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THE MUSIC

Steve Reich *Nagoya Marimbas* (1994)

Born in New York and raised there and in California, Reich graduated from Cornell University in 1957. For the next two years, he studied composition with Hall Overton, and from 1958 to 1961 he studied at Juilliard with William Bergsma and Vincent Persichetti. Reich received his M.A. in music from Mills College in 1963, where he worked with Luciano Berio and Darius Milhaud. In 1966 Reich founded his own ensemble of three musicians, which rapidly grew to 18 members or more and first toured as Steve Reich and Musicians in 1971. Encounters with non-western music in the 1970s took Reich to Ghana and Jerusalem, and he also studied Balinese gamelan in Seattle and Berkeley.

The composer has written the following note to introduce *Nagoya Marimbas* (1994):

Nagoya Marimbas is somewhat similar to my pieces from the 1960s and '70s in that there are repeating patterns played on both marimbas, one or more beats out of phase, creating a series of two-part unison canons. However, these patterns are more melodically developed and change frequently, and each is usually repeated no more than three times, similar to my more recent work. The piece is also considerably more difficult to play than my earlier ones and requires two virtuosic performers.

John Psathas arr. Omar Carmenates *Muisca* (2017)

Soledad
Chia
El Dorado

Muisca, commissioned by Jane Curry through Creative New Zealand, is John Psathas' second work for classical guitar. This was arranged for marimba and vibraphone by Dr Omar Carmenates, Associate Professor of percussion at Furman University. The title refers to the Chibcha-speaking people that formed the Muisca Confederation of the central highlands of present-day Colombia's Eastern Range. They were encountered by the Spanish Empire in 1537, at the time of the conquest.

The opening movement, *Soledad*, is named after the Spanish word for solitude, which the composer has defined as "a different experience from loneliness; solitude can be empowering, and energising". The layered, contrapuntal soundscape of this opening movement presents several different strands of conversation at the same time—from a murmured bass, an ostinato middle voice through to the most outspoken melody in the treble. It is rhythmically compact and driving, through to the middle section of chords, with their asymmetric rhythms, punctuated by percussive and harmonic flourishes.

Chia, the most introspective of the three movements, is a title derived from the mythology of Colombia, before the European settlement, and is the name of the goddess Chía; 'the one who is like the moon'.

Energetic tempi and driving rhythms feature strongly in the closing movement, *El Dorado*, which translates as 'the gilded one', referring to the name of a Muisca tribal chief who covered himself with gold dust and, as an initiation rite, dived into Lake Guatavita. Later, El Dorado became the name of the legendary 'lost city of gold'.

Alyssa Weinberg Table Talk (2016)

Composer Alyssa Weinberg is best-known for crafting visceral, communicative scores, which have been lauded for their “frenetic yet cohesive musical language” (icareifyoulisten) and “heavyweight emotional dimensions” (bachtrack). She finds collaboration deeply inspiring, and her music pulls concepts from her work with writers, dancers and visual artists.

The composer writes: *Table Talk was commissioned by Arx Duo in 2016 with the goal of exploring the concept of percussion “four-hands.” Taking the idea of piano four-hand music and applying it to a shared percussion set-up, I was inspired to make one more parallel to a technique common to modern piano repertoire, that of “preparing” the instrument. Composed at the Avaloch Farm Music Institute, this piece for prepared vibraphone evolved as an attempt to stretch the idea of what a vibraphone could sound like, from exploiting the subtle timbral shifts of a single note to masking its identity completely through the combinations of other items placed on top of it.*

Michael Taylor Rhapsody for Vibraphone and Marimba (2012)

Michael Taylor, an American percussionist and composer, originally composed *Rhapsody* for marimba and cello. He rescored the piece for the Quey Percussion Duo Composition Contest, which he won. The work’s intricate textures and interlocking figures make it challenging for accomplished performers.

The composer aimed to explore the transformation of music styles or moods from one to another seamlessly, sometimes gracefully, and at other times quite violently. Taylor focused on simple themes that develop and become intertwined as the piece progresses. *Rhapsody* was heavily influenced by classical, tango, heavy metal, and funk music, promising to offer a little something for everyone.

—————INTERVAL—————

Claude Debussy, arr. Yoshiko Tsuruta The Toy Box (2013)

Debussy was approached by André Hellé, who had created a ballet scenario based on his children’s tale *La boîte à joujoux*. The theme of childhood in Hellé’s story resonated with Debussy, who had already composed a suite called *Children’s Corner* for his seven-year-old daughter. He went on to write the piano score for the ballet. However, unfortunately, the production was delayed and not staged until 1919, after Debussy’s death.

La boîte à joujoux showcases Debussy’s distinctive style and includes a variety of allusions and direct influences from other composers, folk and popular music, as well as quotes from his previous compositions, including *Children’s Corner*. His inventive musical language can be found throughout the piece. Debussy assigned a distinct leitmotif to three main characters in the story—a toy soldier, an attractive doll, and a silly and quarrelsome polichinelle.

The simple three-sided love story is set in a toy shop in Paris, leaving a vague boundary between reality and imagination. The soldier falls in love with the doll, but the polichinelle refuses to let her go. There is a brutal battle that leaves the soldier injured. Polichinelle ultimately gives up on the doll, who then takes care of the wounded soldier. She falls in love with him, and they get married... everything turns out for the best.

This arrangement for a percussion duo uses not only a number of keyboard instruments but also a range of other percussion instruments to depict the colourful world of toys. The accompanying artwork is sourced from André Hellé’s original illustrations, and the texts were translated into English by Justus Rozemond.

THE ARTISTS

Japanese born percussionist **Yoshiko Tsuruta** is one of the very few dedicated marimbists in New Zealand and performs and tours with various artists throughout the country. Her repertoire includes her own arrangements, with which she explores the expressive possibilities of the marimba beyond the stereotypical limits of percussion.

As a soloist, Yoshiko has performed a number of marimba concertos. She world-premiered Gareth Farr's concerto and in 2021, she recorded John Psathas' *Djinn* with Orchestra Wellington. She also appears in orchestras including the NZSO, APO and OW.

Yoshiko won several prizes in competitions, including Australian marimba competition, Gisborne International Music Competition and the 1st prize at NZ National Concerto Competition. She is a graduate of the NZSM in Wellington and the Anton Bruckner Privat Universität in Austria, where she completed her Master's Degree (1st Class) in percussion performance.

Jeremy Fitzsimons was principal percussionist of Orchestra Wellington until 2023, plays regularly with the NZSO, is percussionist with the Pink Floyd Experience, and has been freelancing in Wellington since 1993. He has recorded CDs of marimba and percussion music by Gareth Farr and John Psathas, toured as marimbist with many groups for Chamber Music New Zealand, and was a founding member of Strike Percussion and Gareth Farr's Drumdrag. Prominent projects include being soloist with Orchestra Wellington for the Psathas concerto *View From Olympus* in 2020, guest soloist at a marimba festival in Portugal, ensemble soloist with the APO, member of Double Shot since 2015, and he performs in Silent Movies Live (Old silent movies with original music with pianist David Selfe).

A 1996 Fulbright Scholar, Jeremy has a Bachelor of Music with first class honours from Victoria University of Wellington as well as a Master's and a Post Graduate Performance Certificate from Northwestern University in Chicago where he studied with Michael Burritt, James Ross and Paul Wertico. He is a graduate of the Leigh Howard Stevens International Marimba Seminar in New Jersey, the Music Academy of the West in California, the Pacific Music Festival in Japan and the World Peace Orchestra in Korea.