

Elevating the Performance of Modern Masterpieces for Marimba

By Ji Hye Jung

In our time together at PASIC50 we will be discussing how to elevate your performance of modern masterpieces for marimba. The suggested repertoire includes some of my favorite pieces: “Time for Marimba” by Minoru Miki, “Dances of Earth and Fire” by Peter Klatzow, “Velocities” by Joseph Schwanter, “Two Movements” by Toshimitsu Tanaka, and “Khan Variations” by Alejandro Viñao.

My goal with this masterclass is to help performers go beyond the notes on the page to fully express themselves through their playing. More than anything, I would love to see more players connect better with the music. For me, performing music can be vulnerable, personal, and scary, but whenever I focus on how excited I am to share my love, reflection, and respect towards the piece and composer, it always seems to go better.

When I was younger, I used to think that the musical ideas all came from mastering the notes, but I have grown to believe that we need to develop our minds and ears to shape our ideas about the music. It is crucial to have a clear perspective from the earliest stages of learning a piece to achieve a personal connection with the music.

There are three steps I try to consider: knowing the score, understanding the composer’s intentions, and creating your own informed interpretation. First, try to digest everything on the page, even the smallest dots. Dynamics, expression markings, articulations, and phrase-markings all need to be observed. This is how the composers communicate with us. Sometimes, I pretend that I am a detective decoding the most important messages from the composer to solve a puzzle. Practicing and learning can be tiring and boring, so try to have fun finding the clues that the composer has left for you.

Memorization can be helpful for performance, but only if every detail of the score is present. I often feel that students are

too eager to memorize the music without having first absorbed all the information on the page. This can lead young players to



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misunderstand the music or even misrepresent a piece. As this initial learning is happening, you can begin to convert the information on the page into sounds, colors, and expressions. Your personal interpretation of the piece begins here.

The next element I like to consider is the composer's intentions. What do composers mean when they write an accent in the music? Are all accents considered equal? Why does the piece begin with a rest? How can I perform the rest, and how do the notes around it relate to the empty space? Asking questions can lead you to clues that lead you to your interpretation.

Understanding a composer is critical too. Every piece of context you can collect is helpful. For me, this makes it easier to connect with the music. Try to research everything about a composer by learning about their lives and what informs their perspective. I find that music is most impactful when I can find a personal connection.

Program notes and websites are a great place to start and, with living composers, it is often possible to connect through email and social media. Listen to recordings of not only the piece you are learning, but other works from the same composer. I also recommend that your listening expand beyond the world of percussion, especially if a composer has written for other instruments.

If you are having difficult time connecting with the music, start by asking what you like about the piece or think about your favorite moments in the work. If you don't have one, consider what you admire or respect about the music or the composer. After living with a piece for a while, you will naturally grow to respect and appreciate it.

The final step is the most fun and one of my favorite parts of being a performer: telling stories through the music. We are using the notes, ideas, and intentions from the composer, but making something special and individual.

We may enjoy hearing a familiar piece of music, but we also like to see the live version of a particular musician. It's because we want to hear what the performer has to say: their specific interpretation, and personal touch. That makes the live performance so special and exciting for me. It's not the perfect accuracy; what makes live performance special is how performers move the audience with their story.

These are just my suggestions based on my performing and teaching experience. There are many ways to go about connecting with the pieces you are learning. I hope that you will find your own ways to guide yourself to more personal, unique, and exciting performances!

Ji Hye Jung has been acclaimed as "spectacular" by the *Los Angeles Times* and "extraordinary" by the *Ventura County Star*. She began performing in South Korea at age 9 and has since given over 100 concerts, including with major Korean orchestras. After moving to the U.S. in 2003, she won first prizes at the 2006 Linz International Marimba Competition and the 2007 Yale Gordon Concerto Competition. Committed to advancing percussion repertoire, Ms. Jung collaborates with composers and has commissioned works from various artists. For over a decade, she has been the principal percussionist for Camerata Pacifica, debuting pieces by notable composers. Recent solo performances include festivals in Ireland, Korea, Portugal, South Africa, Hong Kong, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Finland. Since 2015, she has been Associate Professor of Percussion at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., and she serves as Artist Director for Chamber Music City and Nashville Marimba Sessions. **PN**

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Gregg Bissonette is one of the most versatile drummers in the business. Currently touring with Ringo Starr and the All Starr Band, Bissonette has played live and on recordings with countless artists in a variety of styles, as well as in film and television. Bissonette has played with David Lee Roth, James Taylor, Santana (on his Grammy-winning album *Supernatural*), Don Henley, Joe Satriani, Andrea Bocelli, ELO, Maynard Ferguson, Spinal Tap, Steve Lukather, The Reddcoats, and countless others. Gregg has recorded for numerous films, TV shows, and the Buddy Rich Memorial Concert and video. He recently recorded video lessons for Kennan Wylie's drumset method books (Hal Leonard) and has three solo CDs. He also has an award-winning 2-disc DVD, *Musical Drumming in Different Styles* (Hudson Music).