rich sonority and the uniqueness of the effects gave last night's concert exceptional distinction. There was the impression of one of the most ancient of musical instruments, capable of awakening atavistic emotions, developed and subtilized to a point when it made an intimate appeal to the intelligence and emotions of the man of today.

Marimba Orchestra Plays Program at Carnegie Hall

100 Performers Offer Franck Symphony Arrangement

A musical curiosity in the shape of the International Marimba Symphony Orchestra, Clair Omar Musser conductor, made its local debut in Carnegie Hall last night. The organization, which recently returned from a European tour, was first heard at the Century of Progress in Chicago. The hundred instruments filled the large stage and a special platform was constructed for the conductor. Fifty young women and an equal number of young men, the former garbed in tailored white evening gowns, the latter in conventional swallow tails, presented an agreeable picture as they stood behind their instruments.

The conductor prefaced the performances of Chopin's prelude in E minor, a new bolero by Rosales and an arrangement of the first two movements of the Franck D minor symphony orchestra. He also assured those present that they would hear quite a different version of the Franck work than they were accustomed to hearing from their favorite symphony orchestra. He also informed them that "Franck was very fond of the harp when he wrote the D minor symphony and that he had striven to imitate in his transcription the sounds of that instrument. Leaving aside all questions of taste in procedure of this kind, the reason for presenting accepted masterworks intended for the piano or orchestra on an instrument of such limited possibilities as the marimba was not made evident by the results.

The sounds produced on this occasion were not of a kind to evoke esthetic sensations. The noisier moments resembled the wailing of a calliope and the effect otherwise was one of unalleviated monotony. An audience of good size applauded in friendly fashion. J. D. B.

Illustration 18: "New York Times," May 17, 1935.

Illustration 19: "Herald Tribune," May 17, 1935.

Musser's efforts continued, and in 1941 he directed a marimba orchestra of 150 players and instruments in connection with the Chicagoland Music Festival. The marimba orchestra, one of many large ensembles that participated in the Festival finale on August 16, 1941 programmed three works arranged by Musser: "Carmen Suite" by Georges Bizet, "Finlandia" by Jean Sibelius and "Carioca" from Vincent Youman's, "Flying Down to Rio." (5) The marimbas were grouped at the end of Chicago's Soldier Field on terraced platforms 60 feet high and over 100 feet wide, (see illustration 20) and were illuminated by "1,200 lights which glowed against the marimbas' golden pipes...the arrangement of these lights changed as the music played along." (6) Musser repeated this accomplishment in 1948, but with an ensemble numbering 200 marimbists performing his arrangements of "Pomp and Circumstance" by Edward Elgar, "Pilgrim's Chorus" from Richard Wagner's "Tannhauser" and "Tico-Tico." (7)

Without diminishing the importance of Musser's organizational efforts in assembling large numbers of marimbists to perform together, it must be noted that the concept of massive ensembles, especially in conjunction with the annual Chicagoland Music Festivals which began in 1930, appears to be a consistent trend. For example, the 1941 program indicates several choirs ranging from 500 to 3,000 voices, a massed accordion band of 1,500 players and a plectrophonic orchestra (fretted instruments) of 3,000 performers. (8)

As a teacher, Musser had an important influence on the many students who worked with him. According to Northwestern University (Evanston, Illinois) archival records, Musser served as a part-time instructor of music theory between 1944 and 1946 and a part-time instructor of marimba from 1946 to 1950. Because of the relative obscurity of the marimba and the lack of qualified marimba teachers at that time, along with Musser's growing reputation, he was identified as the singular figure with whom to study. In the words of Vida Chenoweth, his most successful student, "if you were serious about the marimba there was no alternative for you any place in the world. You went to Northwestern University to study with Musser." (9)

During his tenure at Northwestern, Musser composed five etudes and two preludes for solo marimba which were later published. These pieces reflect his interest in the nineteenth century classical music

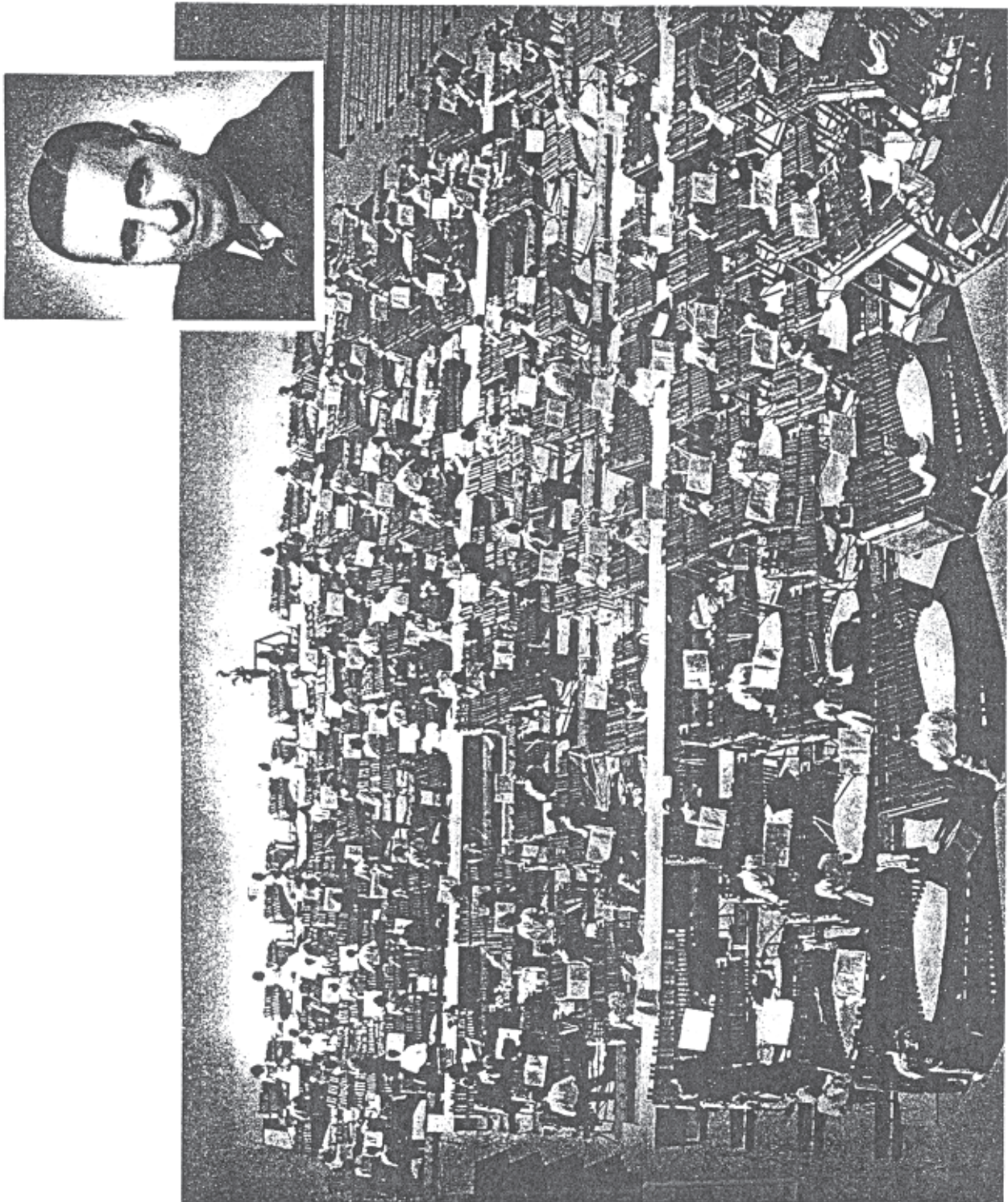


Illustration 20: 1941 Chicagoland Music Festival Marimba Orchestra of 150 marimbas and performers.

tradition and provide insight into his approach to the instrument. They are reminiscent of the piano etudes of Chopin in that they address specific (though unstated) technical problems within a well organized, relatively brief form. Three of the seven works are scored for two mallets and employ arpeggiated chordal patterns throughout the range of the instrument. The remaining four pieces are written for four mallets and utilize primarily close voicings in stepwise motion with occasional arpeggiated leaps. In each of these works, the composer compels the player to maneuver rapid shifts, both in the positioning of the body at the instrument and in the muscles of the hand as chords are quickly changed. The mastery of these techniques has since become the standard goal for all students of the marimba, but it was Musser who promoted these concepts by the technical demands of his marimba compositions.

It is important to emphasize that, despite Musser's important contributions to the solo and ensemble literature, the focus of his musical preference was the music of the nineteenth century and the transcription of that literature. While audiences responded quite favorably to Musser's approach, both critics and students noted the need for original music for the instrument, particularly at that time when the marimba was struggling to emerge as a legitimate vehicle of musical expression in its own right.

Musser provided another important contribution to the marimba with his four mallet grip, commonly referred to as the "Musser grip." Irrespective of small variances among players, the essence of this grip involved the holding of the outside mallets by both the fourth and fifth finger. This contrasted with the cross-hammer grip in which the outside mallets were held between the index and third finger. The cross-hammer grip was more readily learned, and as a result was used by many performers, particularly jazz vibraphone players. The Musser grip had the advantage of greater control of both wide interval spreads and rapid adjustments between adjacent positions.

The genesis of this grip is unclear. According to Vida Chenoweth, Musser did not mention the source of his grip, although he talked about other players like Red Norvo who used the cross-hammer grip. She assumed that he arrived at the grip because he wanted a large interval spread. (10) Regardless of its beginnings, this significant development allowed performers to explore new possibilities in polyphonic and independent approaches to four mallet playing previously inconceivable.

Vida Chenoweth

Another important figure in the development of the marimba was Vida Chenoweth, who brought artistry and recognition to the instrument on the concert stage. Chenoweth, a native of Enid, Oklahoma chose the marimba from her father's music store after an infected finger kept her from practicing the piano. (11) Chenoweth's initial marimba instruction was with a local symphony musician who played organ and timpani. She studied with him for one year, and after he left town, she worked on her own, applying what she had learned on the piano to the marimba. Several years later while still in high school, she studied with Clair Omar Musser in an intense three-week summer term in Evanston, Illinois; however, it was not until she transferred to Northwestern University in her junior year of college that she studied with Musser full time.

As a result of her talent, diligence and perseverance, Chenoweth gained success relatively early. In 1948, she was the first place winner of the Class A Marimba Solo Contest held in Chicago in conjunction with the Chicagoland Music Festival. (12) After receiving her double bachelor's degree in marimba performance and music criticism from Northwestern University, and her master's degree in percussion and theory from the American Conservatory in Chicago, she gave performances in the Chicago area and toured for three years sponsored by the University of Wisconsin.

Chenoweth moved to New York in the mid-fifties and gave her New York debut recital in Town Hall on November 18, 1956. Her program included: "Chorale Prelude on Hassler's Melody" by Eugene Ulrich, "Mirage" by Bernard Rogers, "Petizada" by Heitor Villa-Lobos, "Canonic Sonata III" by George Telemann, "Prelude" and "Three Etudes" by Clair Omar Musser, "Two Toccatas" by Hal Mommsen, "Prelude, Chorale and Finale" by Eugene Ulrich and "Concertino" by Paul Creston. She was assisted by John Wummer on flute (Telemann) and accompanied by William Cerny on piano. The reviews of her playing include superlatives such as, "stunning virtuosity," "master of her instrument," and, "unfailing skill and accuracy," but the critics also acknowledged the limitations of the instrument and its literature (see illustrations 21–23 for reviews of the concert).

Plays Marimba At Town Hall

Something off the beaten musical track was in order late yesterday afternoon when Vida Chenoweth had her big marimba moved onto the stage of Town Hall and proceeded to play a recital on it. One would guess that the literature available for such an undertaking might be limited, and Miss Chenoweth's program indicated that this is indeed the case.

In any event, she played a transcription of Villa-Lobos' piano suite "Petizada" and Telemann's Canonic Sonata No. 3 in addition to works written for the marimba by Paul Creston, Bernard Rogers, Eugene Ulrich, Harold Moomsen, and C. O. Musser. The Creston piece is a Concertino, and in this the young lady was assisted by William Cherny, pianist. In the Telemann Sonata, she shared the responsibility with John Wummer, flutist.

Nothing that happened during the afternoon suggested that Miss Chenoweth is anything other than a master of her instrument. With as many as three mallets in one hand and two in the other, all at the same time, she struck or caressed the wooden bars with unerring accuracy. And she achieved a wide gradation in volume.

But no matter what she did with it, her marimba always sounded like a marimba, and for this reviewer that sound quickly becomes cloying. Listening to it for an hour and a half is for him the aural equivalent of eating marshmallows for the same length of time. Others may react differently. A. H.

Illustration 21: "Herald Tribune," November 19, 1956.

Veda Chenoweth . . . Marimbist

Town Hall, Nov. 18, 5:30 (Debut). —Veda Chenoweth, attempting to do for the marimba what Segovia did for the guitar—make it a respectable concert hall instrument—almost succeeds. I say almost, not because Miss Chenoweth is not capable of doing it—she is one of the finest young musicians to be heard here in many a moon—but simply because of the limitations of her chosen instrument. She has devised an ingenious technique of playing the marimba which permits her to use five mallets simultaneously and which enabled her to get some fine organ-like effects and to highlight inner voices at will. Her program, consisting mostly of works she has commissioned, was an interesting one: Chorale Prelude on Hassler's Melody, and a Prelude, Chorale and Finale by Eugene Ulrich; Bernard Rogers' "Mirage"; Telemann's Canonic Sonata III, in which John Wummer was the flutist; sundry pieces by C. O. Musser and Harold Mommsen; Villa-Lobos' "Petizada" (originally for piano); and Paul Creston's Concertino for Marimba. William Cerny was at the piano for the latter.

Miss Chenoweth handled the instrument with stunning virtuosity. Her fine rhythmic sense and her keen ear for subtleties of tone and nuance added no little to the enjoyment of her playing. For Miss Chenoweth, as well as the marimba, this was an auspicious New York debut. —R. K.

Illustration 22: "Musical America," December 1, 1956.

RECITAL GIVEN HERE BY VIDA CHENOWETH

Vida Chenoweth, who gave a marimba recital late yesterday afternoon in Town Hall, is a serious performer. She has learned to move her mallets over the keys with unflinching skill and accuracy. She has an ear for tonal nuance and a feeling for differing styles. And, like other performers on unusual instruments, she has worked to find original compositions.

Her program included Paul Creston's Concertino for Marimba and four works dedicated to her. They are Chorale Prelude and Prelude, Chorale and Finale by Eugene Ulrich, Two Toccatas by Harold Mommsen, and "Mitige" by Bernard Rogers. William Cerny, pianist, assisted her in the Creston work and John Wummer was her flute partner in Telemann's Canonic Sonata III. Miss Chenoweth plays an instrument of four and a half oc-

taves, and such is her control that she can make it sound, if she wills, like an electric organ, a harp, a music box, a tremulous theremin or even a far-off tug whistle. The variety of effect was intriguing at first, but soon one began to wish for an instrument of more stable character. As it was, her concert marimba was most exhilarating when it most resembled its Guatemalan ancestor, with the unpadded mallets whacking out decisive rhythms of Latin-American type. R. P.

Illustration 23: "New York Times," November 19, 1956.

Following her debut, she played two other recitals in Town Hall, a performance at the Gracie Governor's Mansion and a concert in the Carnegie Recital Hall, to name a few. (13) Her orchestral debut was in Carnegie Hall with the Orchestra of America on November 11, 1959, and in 1962 she traveled to Europe to concertize.

The impact of these performances extended far beyond the outstanding reviews, for this was the first time the marimba appeared on the concert stage as a "legitimate" instrument of musical expression. A critic who reviewed Miss Chenoweth's New York debut and later her first recording in 1962 had this to say: "much of the trouble even today is due to the marimba's unfortunate beginnings (referring to the xylophone) in this country as an ill-tuned prop for vaudeville entertainers." (14) Another critic present at Chenoweth's premiere of Robert Kurka's "Concerto" observed that, "she raised the marimba to concert hall status." (15)

In addition to Chenoweth's success as a performer, her efforts to encourage composers to write new works for the marimba was a continual endeavor. Along with Kurka's previously mentioned contribution, other published works composed as a result of Chenoweth's urging were "Suite No. 1" (Prelude, Chorale and Finale) by Eugene Ulrich and "Mirage" by Bernard Rogers, both written for unaccompanied marimba.

Ulrich's piece was written with input from Chenoweth while he was teaching theory and composition at Phillips University in Enid, Oklahoma. His suite is in three movements; the outside movements are scored for two mallets and the middle movement utilizes four mallets in a chorale style. Ulrich employs a technique rarely found in other works for marimba: the designation to play "on the nodes of the keys" and "gradually off the nodes." The resultant effect is a subtle change of timbral color, as well a gradual alteration of volume. It also indicates a thorough understanding of the instrument's potential and a willingness to explore some of the subtleties available from the marimba.

Bernard Rogers, Ulrich's composition professor at Eastman met Vida Chenoweth and after he heard her play, agreed to write a piece for her, knowing she intended a New York recital. The resultant work was

“Mirage.” Chenoweth explained, “that was his first full exposure to marimba technique and he latched on to a part of the resonance of the marimba that no one else had.” (16) In the score, a visual indication for “l.v.” (let vibrate) is used frequently along with the instruction to “tremolando ad lib throughout” (see illustration 24). According to Chenoweth, the marimbist need not roll the longer durations to achieve a sustained effect, but can experiment with the resonance accomplished by a careful striking of the bars.



Illustration 24: Rogers, ms. 1–4

Several other composers, including Harry Hewitt, Hal Mommsen and Jorge Sarmientos wrote works for Vida Chenoweth, but these have not been published, although Chenoweth did perform the pieces.

(17)

NOTES

- (1) "The Metronome," August, 1930, p. 34.
- (2) Gordon Peters, *The Drummer: Man*, p. 160.
- (3) "Chicago Daily Tribune," Sunday, August 30, 1933, part 7, p. 5.
- (4) Personal correspondence from Mildred Sullivan Lacour, August 26, 1988.
- (5) "Chicago Daily Tribune," Saturday, August 16, 1941, p. 3.
- (6) "Chicago Daily Tribune," Sunday, August 17, 1941, p. 7.
- (7) "Chicago Daily Tribune," Sunday, August 15, 1948, p. 3.
- (8) "Chicago Daily Tribune," Sunday, August 16, 1941, p. 3.
- (9) Interview with Vida Chenoweth, October 1987.
- (10) *Ibid.*
- (11) Rafael Kammerer, "La Vida Brave," *The American Record Guide*, September 1962, p. 5.
- (12) "Chicago Daily Tribune," Sunday, August 15, 1948, 3.
- (13) Holly Hufford, p. 70.
- (14) Rafael Kammerer, p. 4.
- (15) "Musical America," December 1, 1959, p. 37.
- (16) Interview with Vida Chenoweth, October 1987.
- (17) *Ibid.*

V. THE MARIMBA IN JAPAN

A Brief History

In order to gain a complete understanding of the developments of the marimba in the United States, it is necessary to examine the parallel circumstances in Japan, as it is the only other country in the world to sustain a significant musical culture that has fostered an independent and classical approach to the marimba.

Prior to the introduction of the marimba in Japan, the xylophone was first heard as a solo instrument in the 1920's after it was brought into the country by military musicians. The instrument received greater recognition through the efforts of Yoichi Hiraoka, a concert xylophonist, who following his Japanese debut, performed in the United States with numerous orchestras. The Tokyo Xylophone Association (later renamed the Japan Xylophone Association) was founded in 1950 by Eiichi Asabuki, and the instrument continued to increase in popularity. In addition to the professional activities associated with the xylophone, a new educational law allowed for the inclusion of keyboard percussion instruments in the public school curriculum, which increased the number of children involved with the xylophone. (1)

The history of the marimba in Japan began in 1950 when an American missionary, Dr. Lawrence Lacour brought several Musser marimbas to Japan. (2) As a college student, Lacour had toured with Clair Omar Musser's 1935 International Marimba Symphony Orchestra in Europe. During World War II, he was a Navy Chaplain and was stationed in Japan for the first six months of the occupation. In 1950, Lacour, along with his wife and two other musicians returned and embarked on a five month religious crusade, using the marimbas as an aid in their evangelistic efforts. The instruments they used were from Musser's International Marimba Symphony Orchestra (see illustration 25) and were transported in a trailer designed to carry the four marimbas (disassembled), as well as a harp that Mrs. Lacour played. Another tour began in 1954 and included a contrabass marimba (see illustration 26) built by Musser which the Lacours had purchased from him. (3) Numerous photographs indicate that the marimba received wide

exposure as a result of these efforts, as hundreds of thousands of people came to listen to the music and the preaching of the Lacour team. (4)

As a concert instrument, the marimba was accepted into the musical environment of Japan, but had some difficulty achieving public acclaim. In 1961, the Tokyo Marimba Group (5) began performing new pieces for marimba, including the “Concertino” by Paul Creston and several works by Japanese composers; however, due to lack of sponsorship, the group disbanded after only two concerts. Shortly after that, the recording made by Vida Chenoweth in the United States was imported to Japan, along with tapes and records of other mallet artists. (6) In the mid-1960’s, Jack Connor performed the “Concerto for Marimba and Vibraphone” by Darius Milhaud with the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra, further increasing the exposure of the marimba.



Illustration 25: Dr. Lawrence Lacour with (left to right) Leontine Ostlund, Mildred Lacour and Lois Seashore with marimbas from Clair Omar Musser’s International Marimba Symphony Orchestra (Deagan King George model Marimbas).

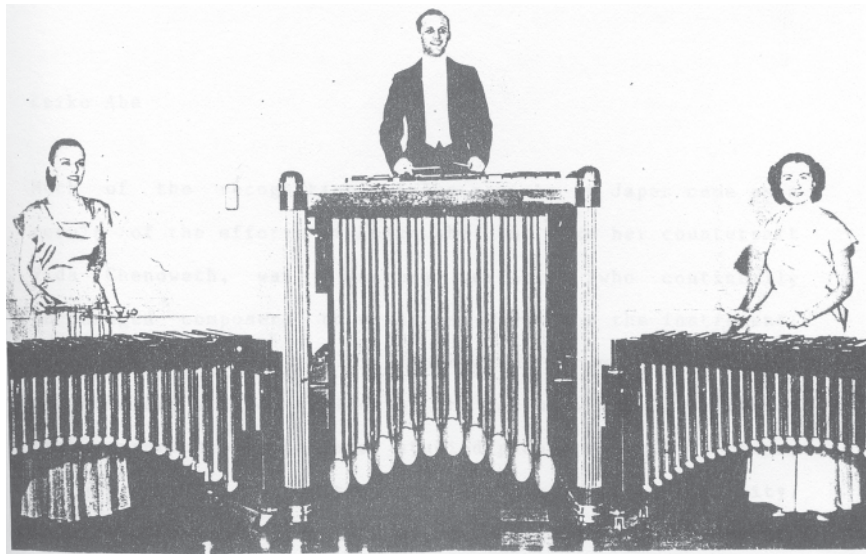


Illustration 26: Dr. Lawrence Lacour with Musser contrabass marimba (Canterbury design), surrounded by Musser Imperial Marimbas.

Keiko Abe

Much of the recognition of the marimba in Japan came as a result of the efforts of Keiko Abe, who like her counterpart Vida Chenoweth, was a superb performer who continually encouraged composers to write new works for the instrument. As a teenager, Ms. Abe first heard the marimba in 1950 when she attended a concert given by the Lacours. (7) Inspired by that experience, she later studied piano, voice, xylophone, percussion and composition at the Tokyo Gabugii University. She has been the recipient of numerous prizes from the Japanese Ministry of Cultural Affairs for her recitals and recordings, and she has toured worldwide, presenting solo recitals and appearing with numerous orchestras.

Ms. Abe's list of accomplishments and prizes indicates only a portion of her consummate excellence. Her performances are electrifying and have been highly acclaimed. In 1986, Ryoichi Yokomizo observed, "The fact that the marimba, an instrument previously regarded as no more than a large xylophone capable of weaving melodies through the use of tremolos, has now been transformed into one of the most stimulating instruments for listeners and performers alike is due primarily to Keiko Abe's penetrating insight and fertile imagination, and also to her virtuosic technique which has made it possible

for this insight and imagination to be translated into actual sound... Keiko Abe is indisputably the leading performer of the marimba in the world today. It is not merely her technique but also the richness and breadth of her musicianship which have enabled her to attain this position.” (8)

One of the most significant contributions made by Ms. Abe is the large amount of music written for the marimba as a result of her efforts: between 1964 and 1986, 32 composers wrote 54 compositions for her. (9) Her dedication to the marimba is further illustrated by a series of three concerts she gave in 1968, 1969 and 1971 entitled, “In Search of Original Works.” (10) The stated purpose of these programs was, “to introduce the latest creative works of ardent composers for the marimba.” (11) Reflecting on the first concert, Ms. Abe observed, “The concert had a strong impact on the field of music, changing ideas about, and appreciation for, the marimba ... (it) was finally recognized as an instrument for classical music.” (12) Akira Ueno summarized her influence as follows: “Keiko Abe has ... commissioned many leading composers to write music for her instrument. On the other hand, many composers have been awakened to the possibilities of the instrument after exposure to her marimba art. She has become the detonator of explosive creative efforts amongst many composers who have accepted the challenge to write marimba music for her, resulting in many worthy works for that instrument.” (13)

Akira Miyoshi

One of the most important composers associated with Keiko Abe was Akira Miyoshi. Miyoshi, born in 1933, studied piano and composition and in 1953, won the Japan Music Competition for his “Sonata for Clarinet, Bassoon and Piano.” He continued his studies at the Paris Conservatory between 1955 and 1957. (14) Miyoshi first heard the marimba at a performance by Takuo Tamura, a colleague of Keiko Abe, and in 1962, inspired by that performance, he composed a suite for Tamura called, “Conversation.” The composer wrote about the suite, “At that time I felt the sound of the marimba was in essence one of entertainment so I tried to capture the mood of daily conversation in my composition for the instrument.” (15) However, after hearing Keiko Abe play, he stated, “she went far beyond my preconceived notion of the marimba.” (16) As a result, he composed several works for the marimba which reflect a new approach to the instrument: “Torse III” for solo marimba was written in 1968 and the

“Concerto for Marimba and Strings” was composed in 1969. Additionally, in 1973 he composed “Torse V” for three marimbas and in 1977, “Concert Etude” for two marimbas.

The technical and musical requirements of Miyoshi’s “Torse III” which included independent one-handed rolls and extremely disjunct melodic motion and register placement were unlike any marimba composition written prior to 1968. The dramatic effect of the music was further evident by the use of quickly varying dynamics, accents, glissandi, unusual meters with numerous changes, as well as the notation itself, which was a combination of single and double staves with changing clefs (see illustrations 27 and 28). It was clear that Miyoshi had pushed the marimba into a new musical realm and set a precedence for new explorations of the instrument.

♩ = 58 environ

ff *mp* *ff* *mp* *f*

f *mp* *pp* *p*

pp *mp* *ff*

mp *ff* *mf* *f* *p*

Illustration 27: Miyoshi, 1st movement, ms. 1–13.

♩ = 104 environ

mp *sf* *sf* *sf*

mf *sf* *mp*

mp *sf* *mp* *sf* *mp* *mf*

sf *mp* *sf* *mf*

Illustration 28: Miyoshi, 3rd movement, ms. 1–12.

The Japanese Influence in the United States

Keiko Abe's first recording of marimba works was available in the United States around 1969, and it provided the initial exposure to the Japanese marimba developments. The compositions included on that recording were: "Conversation," "Torse III" and "Concerto for Marimba and String Ensemble" by Akira Miyoshi; "Quintet for Marimba, Contrabass and Three Flutes" by Teruyuki Noda; "Marimba Piece With Two Percussionists" by Maki Ishii and excerpts from Minoru Miki's "Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra."

The impact of the recording was considerable, in that it sparked a dual interest in the composers' unique and fresh approaches to the marimba and Abe's aggressive, yet sensitive control of technique. As a result, several influential American performers and educators obtained scores for the Japanese marimba music and began developing the necessary technique to incorporate the repertoire into their performances and curriculum. By the close of the 1970's, the Japanese marimba repertoire and its requisite technique had become a component of the major percussion education curricula throughout the United States, and the composers presented on that recording were the recognized representatives of the Japanese marimba style.

NOTES

- (1) Keiko Abe, "The History and Future of the Marimba in Japan," *Percussive Notes*, January 1984, p. 41.
- (2) *Ibid.*
- (3) Personal correspondence with Mildred Sullivan Lacour, August, 1988.
- (4) Tomio Muto, "The Pictorial Story of the Lacour Crusade in Japan."
- (5) The members of the Tokyo Marimba Group included Takuo Tamura, Yoshihisa Mizuno, Shizuko Ishikawa, Noriko Hasegawa, Tokuzo Yanagihara, Masao Yoshikawa and Keiko Abe.
- (6) Tapes and recordings of other mallet artists included those of Milt Jackson, Red Norvo, Lionel Hampton and Harry Breuer.
- (7) Personal correspondence with Mildred Sullivan Lacour, August, 1988.
- (8) Ryoichi Yokomizo in the liner notes of "Marimba Fantasy: The Art of Keiko Abe," Denon OF-7197.
- (9) The complete list of marimba pieces composed for Keiko Abe appears in the liner notes of "Marimba Fantasy: The Art of Keiko Abe," Denon OF-7197.
- (10) The program of the first concert of commissioned works in 1968 included the following: "Dialogue for Marimba and Three Instruments" by Takekuni Hirayoshi, "Divertimento for Marimba and Alto Saxophone" by Akira Yuyama, "Two Movements for Marimba" by Toshimitsu Tanaka, "Time for Marimba" by Minoru Miki, "Torse III" by Akira Miyoshi and "Quintet for Marimba, Contrabass and Three Flutes" by Teruyuki Noda.
- (11) Akira Ueno in the liner notes of "Keiko Abe Reveals the Essence of the Marimba," Denon GL-7001/7002.
- (12) Keiko Abe, p. 42.
- (13) Akira Ueno in the liner notes.
- (14) Masakata Kanazawa, "Akira Miyoshi," *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. 12, p. 372.

(15) Akira Miyoshi in the liner notes of "Contemporary Music from Japan: Works for Marimba,"
Candide CE 31051.

(16) Ibid.

VI. ADVANCED MARIMBA TECHNIQUES

Four Mallet Independence

Any discussion of marimba technique must include the concept of four mallet independence. Briefly described, this technique involves the acquisition of a technical control in order to manipulate independently each of the four mallets. This manipulation can be applied either to individual strokes in a polyphonic texture or to the continuance of a sound in one hand, commonly referred to as an independent, one-handed or single-hand roll.

The earliest manifestation of this technique occurred in Alfred Fissinger's four movement "Suite for Marimba," in 1950. Of the three movements scored for four mallets, the first and third movements require the performer to negotiate the individual voices with an understanding of their independent, polyphonic function, as if executing a fugal passage (see illustration 29). The genesis of Fissinger's approach is explained by Vida Chenoweth as follows, "no one knew how to write for four mallets so he (Fissinger) borrowed on string quartet techniques—he composed for four voices like a string quartet," (1)

The image displays a handwritten musical score for marimba, consisting of three systems of staves. The first system is labeled "MODERATELY SLOW - SIMPLY" and contains measures 1 through 5. The second system contains measures 6 through 10, with a "cresc." marking above measure 7. The third system contains measures 11 through 14, with a "mf" marking above measure 11 and a "decreas." marking above measure 12. The score is written for four mallets, with each mallet's part represented by a separate staff. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and dynamic markings, illustrating the independent polyphonic function of each mallet.

Illustration 29: Fissinger, 3rd movement, ms. 1–14.

In spite of this early evidence of the independent approach, the lack of knowledge about the marimba and the isolation of composers who did write pieces for the instrument resulted in virtually no other compositions requiring this technique until the emergence of the Japanese repertoire in the early 1970's. As the demands of the Japanese works challenged those willing to undertake this new approach, increased numbers of marimbists acquired the necessary technical control to execute convincing performances of this music.

In the mid-1970's, Leigh Howard Stevens emerged as a concert marimbist whose technical approach reflected a thorough grasp of four mallet independence. Stevens studied at the Eastman School of Music and later with Vida Chenoweth. Between 1975 and 1983 he was a frequent clinician at Percussive Arts Society International Conventions, espousing technical concepts of independence in both single strokes and sustained rolls. In 1979 he published his "Method of Movement for Marimba," in which he articulated a detailed explanation of stroke types and their motion. While he did not address the subject of independent rolls and other sustaining techniques, his method and accompanying exercises provided a basis for those advanced independent techniques.

Although Stevens was the first marimbist to systematize and document the four mallet independent technique, it is important to recognize that he was not the first performer to utilize the advanced technique of independent rolls in his playing. Vida Chenoweth used the single-hand roll before Stevens, but she first saw it used by Guatemalan marimbist Celso Hurtado in his solo playing. (2) In Japan, Keiko Abe was the exponent of four mallet independent technique as early as 1968.

Six Mallet Technique

In addition to four mallet independent technique, the control of six mallets also warrants discussion. Six mallets are required in a small number of compositions which primarily involve the marimba in combination with another instrument. The first example of this scoring was used in Akira Yuyama's "Divertimento for Marimba and Alto Saxophone," composed in 1968. In this predominantly four mallet work, the composer requires the marimbist to maneuver six mallets in 32 of the 244 measures. Yuyama

apparently understood the difficulty in negotiating interval changes between the three mallets of each hand, as he maintained a fairly consistent hand position and chordal structure even as consecutive chords move (see illustration 30).



Illustration 30: Yuyama, ms. 109–117.

Another example of six mallet usage is found in “Two October Songs” for trumpet and marimba composed by Gunther Tautenhahn in 1976. Like Yuyama’s approach, Tautenhahn utilizes six mallets in a relatively brief section of the composition, allowing the performer adequate time to pick up the extra mallets and adjust their position. Tautenhahn maintains a consistent cluster structure within each hand, while incorporating contrary motion between the hands. (see illustration 31).



Illustration 31: Tautenhahn, 2nd movement, ms. 28–34.

Extended Marimba Techniques

In recent years, composers have explored numerous extended techniques which, while adding to the timbral possibilities of the marimba, have also contributed to the slow destruction of the instrument's most delicate feature: its wooden keyboard. A variety of procedures has resulted in either the physical deterioration of the wood's finish or the sacrifice of precise intonation. Examples of these techniques are primarily found in the percussion and mallet ensemble literature, perhaps indicating their ineffectiveness as a solo device.

As previously discussed, composer Darius Milhaud was the first composer to use the reverse end or shaft of the mallet to strike the keyboard. He also indicated that the marimbist play the instrument with the fingers (without mallets). In "Woodwork," a primarily keyboard percussion ensemble piece utilizing

three marimbas and xylophone, composer Jan Bach requires each player to draw a notched stick across the end of individual bars. Ruth Lomon, in her 1984 composition "Desiderata" for oboe and marimba, instructs the marimbist to continually sustain a single pitch by the use of a bow (or two) while the oboist engages in a rather lengthy cadenza-like passage. Wooden cluster mallets and even triangle beaters are indicated in works by Karlheinz Stockhausen and Krzysztof Penderecki. Additionally, several composers, including Kazmierczak Serocki and Howard Whitaker require the marimbist to play on the resonators of the instrument.

One example of a solo work utilizing a particularly damaging technique is found in "For Marimba By One Player" by Masoyoshi Sugiura. In this piece, the marimbist is required to use snare drum sticks in the execution of both single strokes and rolls on the keyboard. In this case, a synthetic or an old, already battered instrument would be the only solution to a protected keyboard and a guiltless performance.

Most of the extended marimba techniques previously mentioned have developed as a result of composers searching for fresh and unique timbral possibilities from the instrument. It should be noted that the creation of these new sounds often resemble effects available from other wooden percussion instruments, but without the pitch differentiation. It is in this regard that the marimba has evolved from its original solo, melodic function to an instrument also capable of decorative coloration.

NOTES

(1) Interview with Vida Chenoweth, October 1987.

(2) Ibid.

VII. CONCLUSION

The emergence and evolution of a generalized marimba technique in the United States can be observed primarily through the creative contributions of seven individuals: Paul Creston, Darius Milhaud, Robert Kurka, Clair Omar Musser, Vida Chenoweth, Keiko Abe and Akira Miyoshi. As a result of the efforts of these men and women, a technique and literature for the marimba was developed which elevated the instrument to a vital and imaginative means of musical expression.

Composers Creston, Milhaud and Kurka created only one work each for the marimba. However, because these composers were willing to write a major concerto for a relatively unknown instrument which then received a well-publicized premiere, the marimba achieved its early exposure as a serious concert instrument. Japanese composer Miyoshi, encouraged by his nation's leading performer contributed numerous compositions which further stimulated other colleagues to explore the potential of the marimba, resulting in a large body of repertoire for the instrument.

Central to the development of the marimba was Clair Omar Musser, whose diverse activities promoted advancements in the physical design of the instrument, ensemble performance and instruction opportunities for marimbists around the country, as well as the transcription of a popular repertoire which allowed listeners some familiarity in the context of a new instrument. Musser's accomplishments examined individually provide little understanding of his significance, but the totality of his contributions indicate the extent of his influence.

The two performers responsible for the recognition given the marimba in its early years were Vida Chenoweth and Keiko Abe. Ms. Chenoweth was the first artist to actively pursue and establish a concert career devoted to the marimba. The magnitude of this accomplishment is further intensified when one realizes that she achieved this status in spite of paucity of original repertoire for the marimba. Moreover, at a time when the instrument was virtually unknown, Chenoweth's dedication to the promotion of new literature, along with her pioneering spirit provided future generations of performers an example of bold inspiration.

Ms. Abe's successes, while occurring almost twenty-five years after Chenoweth's, are no less impressive. The large quantity of marimba literature composed as a result of her efforts has been perhaps the most important influence on the technical and musical advancements associated with the marimba in the United States during the last twenty years. Furthermore, her continuing artistry as a performer has expanded and revolutionized the possibilities of the marimba: her energetic yet sensitive approach to the instrument has created a unique means of musical expression.

While acknowledging the contributions of these individuals, it is important to recognize that two obstacles hindered the emergence and delayed the acceptance of the marimba in the United States. The first stemmed from its predecessor, the xylophone and its use in the popular vaudeville and ragtime styles. The notion of the xylophone as a novelty instrument haunted the development of the marimba as numerous newspaper accounts repeatedly illustrate. The second difficulty was the relative obscurity of the marimba within an overall musical framework which also contributed to the concept of novelty and delayed the recognition of the instrument as a serious component of culture.

Finally, the gradual emergence and recognition of the marimba in the United States transpired as a result of the individual efforts of dedicated performers, composers and teachers, whose creative ideas and willing explorations stimulated musical growth beyond previous expectations and imaginations. As this study has shown, many of the compositions and performances occurred in relative isolation due to the lack of knowledge about the instrument. However, this factor also permitted those same individuals to develop a unique approach to the marimba which has resulted in a rich and diverse musical expression.

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IX. VITA

Kathleen Kastner was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on September 6, 1949. She attended the Conservatory of Music at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, where she was awarded a Bachelor of Music degree with a major in percussion in 1971. In 1976, she received a Master of Music degree in Percussion Performance from the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago. Ms. Kastner completed the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Percussion Performance and Literature in 1988 at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Her principal percussion teachers have been Thomas Siwe, James Dutton and Robert Tilles.

Ms. Kastner has taught full time in the Conservatory of Music at Wheaton College since 1976, where her responsibilities have included the teaching of private percussion, percussion ensemble, percussion methods, twentieth century music history, introductory music theory and music appreciation, along with the administration of the orchestral instruments department. Prior to her appointment at Wheaton College, she taught private percussion at DePaul University in Chicago for several years.

In 1988, Ms. Kastner was the recipient of the Junior Teacher-of-the Year Award from Wheaton College. She received the Edgard Varese Percussion Prize from the University of Illinois in 1985 and in 1984, she was selected to perform Robert Kurka's "Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra" with the University of Illinois Symphony Orchestra. Between 1979 and 1981, she served as Illinois State Chapter President of the Percussive Arts Society.

Her performance activities have included annual appearances on the Faculty Recital Series at Wheaton College, as well as chamber performances in the Chicago area. In 1979, she was timpanist for the Classical Music Seminar Orchestra in Eisenstadt, Austria. She has also served as timpanist of the Wheaton Summer Symphony for several seasons. In 1971 and 1972 she toured with the "Rosewood Rebellion" and the "Chicago Percussion Quartet."