



LYNN VARTAN

DANCING ON THE
HEAD OF A PIN



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LYNN VARTAN
MARIMBA
DANCING ON THE HEAD OF A PIN

*"Vartan proved herself to be a commander of color ...
She was the model of a musical action painter" - Los Angeles Times*

1. Guillaume Le Picard: Abaca

Gareth Farr: Three Etudes

2. From Duggan

3. For Jeremy Fitzsimons

4. Him

5. Anna Ignatowicz: Toccata

6. Daniel Berg: Blue Memories

7. Csaba Zoltán Marján: Niflheim

8. Dave Maric: Sense & Innocence

Christos Hatzis: In the Fire of Conflict

9. Rescue Me

10. I Call Your Name

Total Playing Time: 52:51



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MARIMBA

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- | | |
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| 1. Guillaume Le Picard: Abaca | (6:23) |
| Gareth Farr: Three Etudes | (8:25) |
| 2. From Duggan | (1:01) |
| 3. For Jeremy Fitzsimons | (2:11) |
| 4. Him | (5:13) |
| 5. Anna Ignatowicz: Toccata | (7:48) |
| 6. Daniel Berg: Blue Memories | (2:48) |
| 7. Csaba Zoltán Marján: Niflheim | (7:05) |
| 8. Dave Maric: Sense & Innocence | (10:13) |
| Christos Hatzis: In the Fire of Conflict | (10:09) |
| 9. Rescue Me | (6:05) |
| 10. I Call Your Name | (4:04) |

Total Playing Time: 52:51



Abaca is French composer **Guillaume Le Picard's** first composition, written in 2010 at the beginning of his percussion studies at the Paris Conservatoire; the piece was awarded third prize at the Percussive Arts Society's International Competition. The composer advises that, while *Abaca* is the name of a flowering plant, he was simply attracted to the word's sound. He adds that while the work tells no programmatic story, listeners can easily let the music help suggest imaginary "natural scenes or landscapes where they feel calm."

An introduction leads into a fairly subdued first section that – with its flowing 6/8 meter – imitates the ceaseless movement of a gentle wind. Transitional passages precede each of the remaining two sections, both in 3/4 time; the second section is more dynamic and rhythmically intense, and the final section blends elements from both of the previous parts.

Gareth Farr – one of New Zealand's most prominent composers – wrote his *Three Etudes* in 2005, at a time when he was performing regularly as a solo marimba player. Being "etudes," they were designed, of course, to serve as means of exercising specific technical challenges associated with his instrument – but these three pieces are shining examples of "concert etudes" – works that add true musical value and listener appeal to their core purpose of honing a virtuoso's performing chops!

The first etude, “From Duggan,” is a short piece that Farr transcribed from its original version for marimba with flute that was used as the theme music for *Duggan*, a popular New Zealand police drama series for television. In its guise for marimba alone, it becomes a compact exercise in maintaining tricky dynamic contrasts between its prominent melody and a smoothly coruscating pattern of softer inner voices.

The second piece, “For Jeremy Fitzsimons,” was written for its title namesake, also a marimba player. It offers a bracing workout in maintaining a steady, well-connected flow of rising and falling arpeggios as well as of related note-sequences – and at varied tempos and dynamics. Listen for the fast sextuplets in the latter half of the piece.

The set finishes with “Him” – a piece Farr composed for another

fellow percussionist, Suzanne Warner. A piece more of shifting sonic textures than of melody, the music flows in a gradual arch, from soft beginnings through a more intense central episode before falling back into a gently hypnotic sense of glowing reverie. The challenge here has to do with maintaining quality of rolled notes and bringing out voice leading.

Anna Ignatowicz composed her *Toccata* for Marimba in memory of her father in 2001. She has written that, as she wrote the piece, she found herself sifting “through my daddy’s life,” which took her back to his years prior to her birth. The composer maintains that this is not a programmatic work, even while speaking of the music’s sense of “ultra-subjective narration” – a sense that seems more a distillation of intensely intuitive personal emotion and nostalgia than the telling of anecdotes or a continuous story. The

virtuoso piece progresses through a series of contrasting episodes – here dreamy, there intense – somewhat reminiscent of a Baroque toccata form.

Swedish marimba virtuoso **Daniel Berg** published his haunting and wistful *Blue Memories* in 2010. In Berg's own words, "Some memories are easy to tell - others are more like a feeling, difficult to put into words. This piece is an attempt to describe this feeling in music ... The harmonic tension between G major and F sharp minor creates a melancholy mood..." Note the piece's consistent interval structure: fourths and fifths from the left hand and octaves from the right.

In fact, the work was inspired as Berg was demonstrating to a student how he might write an exercise in octaves, improvising in gently jazzy harmonies that produced a wistful and nostalgic mood – as

with "memories of an old boy- or girlfriend." He designed the piece to begin and end with evocations of actual distinct memories – with the middle part more like the pure, indescribable feeling of a dreamed memory. Berg advises performers that they should play the central episode as if they are "walking in the fog," with accents evoking dimly-seen "traffic lights."

Ironically described by its publisher (Edition Svitzer) as "the hottest release of 2010," *Niflheim* – by Hungarian composer **Csaba Zoltán Marján** – was in fact named for a frigid region of the underworld in ancient Norse mythology: a place of endless cold, fog and darkness. It was written for the 2010 brass and percussion competition in Debrecen, Hungary.

The work – dominated by skeins of sixteenth notes – moves insistently through the multiple episodes of



its seven-plus minute course with a broad variety of time signatures and tempos – likewise an infinitely varied palette of colors, accents and textural effects that evoke auras of edgy apprehension, mystery and dark menace. After the manic momentum of the opening passage, there are shifts to a more effulgent section of rolled notes and arpeggios, followed by moments of musically feisty discord, relieved here and there by brief interludes of uneasy calm. The piece's constant, restless shifts combine with its daunting technical demands to make it quite a challenge to even the finest virtuosos of the marimba.

Dave Maric created *Sense & Innocence*, a fairly substantial (10 minutes) four-movement work for live and sampled percussion, in 2002. In performance, the music is realized by playing an assortment of tuned percussion instruments

– mainly vibraphone and marimba. We also hear profuse playing of various cymbals and crotales: a chromatically-tuned array of small, cymbal-like bells that can either be struck or bowed. The performer brings the score to life against the sampled framework: a pre-recorded aural canvas of sounds and effects from a variety of other (and some of the same) percussion instruments. The net effect is a rich sonic smorgasbord that beguiles the ear and mind alike.

The first movement serves as a sort of dreamy and rhythmically vague prelude, establishing a sense of anticipation. The listener won't pick up on a distinct tempo until the music breaks into movement 2's more driven passage that gradually rises to an almost frightful climax. But stark contrast soon arrives, as the musical violence comes to an abrupt halt with the lush third movement – in which the perform-

er plays a variety of bowed sounds on her crotales and cymbals – in a kind of atmospherically abstract “duet” with similar sounds from the sample track. The pace picks up again with the finale, which assumes a more perceptible harmonic and rhythmic form as it takes us to another smashing climax ... before a final brief coda restores the fantasy-ridden atmosphere of the work's beginning.

Christos Hatzis composed his *In the Fire of Conflict* (solo percussion), for marimba, crotales and prerecorded digital audio; it was written for the 2008 Toronto Summer Music Festival of the same name. Its two continuous movements – “Rescue Me” and “I Call Your Name” – are built around music and lyrics by American rapper Steve Henry, otherwise known as ‘Bugsy H.’ of the Poetik Disciples: a Christian Rap Group.

The composer explains that he has long been very concerned – not only by increasing gun violence in his hometown of Toronto – but also about the spread of violence worldwide: whether by war, environmental decay, overpopulation, global warming, natural disasters, etc. The resulting widespread misery has given rise to pervasive feelings of despair and an ever-growing belief that things may get worse before they get better. And it was just such a malaise of the spirit that the composer sought to address in this piece: “...the impenetrable darkness of someone struggling to stay afloat amidst this sea of hopelessness.” Hatzis’ subsequent exposure to the music of Poetik Disciples – and specifically the lyrics of its leader Buggy H. (who had once “hit bottom,” but rebounded spiritually) – convinced him that here was his composition’s core message, and the main ingredient of the piece’s audio playback component.

Given the inherent agony of the subject matter, it’s no surprise that this is highly intense music. Its often explosive entrances, jagged harmonics, violent rhythms and even occasional shattering sounds speak of wretched anguish and despair. There’s even a “dies irae”-like theme that seems to speak of inevitable doom. But, amid it all, the urgent cries for deliverance (“I Call Your Name”) and sense of ardent spiritual supplication keep resounding. Lynn Vartan’s marimba (and crotales) often seem to mirror the rapper’s spoken rhythms and speech patterns – weaving over, under, and around the lyrics while – as the composer put it – “drawing melodic contours from the prosodic contours of the spoken text.”

-- Lindsay Koob

Percussionist Lynn Vartan is an acclaimed international performer and educator who is a staunch advocate of diversity in music. As a new music percussionist Lynn has worked with Michael Colgrass, Vinny Golia, Arthur Jarvinen, Ursula Oppens, Joan Tower, Glen Velez, Xtet, James Newton, Chinary Ung, the Hilliard Ensemble, the Tambuco Percussion Ensemble and Grammy Award-winning Southwest Chamber Music; she is known for her dynamic athleticism and exciting energy onstage. She has commissioned and/or performed countless new works for percussion by composers such as Donald Crockett, William Kraft, Steve Hoey, Veronika Krausas, Erica Muhl, Arthur Jarvinen, Sean Heim, Jeff Holmes, Keith Bradshaw and Shaun Naidoo.

As a recital soloist, Lynn has been featured on the Los Angeles Philharmonic Green Umbrella Series, the Different Trains Series, in resi-



dence at universities all over the United States as well as on the Music at the Court series in Pasadena, California, where she produced her

own solo percussion concerts. As a concerto soloist Lynn has performed with various orchestras including the Hubei Opera and Dance Company of Wuhan, China, the Sierra Wind Symphony, the Helena Symphony, The Orchestra of Southern Utah, Southwest Chamber Music, and The Helena Symphony –as well as premiering new concertos by both American and Chinese composers. She has participated in cultural exchange projects such as the “Ascending Dragon” Project in Vietnam, “The Dream of Helen” project in China and the “East Meets West” project designed around her as a soloist in Wuhan, China for the Spring of 2014. As a recording artist, Lynn has appeared on the ECM New Series, Albany Records, Cuneiform Records, Bridge Records, New World Records, Lian Records, Yarlung Records and Cambria. Her recordings on the Cambria label with Southwest Chamber Music were nominated three times for Grammys in the

“Best Classical Album of the Year” and “Best Small Ensemble With or Without a Conductor” categories (for the *Complete Chamber Music of Carlos Chavez, Volume III*) – and for the “Latin Classical Album of the Year” (for William Kraft’s *Complete Encounters Series*).

A devoted ensemble musician, Lynn is the percussionist for Southwest Chamber Music, the violin/percussion duo 61/4 which she founded with Shalini Vijayan, and Exacta, a duo percussion group that she formed with Tambuco’s Miguel Gonzalez. Lynn is currently the Director of Percussion at Southern Utah University. She is endorsed by the Paiste Corporation, Remo Inc. and Marimba One.

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Lynn Vartan plays a Marimba One 5 octave marimba, a Yamaha 4 octave vibraphone, and Paiste cymbals.

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