



School of

Music

College of Arts and Sciences

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY

Faculty Artist Series

Presents

Dr. Christopher Wilson, *marimba*

A Solemn Music (2013)

Part 1

Part 2

Part 3

David Maslanka
(1943-2017)

~brief intermission~

Six Elegies Dancing (1987)

I. Adamantly, Vigorously

II. Intensely

III. Gingerly, Very Stable

IV. Furiously

V. With Deliberate Concentration

VI. Elegiac

Jennifer Stasack
(b.1956)

Velocities (1990)

Joseph Schwantner
(b.1943)

Kimbrough Concert Hall – January 20, 2025 – 7:30pm

    @WSUPullmanMusic

Program Notes

A Solemn Music

David Maslanka

David Maslanka was a prolific composer who lived most of his life in Missoula, MT. His works for winds have become standards in their repertoire, including over fifty pieces for wind ensemble, four wind quintets, and five saxophone quintets. His oeuvre also includes many works for percussion, including five works for percussion ensemble. He composed three marimba solos; the first two (*Variations on Lost Love* and *My Lady White*) are standard works for the collegiate and professional percussionist. *A Solemn Music* was his third and final marimba solo, as well as his final composition for percussion. The piece was premiered in 2014 and received its first professional recording by Christopher Wilson on his album “Solemn Music: Marimba Solos by David Maslanka.”

The piece is comprised of three movements, each of which follows a tempo pattern of slow-fast-slow. Maslanka stated that “the three ‘songs’ in this set are studies in deep moods of contemplation. There are no stories being told, but the patient laying out of line shapes with pauses, and the simple beauty of the marimba tone allows a quiet opening for personal reflection. My own sense of this music is the release and clearing of old patterns of thought and feeling.”

Part 1 begins with a slow, meditative chorale for two mallets in which Maslanka dictates that the performer not include any “dynamic inflections other those indicated.” This gives way to a slower, more peaceful chorale for four mallets. After this lengthy introduction, the movement explodes with “forceful” fortissimo arpeggios and rolls that cascade up and down the marimba. Once this section concludes, the movement returns to the initial two-mallet chorale.

Part 2 begins with a chorale of tonal chords progressing at a much faster rate than the first movement. This chorale is interrupted by a section of descending arpeggios, constantly tonicizing then moving on as if the composer is searching for some place to land. After resolving to a C major chord, the movement concludes darkly and quietly in the relative minor.

Part 3 is bookended by chorales that are the least tonal of Maslanka’s harmonic language found in the piece. Throughout the opening chorale, the composer mostly makes use of unsettling parallel fourths which never resolve. After this opening chorale, there is a short section of rolled counterpoint in which the performer sings along with the top line. Maslanka dictates that the performer “hum an ‘oo,’ narrowing the circle of the lips until a buzzing whistle happens along with the pitch.” Immediately following this section is, like the first movement, an explosion of fast arpeggios up and down the marimba. This climactic moment in the piece slowly winds down until Maslanka returns to the opening chorale from this movement. However, this time the chorale finally finds a resolution, ending with the same B Major cadence which ends his first work for marimba, *Variations on Lost Love*.

Six Elegies Dancing

Jennifer Stasack

Six Elegies Dancing is an experimental, six-movement work for marimba. Each movement is given a title that indicates the “manner in which each should be played.” The first movement,

“Adamantly, Vigorously,” is quick-paced and loud with high-pitch rolls interrupted by rhythmic figures that accelerate as they’re performed.

In the second movement, “Intensely,” Stasack states that the performer should use four mallets, with the outside mallets being significantly harder than the inside mallets. The movement is composed as a string of note heads with no meter indicated. Although Stasack tells the performer what mallets to use, she doesn’t dictate the sticking choices. Some notes will be more staccato while others more legato depending on the performer’s sticking choices, and each performer’s take will be a little different.

The third movement, “Gingerly, very stable,” is slower and more reserved. Each measure has a different meter, and oftentimes the performer’s hands are at two different dynamics. This creates an dichotomy where the movement has the most stability within the piece as a whole, yet at the same time does not feel stable to the listener.

In movement four, “Furiously,” Stasack again dictates the type of mallets the performer should use. This time, the performer should have hard mallets in their right hand and softer mallets in their left hand. The sticking choices are indicated by the composer using stems up for the right and stems down for the left.

The fourth movement continues attacca into the fifth movement, “With Deliberate Concentration.” Movement five progresses as a graphic score that has the performer play specific notes on the keyboard, play approximate pitches on the keyboard, or pretend to hit the keyboard. Most notable in this movement are the visual cues given to the performer, which should be performed ala Tai Chi. Every physical movement that the audience sees was dictated in the score using various drawings and notations. At the halfway point of this movement, the performer turns away from the audience and plays their “favorite marimba piece on an imaginary marimba for approximately ten seconds, arms rising as though playing against an imaginary wall.” The movement ends with a recap of an earlier movement, although the performer is instructed to “proceed such that at first notes are ‘unvoiced,’ but as the movement progresses notes are ‘sounded’ with increasing frequency. The intent is that by the end of this section, the listener will understand” which movement has been replayed. The piece then continues attacca into “Elegiac,” a deep and sorrowful chorale which concludes the piece.

Velocities

Joseph Schwantner

Velocities (subtitled *Moto perpetuo*) was commissioned by the Percussive Arts Society and a consortium that included noted percussionists Leigh Howard Stevens, William Moersch, and Gordon Stout. The piece was written for and premiered by Stevens. In the score, Schwantner notes: “As the title suggests, the music is characterized by a continuously unfolding texture of rapid gestures within a framework of continually shifting meters. The linear and harmonic elements of the work are derived from a series of four, five, six and seven-note pitch sets. The first major division marked, *relentlessly with energy and intensity*,’ opens with a series of aggressive articulations of a repeating harmonic idea followed by wave-like ostinato figures presented in seven-eight meter. The second principal section continues with ever-persistent

sixteenth notes framed in triple meter. The last major section re-engages the primary musical elements presented and developed earlier and leads to a forceful and spirited conclusion.”

The piece makes frequent use of the performer playing with the shaft of the mallets on the edge of the bars, a technique commonly referred to as “Stevens pizzicato.” The name comes from the imitation of the “Bartok pizzicato,” and in honor of marimbist Leigh Stevens. While the piece is not purely a work on minimalism, the audience will hear short, repeated patterns. These patterns alternate from monophonic lines which look like two-mallet playing to sections of counterpoint where the performer’s hands are in different meters. Unlike a work of minimalism, these patterns alternate and progress quickly and are never repeated for more than a few measures. The connective ideas between major sections are often complex sequences either ascending or descending the keyboard.

The composer describes above an intense opening, which includes loud chords, Stevens pizzicato, and ever-changing meters. While the piece continues with nearly constant sixteenth-notes, the mood and articulation intentionally settle into a more relaxed, legato section. The conclusion of the middle sections brings fast thirty-second notes which act more like ornamentation. Towards the end of the piece, the Stevens pizzicato returns. Then a section of the opening is restated, this time raised up a whole step. *Velocities* concludes with an accelerando into a section marked “Brutale.”