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A Performance Analysis of Cloud Folk for Percussion Octet and Piano by John Psathas

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A PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS OF *CLOUD FOLK* FOR PERCUSSION OCTET AND
PIANO BY JOHN PSATHAS

DMA PROJECT

A DMA Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in the
College of Fine Arts at the University of Kentucky

By

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2020

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ABSTRACT OF DMA PROJECT

A PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS OF *CLOUD FOLK* FOR PERCUSSION OCTET AND PIANO BY JOHN PSATHAS

John Psathas is the one of the most forefront, living New Zealand composers and is considered to be one of the three most important living composers of the Greek Diaspora. His music is performed across the globe, most notably as the opening and closing ceremony music for the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece. His percussion music has been championed by percussionists for three decades, starting with Dame Evelyn Glennie with the work *Matre's Dance*. Psathas still receives regular commissions for percussion instruments, having released multiple works in the last few years and multiple works still to be premiered.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the percussion works of John Psathas and its place in modern percussion literature, understand Psathas's compositional style, and provide insights to performing his works. Interviews with individuals who have worked with Psathas and his music, as well as interviews with the composer himself provide an in-depth look at these works. Taking that knowledge, the dissertation provides an in-depth analysis into the theory and performance practice of *Cloud Folk* (2017), including harmony, setup, ensemble balance, instrument consideration, style, rehearsal markers, and specific performance considerations for each section.

KEYWORDS: Percussion Ensemble, John Psathas, Cloud Folk, Percussion, Chamber Music

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11/30/2020

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A PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS OF *CLOUD FOLK* FOR PERCUSSION OCTET AND
PIANO BY JOHN PSATHAS

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DEDICATION

To Holli, who supported me through this degree as my date, fiancé, and now wife, and my family: Margaret Vilseck, Keith Vilseck, Keith Vilseck Jr., and Daniel Vilseck

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PART ONE

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As one of the youngest genres of classical art music, percussion ensemble emerged through the mid-twentieth century and developed an important educational role in standard curriculum at all major universities, schools of music, and most high schools. For percussionists, the genre serves the same role as a string quartet for violin players and develops necessary chamber music skills.¹ According to Brian West, percussion ensemble provides experiences on a wider variety of percussion instruments, allowing them to learn melody and accompaniment parts and develop listening skills.² In order to teach these skills, ensemble directors must have a strong understanding of the repertoire and current performance practice.

Greek-born New Zealand-based composer John Psathas composes for a large list of genres ranging from double concertos to film and chamber music that includes collaborations with diverse internationally-renowned musicians including jazz saxophonist Michael Brecker and front man of *System of a Down*, Serj Tankian. In 2004, Psathas firmly solidified himself as one of the most important New Zealand composers by writing the music for the opening and closing ceremonies of the Summer Olympic Games in Athens, Greece. Prior to this, he credits percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie and her many of performances of *Matre's Dance*, a duo for piano and multi-percussion, for the beginning of his international acclaim in the 1990s.³ Psathas followed *Matre's Dance* with over thirty years of percussion writing and composed many works including

¹ Jason Baker, Tommy Dobbs, Matt Holm, and Marja Kerney, "The Pedagogy of the College Percussion Ensemble," *Percussive Notes* Vol. 58, No. 5 (Nov. 2018): 58.

² *Ibid.*

³ John Psathas, *Cloud Folk* (Wellington: Promethian Editions, 2018), iii.

percussion instruments in eclectic mediums, such as his double concerto *View From Olympus* for percussion, piano, and orchestra and the solo *One Study One Summary* for marimba, junk percussion, and digital playback. As of September 2020, Psathas has produced over thirty works involving percussion instruments and become a frequent name on percussion ensemble programs. Winners of the Percussive Arts Society International Percussion Ensemble Competition have performed Psathas's music in each of the last three years, including performances by two separate ensembles at the 2019 Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC) and a premier in 2017.

Cloud Folk was commissioned and premiered by Michael Burritt and the Eastman Percussion Ensemble at PASIC on November 11th, 2017. This work for eight percussionists and piano requires a high level of technical skill from all nine performers to balance the work's many dense layers. *Cloud Folk* has received many performances from both college and, a few, high school ensembles in its short life, including submissions on tapes for the 2019 Percussive Arts Society International Percussion Ensemble Competition⁴ and as a winner of the Black Swamp Percussion Ensemble competition in 2019.⁵ A performance of *Cloud Folk* was performed by the University of Kentucky Percussion ensemble on November 3, 2019, under the direction of professor James Campbell and coached by James Vilseck.

⁴ West, "International Percussion Ensemble Competition," *Percussive Notes* Vol. 57, No. 4 (September 2019): 82.

⁵ Black Swamp Percussion, "BSP Percussion Ensemble Showcase," Accessed March 17, 2020. https://www.blackswamp.com/percussion-ensemble-showcase?fbclid=IwAR2H9bEq8tBpVyjarDGuD7Ntvj_LiYRO_hSsp0ZKE0bmSYCvWPYOaqq_IWE.

This document serves to outline the impact of Psathas's contribution to percussion literature by analyzing and providing a performance guide for *Cloud Folk*. Interviews with prominent percussionists, and the composer himself, will present modern commentary and insight on the impact of Psathas's percussion works. First, a comprehensive background of Psathas is established, examining his biggest projects and achievements. The following chapter focuses on Psathas's percussion writing and important works for percussion commonly performed today. Finally, a theoretical and performance analysis of *Cloud Folk* will follow with the goal of encouraging and aiding in future performance of Psathas's works.

CHAPTER 2. BIOGRAPHY OF JOHN PSATHAS

Ioannis (John) Psathas is a composer of high energy music ranging from classical music, to film scores and electronica. A jazz pianist, though he no longer performs, his work is filled with many fruitful collaborations by many of the world's top musicians and has been enjoyed on every continent, including Antarctica.⁶ Born on July 3rd, 1966 in Wellington, New Zealand to parents of Greek heritage, Psathas receives an unprecedented amount of international success in New Zealand history and is considered one of the three most influential living composers of the Greek Diaspora by fellow composer Christos Hatzis.⁷ In addition to freelance composing, he is currently professor emeritus at the New Zealand School of Music at Victoria University of Wellington.

2.1 Early Life and Success

Psathas grew up for much of his life in the small town of Taumaranui where his parents opened a restaurant.⁸ He would later attend school in Napier where he developed a keen interest in music. He left high school early and studied piano and composition at Victory University of Wellington. After graduation, he traveled to Belgium and studied under composer Jacqueline Fontyn for two years. Starting in 1994, Psathas returned to New Zealand and began teaching composition at Victoria University of Wellington, a position he has retained since then.

⁶ Sounz, "John Psathas: Composer; Biography," Centre for New Zealand Music Trust, Accessed May 17, 2020, <https://sounz.org.nz/contributors/1017>.

⁷ Psathas, *Cloud Folk*: iii.

⁸ Sounz, "John Psathas: Composer; Biography."

Psathas's earliest international success came through collaborations with virtuoso Scottish percussionist Evelyn Glennie. In the early 1990s, Glennie traveled to New Zealand for a music festival and was approached by the festival staff who asked if she would perform works by New Zealand composers.⁹ After agreeing, Glennie was handed the score for Psathas's percussion and piano duet, *Matre's Dance*, composed in 1991. Glennie greatly enjoyed the piece and championed the work. It is estimated that she has performed it around the world over 1000 times in the last thirty years. Glennie has additionally recorded *Matre's Dance* on two of her CDs. These many performances by Glennie brought Psathas his first international recognition. Soon after, in 1993, Psathas composed another piece for Glennie, *Drum Dances*, a duo for drum kit and piano. Both *Matre's Dance* and *Drum Dances* have become part of the standard repertoire for percussion instruments. Glennie would later request more works including *Happy Tachyons* and champion others such as *Spike*.¹⁰

While experiencing some success in the percussion realm, Psathas's name spread further when he started composing large scale works, beginning with a few concerti. The first of these concerti performed was *Omnifenix*, featuring improvised saxophone, drum set, and orchestra. Commissioned by Concorso Internazionale and premiered in 2000, this work was written with saxophone player Michael Brecker specifically in mind and brings

⁹ John Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck, Phone Interview, Feb. 13, 2020.

¹⁰ Promethean Editions, "Composer Summary: John Psathas," Promethean Editions, Accessed May 13, 2020, <http://www.promethean-editions.com/php/ComposerSummary.php?CompID=10>.

together traditional art music with the freedom of jazz.¹¹ Commissioned the same year but premiered later, *View From Olympus* is a double concerto for piano, percussion, and orchestra written for Evelyn Glennie. Glennie and pianist Philip Smith premiered the work with the Hallé Orchestra lead by Mark Elder at the final concert of the Royal Gala at the Pulse International Festival of Rhythm in 2002. These two works introduced Psathas to the wider orchestra world and demonstrated his expert ability to combine a variety of genres. More concerti followed, including *Psyzygysm* and *Three Psalms*. Written in 2001 for chamber ensemble with a mallet soloist, *Psyzygysm* marks Psathas's first collaboration with percussionist Pedro Carneiro, a relationship that would later produce some of Psathas's most well-known works. *Three Psalms*, commissioned by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra for pianist Michael Houstoun in 2003, was later premiered by pianist Stephen Gosling in April of 2004.¹²

The renown earned from these works coupled with a few chance meetings allowed Psathas to present his music on one of the world's largest stages as the composer for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2004 Athens Summer Olympic Games. Psathas's Greek heritage did not play a role in his selection. The Olympic committee was looking for an international sound and researched for several years from a list of over 600 composers. The piece that caught the attention of the committee was *Fanfare: Te Papa* for Brass and Percussion, written in 1998. The composition process for the games began

¹¹ John Psathas, "Omnifenix – Concerto for Improvising Saxophone, Drumset, and Orchestra (2000)," John Psathas, Accessed May 17, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/omnifenix-2000>.

¹² John Psathas, "Three Psalms – Solo Piano and Orcehstra (2003)," John Psathas, Accessed May 16, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/three-psalms-2003>.

in late 2003 and occurred within the nine months before the event.¹³ The committee required Psathas to sign a confidentiality contract before he could begin working. Because of this secrecy and deadlines, he composed under intense pressure. The music was under constant revision. So much so that the music for the closing ceremony was recorded after the opening ceremonies. Retrospectively, Psathas believes the process was manageable and credits these feelings to working with a fantastic musical director.

Soon after, Pedro Carneiro commissioned Psathas, resulting in the virtuoso solo *One Study One Summary* for marimba, junk percussion, and electronics. While Psathas initially feared this new piece was too difficult to be performed, high-quality performance videos created by Carneiro demonstrated the solo's accessibility to performers.¹⁴ A performance at PASIC by Carneiro in 2008 also helped increase the fame of this work and demonstrate it to American audiences.¹⁵ One of the biggest developments to come from *One Study* was Psathas's initial effort in combining acoustic instruments with electronic playback.¹⁶ Electro-acoustic music would later become a major component of Psathas's output and ultimately influenced many of his other works, such as *Ukiyo* (2005), *Songs for Simon* (2010), *Between Zero and One* (2013), *Voices at the End* (2018), *Mentacide* (2018) and others.¹⁷

¹³ John Psathas, "Athens 2004 Ceremonies (2004)," John Psathas, Accessed May 14, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/athens-2004-ceremonies-2004>.

¹⁴ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

¹⁵ Omar Carmenates, Interview with James Vilseck, Lexington, KY, February 8, 2020.

¹⁶ John Psathas, "One Study One Summary – Marimba, Junk Percussion, and Digital Audio (2005)," John Psathas, Accessed November 18, 2019, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/one-study-one-summary>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Approaching the end of the decade, Psathas continued to receive commissions both domestic and abroad such as *A Cool Wind*, a string quartet commissioned by Chamber Music New Zealand in 2008, and *Djinn*, a concerto for marimba with chamber orchestra written for Carneiro.¹⁸

2.2 Modern Projects

Psathas's continued to work on many large-scale projects including new collaborations and film projects. In 2009, Psathas would work with Armenian musician Serj Tankian, lead singer of "System of a Down," on the *Elect the Dead* Symphony. The project was Tankian's first live CD/DVD and features rearrangements of his solo rock album "Elect The Dead" with a seventy-piece orchestra.¹⁹ Psathas arranged all the orchestral parts later performed by the Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra. This CD would reach No. 2 on the Billboard Classical Album chart.²⁰

Beginning around 2010, many of Psathas's projects would contain a social or historical commentary and utilize a wide variety of technology.²¹ Using piano and taonga puoro,²² Psathas created a twenty-eight minute piece for the 2013 New Zealand film

¹⁸ Psathas, *Cloud Folk*: iii.

¹⁹ "Elect the Dead Symphony," Serj Tankian, Accessed May 16, 2020, <https://serjtankian.com/pages/elect-the-dead-symphony>.

²⁰ Psathas, *Cloud Folk*: iv.

²¹ John Psathas. "Biography and Milestones," John Psathas, Accessed May 17, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/biography>.

²² Traditional musical instruments of the Māori people used for both spiritual and physical purposes; Brian Flintoff, "Māori Musical Instruments – Taonga Puoro," Te Ara-The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, Accessed May 17, 2020, <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/maori-musical-instruments-taonga-puoro>.

“White Lies.”²³ That same year, a large multimedia collaboration with the Wellington-based Strike Percussion resulted in *Between Zero and One*. Based upon ancient rhythms of Africa, Persia, Greece, as well as modern genres, *Between Zero and One* (2013) explores the scenario of what would happen if the gods took a day off from watching mankind.²⁴ Another soundtrack, *100 Years* (2014), is a commemorative video honoring Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian victims from Armenian Genocide of the early 20th century.²⁵ Psathas’s second collaboration with Tenkian, *100 Years* is featured in the film *1915*.

Possibly the most notable of these modern projects is 2016’s *No Man’s Land*, an eighty-minute live cinematic concert. In this live show, video projections of musicians combine with a live seven-piece orchestra to create a moving visual and musical experience based on the idea of a single, global orchestra.²⁶ Psathas co-produced the project and traveled the world with director Jasmine Millet to record musicians on locations of major battle sights from World War I.²⁷ This project involved 150 world-renown musicians from twenty-five different countries encompassing both sides of the war. The music contains a wide variety of genres ranging from rock, folk, and hip-hop

²³ John Psathas. “White Lies: Film Score (2013),” John Psathas, Accessed May 17, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/white-lies-2013>.

²⁴ John Psathas, “Between Zero and One – Percussion Sextet and Digital Audio (2013),” John Psathas, Accessed May 17, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/1/29/between-zero-and-one-2013>.

²⁵ John Psathas, “100 Years: Commemorative Video – with Serj Tankian (2014),” John Psathas, Accessed May 19, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/100-years-with-serj-tankian-2014>.

²⁶ “No Man’s Land Project,” Victoria University of Wellington, Accessed May 18, 2020, <http://www.nomanslandproject.org>.

²⁷ Victoria University of Wellington, “No Man’s Land,” Accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/capital-thinking/no-mans-land>.

with artists like the Refugees of Rap, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg, and another collaboration with Serj Tenkian. The message of the film is simple, but powerful: “Even at our worst, humanity and empathy continue to survive.”²⁸

Two more large scale projects round out Psathas’s recent compositions, the soundtrack “Mythos” and the massive piano piece *Voices at the End*. Described as a “digital concerto for six pianos” and inspired by the film *Planetary*, *Voices at the End* was written for Piano Circus, an ensemble of six pianists who first formed to perform Steve Reich’s *Six Pianos*.²⁹ The large work also incorporates digital playback. *Mythos* is a soundtrack composed for the 2019 World of WearableArt production.³⁰ Like other projects, this soundtrack involved a multitude of performers and collaborators.

Looking towards the future, Psathas has many more incoming projects listed on his website.³¹ Many of these works are concerti, including *Leviathan*, a percussion concerto for European-based percussionist Alexej Gerassimez whose premier was delayed due to the COVID pandemic, a double percussion concerto for Fabian Ziegler and Luca Steffelbach, a quadruple percussion concerto for Re:Percussion and WDR Funkhausorchester Köln, as well as a concerto for tabla and orchestra.

²⁸ “No Man’s Land Project,” Victoria University of Wellington.

²⁹ John Psathas, “Voices at the End – Six Pianos and Digital Audio (2018),” John Psathas, Accessed October 8, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/voices-at-the-end>.

³⁰ John Psathas, “Mythos (soundtrack) (2019),” John Psathas, Accessed Oct. 8, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2019/11/27/mythos-soundtrack?rq=mythos>

³¹ John Psathas, “Upcoming Projects,” John Psathas, Accessed May 19, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/commission-schedule>.

2.3 Awards

Throughout his career, Psathas has been the recipient of a multitude of awards. New Zealand-based company SOUNZ has awarded Psathas the SOUNZ contemporary award twice, first in 2002 for *View From Olympus* and second in 2004 for *Three Psalms*. He was a winner of the Tui for best Classical album of the year in 2000, 2004, and 2007. He was made a New Zealand Arts Foundation Laureate in 2003 and appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2005. Additionally, Victoria University of Wellington has granted Psathas numerous honors including the Research Excellence Award in 2011 and 2016 and a Doctor of Music degree in recognition of his contributions to the field of music.

2.4 Musical and Compositional Style

Michael Burritt, Professor of Percussion and Chair of the Woodwinds, Brass and Percussion department at the Eastman School of Music, describes Psathas's compositional style as a bottom-up composer, in which he starts at the beginning and sees where the music ends up.³² In accordance with this idea, Psathas admits he has never written a piece where he knows what is going to happen and always starts at the beginning.³³ He invests large amounts of time on opening material and puts meticulous detail into it, having developed the ability to find a large amount of potential out of a small amount of material. Taking this opening material, the composition process occurs bar-by-bar with all voices written simultaneously. No one instrument is written faster than any other instrument, including playback on works with electronic accompaniment.

³² Michael Burritt, Interview with James Vilseck, Phone Interview, February 2, 2020.

³³ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

Listening to playback via the software Logic Pro X, Psathas attempts every rhythmic combination for the next few seconds of music to know for sure the best way forward.³⁴ This playback is a crucial element of the process, as Psathas needs to know where the music “is” to understand where it needs to “go.” When finished, Psathas handwrites his scores before sending them to an engraver. This provides a final chance to re-examine every measure, for every part, before finalizing a work. This process alone can take up many hours, but provides Psathas a more comprehensive perspective of his own music.

There is a gradual change of style between Psathas’s earliest work and his more recent works.³⁵ Many early works were very dense rhythmically and harmonically, driven by more clustered intervals and chromatics. Through later works, his style gradually changed to have a more pop and jazzy harmonic voice. However, the rhythmic energy and through-composed nature have remain generally the same. In terms of form, Psathas rarely repeats material exactly. Whenever music appears to be the same, there will be some element that is slightly different or stretched longer.³⁶ Changes might be a phrase extension or a different harmony. Psathas does not expect audience members to remember specific themes, but if they do, these extensions throw off a sense of familiarity. This creates a feel of continual progression and newness within his music.

Rhythm is perhaps the most important element to Psathas’s music, specifically rhythmic interactions. Interactions between at least two sources is the basis for much of

³⁴ John Psathas, “From Matre’s Dance to Leviathan: Three Decades of Percussion Writing,” Composing for Percussion Seminar by Furman University, Greenville, SC, July 6, 2020, <https://vimeo.com/showcase/7322055/video/436088641>.

³⁵ Carmenates, Interview with James Vilseck.

³⁶ Ibid.

Psathas's music.³⁷ This interaction is further compounded by varying levels of accentuation. Individual parts may involve as many as four different layers of emphasis. These layers of emphasis exist outside of dynamics and articulations, where additional interactions may occur. Basing his music around interaction, Psathas rarely composes for purely solo instruments. Nearly every solo work he has written contains electronic playback to provide a level of interaction. A few solo piano works without playback exist, though the freedom of piano playing allows a single performer to provide interaction between their hands. The only true solo, acoustic piece incapable of interaction Psathas has currently written is *Gyftiko* (2010) for solo violin.

Gyftiko helps demonstrate an isolated example of Psathas's melodic and harmonic writing. Sweeping melodies are developed over a long period of time, often by stretching or manipulating previous material. Psathas's unique harmonic language often relates to jazz and Eastern European scales, retaining a level of flexibility and working around different modalities with a stable tonic. For example, starting on a B-flat and focusing on a minor tonality, a composer can choose between natural, harmonic, and melodic minor scales, Dorian and Phrygian modes, among others scale collections. As long as the B-flat tonic remains the same, Psathas can pick and choose any notes from any of those scales that fits the moment best while remaining in within a stable, perceivable tonality, creating pseudo-improvised melodic lines and fluid harmony. Additionally, this approach creates greater flexibility in chord progressions, which Psathas tends to avoid strict adherence to, unless he has a specific use for it. All these stylistic factors combined create music with undulating, groove-based textures within large, energetic musical arcs.

³⁷ Psathas, "From Matre's Dance to Leviathon."

Whenever starting a new work, Psathas thinks of the Japanese phrase “*Ichi-go Ichi-e*,” meaning to cherish the unrepeatable nature of a moment. Every individual performance will be slightly different, whether it’s the acoustics of the hall, the number of audience members, or even the mood of the performer. Each performance should be cherished and appreciated. Individuals who have influenced Psathas’s compositional style include previous teacher Jacqueline Fontyn, pianist Keith Jarrett, Chick Corea and Dave Wekyl, Beethoven, and Conlon Nancarrow.

CHAPTER 3. THE PERCUSSION MUSIC OF JOHN PSATHAS

What is it about Psathas's music and percussion instruments that creates a symbiotic relationship which is mutually beneficial? One of the most identifiable qualities of Psathas's music is his rhythmic vocabulary, an area of specialty for percussionists. From the moto-perpetuo nature of "Etude" from *One Study One Summary* to the fast, driving shekere-based beginnings of *Cloud Folk*, Psathas's percussion music is rhythmically dominated. While rhythm is a universal element of all music instruments, many instruments of the percussion family are limited in their harmonic capabilities.³⁸ These instruments are referred to as non-pitched percussion and use rhythm as their main form of expression. Some common non-pitched percussion instruments include snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, sleigh bells, and shakers. Even percussion instruments with harmonic capabilities are united by the motion of striking instruments with multiple mallets. This allows an individual percussionist to create multiple rhythmic layers simultaneously, something only repeatable by keyboard instruments such as a piano. With a large amount of their training and performing based around rhythmic expression, a unique rhythmic vocabulary is attractive to percussionists, as demonstrated from other popular composers for the genre such as Alejandro Viñao or Steve Reich. Much of Psathas's rhythmic language is driving and forward-moving. It sets an kinetic energy and then manipulates the energy through intricate changes. Triple and duple figures are used

³⁸ Christopher Butler, "Understanding the Percussion Works of Alejandro Viñao: An Analysis and Performer's Guide of *Water for Percussion Ensemble*," PhD Diss., University of Kentucky, 2016: 69.

freely together in melodies, often assisting the direction of phrases by stretching and compressing rhythms.

One unique way Psathas creates intricate rhythms is through composed rubato.³⁹ The intended effect is of a single part fading out or coming in while other parts retain tempo. Psathas creates unorthodox rhythms to achieve this effect, such as an isolated sixteenth note or the final partial of a sextuplet. The performer is required to perform advanced, internal counting, but the effect to the audience is a gradual *accelerando* or *ritardando*. In talking about this effect, Omar Carmanates, Director of Psathas Percussion Project and Professor of Percussion at Furman University, says:

So the effect is that of a melody with a very natural or organic *rubato*, but he with the underlying energy and groove keeping going. When you hear it, it just sounds like the melody is floating with a natural ebb and flow in and out of the exactitude of the pulse, but it's actually very controlled and very prescribed.⁴⁰

Another possible answer to Psathas's success with percussion is contained within the challenge of performing Psathas's works. He never aims to write difficult music, but the unrepetitive nature, fast, incessant rhythms, and required endurance create an advanced quality to each of Psathas's works. In addition to solving musical challenges, percussionists must also maneuver equipment and logistical challenges for each piece they perform. In this sense, percussionists are trained to think as problem solvers, rising to unique, varying problems for every work. This attitude translates to the music they play as well, causing difficulty to become an exciting journey rather than a daunting task.

³⁹ Carmanates, Interview with James Vilseck.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Psathas notes:

So what better medium for me to explore those ideas, which can be quite complex, than in the world of percussion, with percussionists? That's where you'll find the most willing punters that'll have a go with this material. And the other thing too is that percussionists will put more time into solving rhythmic conundrums. You know, they'll put the time into figuring rhythmic stuff out. The thing is, there's an attitude, generally speaking, an attitude of percussionists towards challenge which really suits my writing because the way I write is challenging to play. It's not easy. Nothing I've written is sight-readable, ever. It all requires putting the hours in. And its high stakes because you go on stage to play *One Study One Summary*, and it could all go badly. There's no room to breathe. There are hardly any rests and you're playing all the time. And so, it's high-risk, high-stakes. It's percussionists that'll go there. They're the no-harness free-climbers, putting it all on the line. So that's kind of why I'm in that world, I think.⁴¹

Carmenates echoes this sentiment.⁴² The attitude is instilled in percussionists from everyday work in the profession and in the percussion community, always striving to push things further. These conditions are perfect to tackle the music of John Psathas. This challenge, along with a complex rhythmic vocabulary and groove, help drive percussionists to continue to perform and commission Psathas for more music.

The remainder of this chapter examines a sample of Psathas's works for percussion that are frequently performed or serve as major steps in his development as a composer of percussion works. The pieces span almost thirty years and range from solo works, to chamber works, and concerti with percussion as a soloist.

⁴¹ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

⁴² Carmenates, Interview with James Vilseck.

3.1 Matre's Dance (1991)

Matre's Dance is credited with giving Psathas his first taste of international acclaim. Originally commissioned as a violin solo, this highly aggressive duo for piano and multi-percussion was commissioned by fellow New Zealand composer Jack Body and first premiered in April 1991 by David Guerin on piano and Bruce McKinnon playing percussion.⁴³ The work became an international success after being championed by Dame Evelyn Glennie who was given the work to perform at a festival in New Zealand. It is estimated that she performed the work over 1000 times in the coming years, including performance broadcasts for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).⁴⁴ *Matre's Dance* is now considered standard repertoire for piano and percussion. While composed in 1991, the composer made some edits and removed some measures in 1994. While some of the most famous recordings use the old version, such as the one by Glennie on her greatest hits CD, the 1994 version is considered the definitive edition by the composer.⁴⁵

It is recommended that the piano is amplified to ensure clarity with the percussion, which consists exclusively of drums. Psathas provides two possible percussion set-ups. The first set-up includes a single bongo, three toms, and two timpani tuned to C and A. To prevent damage to the timpani in this set-up, the percussionist should use semi-hard marimba mallets. The second set-up, using drum sticks, consists of three toms and three roto-toms, each tuned to a general pitch. The highest drum in either set-up can also be replaced by high-pitched snare. The player must ensure proper

⁴³ John Psathas, *Matre's Dance* (Wellington: Promethean Editions 1991).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

intervals for the drum regardless of the set-up to ensure blend, but not take away from the intensity of the music. The choice of which of these set-ups to use is based on the type of mallets the performer wants to use and the “edge” they want to their sound.⁴⁶

The title refers to a specific dance in one of Frank Herbert’s *Dune* books.⁴⁷ This particular dance was so intense and non-repetitive, the dancer would often collapse or die before its completion. The qualities of this story are matched in the music, with pounding low frequencies from the piano to match the intensity of the drums as the two converse in this disjunct dance. *Matre’s Dance* is a true duo as both parts are written and treated similarly.⁴⁸ Melodic-style writing in the percussion paired with clusters focused around a minor third interval in the piano blur each instrument’s traditional role. Rhythms vary from spastic to a consistent stream of clustered intervals. Both the piano and percussion serve to compliment the other part without holding the lead role too long. If not working together, the parts purposefully play off the other. Random accents help set the groove across streams of notes played by the drums and piano. This writing makes it hard for the performer or listener to ever settle, always feeling like they are pushed forward until the end of the piece. Dr. Omar Carmenates later arranged *Matre’s Dance* for a percussion soloist backed by a percussion ensemble for the Psathas Percussion Project.

⁴⁶ John Psathas, “Matre’s Dance – Piano and Percussion (1991),” John Psathas, Accessed June 17, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/matres-dance-1991>.

⁴⁷ Psathas, *Matre’s Dance*.

⁴⁸ Psathas, “From Matre’s Dance to Leviathan.”

3.2 Drum Dances (1993)

Drum Dances, a sister-piece to *Matre's Dance*, was commissioned by Glennie. A four-movement duo for drum set and piano, the work is heavily influenced by jazz and rock music from the late 1980's and early 1990's, most specifically Chick Corea's Elektric Band.⁴⁹ The qualities of Dave Weckl's drumming with the combined interaction of the drums and keyboards in the Elektric Band are what Psathas pulled from the most. Different possible rhythmic interactions between the two players separate each movement, moving gradually from chaotic and disjunctive in the first movement, to an increasing amount of interaction in the middle movements, and complete synchronization in the fourth movement.⁵⁰ These interactions between non-pitched percussion and piano are an expansion of the ideas Psathas created in *Matre's Dance*.

Unlike most works written for drum set, the piece is entirely written out and contains no improvisation. Each movement utilizes a different character and different sections of the drum set. The first movement, reminiscent of a multi-percussion solo, focuses on the drums with occasional cymbal crashes matching accented piano notes. The furious energy of the drums is matched by a strong quarter-note pulse in the high register of the piano and chaotic accents in the low register. In second movement the drum set player switches to glockenspiel while maintaining the kick drum and hi-hat pedals in a slower dance full of clashing, high textures. The third movement creates a tightly-interlocked groove based around syncopated accents on the snare and bass drum with a

⁴⁹ John Psathas, "Drum Dances – Drum set and Piano (1993)," John Psathas, Accessed May 27, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/drum-dances-1993>.

⁵⁰ John Psathas, *Drum Dances* (Wellington: Promethean Editions 1993).

hi-hat groove. The piano takes the main role in creating a variety and texture, leading with funk-like bass melodies. The two parts are more synchronized by this point as the drums match many of the piano accents. The final movement creates energy through velocity and rapid meter changes. Calling for both the bell and edge of the ride cymbal, the drum set groove now utilizes all four limbs.

In a review for *Percussive Notes*, Terry O’Mahoney says Psathas “has produced a very detailed piano/drum set score that attempts to capture the spontaneity and rhythmic interplay of a duet between these two musicians.”⁵¹ The work requires excellent control, independence, and reading skills from both musicians and remains a part of the standard repertoire today. *Drum Dances* was arranged for drum set and percussion ensemble in 2015 by Dr. Omar Carmenates for the Psathas Percussion Project.

3.3 View from Olympus (2000)

Another commission by Glennie, *View From Olympus* assisted Psathas’s launch to international fame, though this time among a more traditional, orchestral audience. Considered one of his landmark works, this double concerto for piano and percussion consists of three movements and an optional encore for the soloists. It explores the world of Greek percussion styles and techniques.⁵² Psathas credits Petros Kourtis for introducing him to these percussive styles.⁵³ Written during a sabbatical in 2000, the

⁵¹ Terry O’Mahoney, “New Percussion Literature and Recordings: Drum Dances, John Psathas,” *Percussive Notes* Vol. 37, No. 1 (February 1999): 67.

⁵² John Psathas, “View From Olympus – Concerto for Solo Percussion, Solo Piano, and Orchestra (2000),” John Psathas, Accessed June 17, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/view-from-olympus-2000>.

⁵³ John Psathas, *View From Olympus* (Wellington: Promethean Editions, 2000).

concerto is dedicated to the composer's family and was premiered by Evelyn Glennie on percussion and Philip Smith on piano in Manchester, UK on July 26th, 2002.

The first movement, *The Furies*, is based on the story of Alecto, Megaera, and Tisiphone, avenging spirits who punished crimes that human justice could not reach. The music comes from an adapted transcription of an improvised solo by one of Psathas's favorite Greek violinists, Stathis Koukoularis. The second movement, dedicated to the feelings inspired by his children, shows a more sensitive side to Psathas. It is titled *To Yelasto Paithi*, which translates to "The Smiling Child." The movement also echoes Psathas's feeling while working on the concerto at his parent's house, which looks upon Mount Olympus. The final movement is titled *Dance of the Mænads* and depicts the celebration of the Mænads as they sing and dance for their god Dionysus. Psathas recommends the percussion version of his work *Fragment* as a possible encore for the two solo performers. A duo for vibraphone and piano, *Fragment* is loosely based on material from the second movement of the concerto.⁵⁴

Like his other works featuring piano and percussion, the piano should be amplified with the exception of the second movement, which should have less amplification. The percussion soloist uses a plethora of instruments and moves between multiple mallet instruments and set-ups. The supportive writing between the percussion and piano is akin to *Matre's Dance* and *Drum Dances*, consisting of intense lines between both parts with complimenting accents. Since the release of the original, Psathas has released two "karaoke" versions of *View From Olympus*. While the soloist parts remain unchanged in these versions, Psathas replaces the orchestral accompaniment with

⁵⁴ Psathas, *View From Olympus*.

MIDI playback. The recital version remains similar to the original and simply uses a MIDI orchestra while the recently released Zeigler version replaces the orchestra with synths, guitars, and sub-bass.⁵⁵ A percussion ensemble version of *View From Olympus* will also be featured in volume 2 of the Psathas Percussion Project.

3.4 One Study One Summary (2005)

One Study One Summary is quite possibly Psathas's most performed work. An exciting two-movement moto-perpetuo for marimba, junk percussion, and electronic playback composed for Pedro Carneiro, the work lasts about twelve minutes. The title specifically avoids any programmatic meaning and the movements can be performed in any order. This work marks a major landmark for Psathas as his first work for an acoustic instrument with electronic playback, an pairing immediately influencing his work *Ukiyo* the same year, as well as future percussion works *Buyan*, *Mentacide*, *Koolish Zein*, among others. *One Study One Summary* premiered on June 16th, 2005 at the Purcell Room of the Southband Center in London performed by Carneiro.

Conception of *One Study* began when Psathas invited Carneiro, whom he had worked with before, to perform the double concerto *View From Olympus*.⁵⁶ During this time, Carneiro asked Psathas to partake in an experiment to write a solo composition for marimba, but with an added stipulation. He wanted to include various percussion sounds

⁵⁵ John Psathas, "View From Olympus (Zeigler Recital Version 2019)- Solo Percussion, Solo Piano, and Digital Audio," John Psathas, Accessed June 17, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/view-from-olympus-soli-version-2015-lpp15>.

⁵⁶ Virginia Alcarria, "Virginia's Marimba Stories – One Study, One Summary, Pedro Carneiro and Junk Percussion" (video), posted June 12, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIt4XIp-ADA>.

to the marimba part. These “junk” instruments came from other percussion set-ups Carneiro was performing at the time. Psathas wanted these extra sounds to be aggressive and, in many cases, metallic to provide great contrast from the marimba and make the marimba itself sound richer. The junk percussion instruments are also designed to combine sounds in a manner similar to a drum kit, as if it was a Dave Weckl solo. This combination of junk percussion and marimba can be considered a prepared marimba, similar to a prepared piano in the music of John Cage. To record each sound, Carneiro took each instrument he had in mind and recorded them in one take while holding a microphone to the instrument. He sent the recordings to Psathas, who then mapped each sound onto a MIDI keyboard. Carneiro assumed only five or six of the sounds would be used, but Psathas used every sound that was sent to him.

Carneiro’s idea resulted in sixteen junk-percussion sounds, including two china cymbals, an old thin cymbal, three frying pans, a Chinese wok, an unspecified metallic object, plastic woodblock, three Peking gongs, three salad bowls, and a laundry-powder lid.⁵⁷ While many of the sounds come from tradition percussion instruments, some of the instruments are “found” sounds, using everyday objects as traditional instruments or in traditional settings. Performers have various decisions to make about each sound. No size or type of cymbals and gongs are specified. When more than one of the same instruments is used, the two instruments should be different pitches. Additionally, no information is provided about harmonic intervals between instruments. The cymbals should have a should have an open, “splash” sound that provides volume and impact, but should not sustain for long amounts of time where they will cover the sound of the marimba. The

⁵⁷ John Psathas, *One Study One Summary* (Wellington: Promethean Editions, 2005).

Chinese wok can be replaced by another frying pan as long as the pitch has enough contrast. The unspecified metallic object, according to the audio files provided with the score, is a semi-resonant metal sound, similar to the sound of a metal pipe. The laundry-powder lid should be a shorter, smacking sound, similar to a “trashy” hi-hat sound.

On the matter of selecting instruments, Psathas provides two options. First, the performers may listen to the provided audio files and match pitches and sounds to the instruments on the tape.⁵⁸ This makes the interpretation as similar as possible to his originally conceived idea while also ensuring proper intervals and variety of timbre among the junk percussion sounds. The second option is to conceive the polar opposite and make all of the sounds entirely unique and different from the original recording. This option presents more artistic liberties, however, caution should be taken to consider the limitations of articulation of the original instruments, as the junk percussion parts were written with certain sounds in mind. Replacing a more staccato instrument, such as the plastic woodblock, with an instrument of contrasting articulation will remove clarity from these sections of the music. Psathas specifies that metal sounds should remain as metal instruments and plastic sounds should remain as plastic, and so on. A less desirable interpretation would be a solution halfway between these two preferences. In addition to understanding what junk sounds to include, performers must also consider their logistical set-up. The junk percussion needs to be accessible to the performer simultaneously with the marimba—a challenge at first for Carneiro.⁵⁹ He would eventually come up with a

⁵⁸ John Psathas, Interview by Kellen King, Phone Interview, April 8, 2018, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/one-study-one-summary>.

⁵⁹ Alcarria, “Virginia’s Marimba Stories...”

third-tier solution, referencing how the accidental bars of the marimba are slightly raised above the natural notes. In this solution, the junk percussion rests on tables slightly above the accidentals of the marimba. This is the most common location to place the junk percussion. Another solution includes suspending the junk percussion from a frame resting above the marimba. Within any set-up, the performer must also consider the size of the instruments. It is quite easy to line up the sixteen sounds in a way that is longer in design than the marimba itself. Many solutions use two rows, assuming the back row of instruments is within the player's reach. When possible, keep the instruments to a smaller size. Specifically, the salad bowls, cymbals, gongs, and pans can get very large in size. Ultimately, the inventory of instruments to use for the junk percussion needs to be based upon the performer's selection and set-up possibilities.

Figure 3.1- Example of the third-tier system for playing the junk percussion.



Psathas includes a second performance version of the audio with the junk sounds included if the use of junk percussion is impossible or improbable because of events like touring. Additionally, a third option is to play a re-composed version of the junk

percussion arranged by Mike Truesdell where all the junk percussion parts are rewritten to be played on the marimba.⁶⁰ In this version, the player uses the performance audio including junk percussion sounds. The replacement marimba parts occur only during the junk percussion solo in mm. 142-66. Written for easier accessibility and travel, Truesdell initially requested for Psathas to rewrite this section for the marimba. Citing a lack of time, Psathas told Truesdell he could write it himself. After a few back-and-forth emails, Psathas and Truesdell created this version focusing on various intervals to create intensity and best mimic the junk percussion. The final draft of this version is available on Mike Truesdell's website.

The first movement of *One Study One Summary* is titled *Etude* and is based harmonically in variations of B-Flat minor. It is the only movement to utilize junk percussion. Consistent with Psathas's heavy and aggressive rhythmic approach, this moto-perpetuo movement consists of a sixteenth-note rhythmic base and varying levels of emphasis marked by tenuto and accent markings. Performers must control each note while connecting melodic lines brought about through accentuation, similar to the way a performer must manage "hidden" melodies in one of Bach's Cello Suites.⁶¹ These layers, along with the diminished modality and a sense of unease and tension from the tape, help the movement to feel exciting, but with a sense of anxiety.

Much of the energy of *Etude* comes through rhythmic interaction between the marimba and tape. Psathas refers to this movement as the result of frustration on how to bring about more potential rhythmic interaction, citing similarities to composer Conlon

⁶⁰ Mike Truesdell, "John Psathas: One Study One Summary," Mike Truesdell, Accessed March 17, 2020, <https://www.miketruessedell.com/blog/psathas>.

⁶¹ Carmenates, Interview with James Vilseck.

Nancarrow and rhythmic interaction in his piano rolls.⁶² The tape part is composed mostly from a preset synthesizer in the Mac OS software Logic Pro X called Ultrabeat. More specifically, the element of Ultrabeat that keeps the music moving forward is a low, thuddy-like bass drum sound called Technoir.⁶³ Written spastically, Technoir largely interacts with the accents of the marimba throughout the entire movement. Psathas utilizes many other sounds for the tape including CR-78, a mid-range pulse sound in the background which provides a constant rhythm for the marimba and the remaining material of the tape to dance around. Various organ, bass, and percussion sounds are also included to bring variety and drive the music perpetually forward.

Figure 3.2- Opening measures of *Etude*.

The image shows a musical score for the opening measures of 'Etude'. It consists of three staves: Marimba (top), Ultrabeat (middle), and CR-78 (bottom). The Marimba staff is in 4/4 time and features a complex, spastic melody with many accents and slurs. The Ultrabeat staff is in 4/4 time and features a low, thuddy bass drum sound called Technoir, which is written as a series of eighth notes. The CR-78 staff is in 4/4 time and features a mid-range pulse sound, written as a series of eighth notes. The score is written in 4/4 time and spans four measures.

Junk percussion is introduced at m. 54 after the completion of the first major, musical arc, a bit more than a minute into the piece. This particular section is heavily based on the cadenza from the first movement of *View From Olympus* and is more rhythmically varied.⁶⁴ Larger spaces are included to allow time to reach the junk percussion and triplet rhythms are used at eighth and sixteenth-note speeds within the now broken stream of sixteenth notes. Emphasis on upbeat figures and quintuplet

⁶² Psathas, “One Study One Summary.”

⁶³ Psathas, *One Study One Summary*, Score.

⁶⁴ Alcarria, “Virginia’s Marimba Stories...”

rhythms alongside meter changes disorient and blur the pulse for listeners while the junk percussion takes the lead in the texture. After the marimba, once again, takes over from the junk percussion, contrast achieved though rhythmic unity with the tape and intense syncopated sections push to a reprise of the beginning. After a later junk percussion cadenza-like section, the piece builds once more only to fade away, maintaining a rhythmic approach to the end.

Figure 3.3- Integration of junk percussion and complex rhythmic patterns in mm. 48-61 of *Etude*.

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Junk Percussion and Marimba. The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 48-51, and the second system covers measures 52-61. The Junk Percussion part is written in a single staff with a treble clef, and the Marimba part is written in two staves (treble and bass clefs). The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and syncopation. The meter changes from 3/4 to 3/8 and back to 4/4. The score includes various musical notations such as accents, slurs, and dynamic markings.

When talking about *One Study One Summary*, Carneiro says that *Etude* is more terrestrial, about daily life, while *Summary* is much more philosophical.⁶⁵ *Summary*, the second movement, is loosely based upon the idea of a post-human earth.⁶⁶ The title, a shortened version of the original title “A Brief Summary of the Human Presence,” was shortened to avoid tainting the audience’s perception of the music and fill-in a meaning with programmatic elements.⁶⁷ The tempo is slower compared to *Etude* and the tape sounds atmospheric and less rhythmic. The player continues to perform a slew of sixteenth notes with varying levels of accentuation, but instead with soft mallets and a

⁶⁵ Alcarria, “Virginia’s Marimba Stories...”

⁶⁶ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

⁶⁷ Psathas, Interview with Kellen King.

more legato approach. Instead of hearing the articulation of every note like in *Etude*, the notes of *Summary* should blend together, while still individually distinguishable.

Harmony is clearer in this movement, sometimes only using notes from a triad or seventh chord for measures at time. As a result, harmony has a greater impact in *Summary* compared to *Etude*.

With no junk percussion, both the marimba and tape part contain a wider variety of techniques and textures. Especially in the more spacious moments between streams of notes, the marimba plays more dead strokes and roll textures. The tape uses many atmospheric synth pads and bowing-like textures. However, starting at m. 95, the tape contains an electronic drum set beat to accompany a more active marimba part. Outside this drum set, rhythmic information is sparser, especially in transitioning sections. The CR-78 sound remains, connecting this movement to *Etude*. Though, in contrast to *Etude*, the CR-78 provides a less consistent rhythmic backdrop and is sometimes being the only rhythmic information on the tape. True to the movements original title and hidden within the tape are sounds of humanity and nature. Beginning synth alone, the first of these sounds appears in m. 87 with children playing on a playground. The soundscape later evolves to the sound of a city starting in m. 113. The work fades with the noises of insects and the ocean, as if to indicate a world without humans.

Many performers already consider *One Study One Summary* a masterwork for marimba. A performance takes hours upon hours of preparation and is a high-risk, high reward type of piece. Psathas was initially worried that he overdid it.⁶⁸ He credits videos created by Carneiro, as well as many performances by him that allowed percussionists to

⁶⁸ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

see that the piece is achievable. With few rests and almost no room to breathe, Psathas also acknowledges that a performance could easily fall apart completely. This challenge, and the adrenaline rush of performing it, likely leads percussionists to continually want to perform this thrilling work.

3.5 Planet Damnation (2007)

Planet Damnation, a timpani concerto commissioned by the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra for timpani player Laurence (Larry) Reese, references a chapter from *The Great War for Civilization* by Robert Fisk. Taking advantages of the powerful energy of the timpani, Psathas aimed to create something massive and almost overwhelming.⁶⁹ Timpani is one of the few instruments with enough volume capacity that it will not be overpowered by the rest of the orchestra. This capacity helps Psathas achieve his goals for the work: to help the timpani sing and find its melodic voice. Although short for a concerto, at only about ten minutes, it is very intense.

The music of *Planet Damnation* takes inspiration from music in war and action films. These characteristics are brought about through orchestration and textures. When working on his arrangement for the Psathas Percussion Project, Carmenates mentioned: “One of the characteristics of the orchestra version of *Planet Damnation* that I find so engaging is the superimposition of driving rhythmic figures, particularly in the strings and solo timpani, against sustaining textures that range from lush woodwind chords to

⁶⁹ John Psathas, “Planet Damnation – Concerto for Solo Timpani and Orchestra (2007),” John Psathas, Accessed June 17, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/planet-damnation-2007>.

brutal brass swells.”⁷⁰ The work aims to feel militaristic and at times heroic, focusing on timbres like the snare drum. The role of the soloist must be the most heroic, shaped by the idea of confidence while balancing both rhythmic and melodic roles. Much of the soloist’s rhythms are based on transcriptions of Iranian frame drumming applied to the timpani. The most striking feature of the solo part is its heavy melodic focus. Being a fully chromatic instrument, timpani are capable of playing melodies and serious players often practice performing melodies, though it is more unorthodox to actually be called to do so in performance. Timpani have most commonly been used as a harmonic instrument, supporting the bottom end of chords in the ensemble while creating heavy percussive accents. In *Planet Damnation*, the timpani soloist is the main melodic focus, requiring extensive pedal-manipulation and challenging pitch control. Psathas claims that nothing in the timpani repertoire is as difficult for a performer. One watch of Kae Reed’s Pedal Camera video excerpt of the piece can certainly give ground to this claim.⁷¹ The melodic nature of the part does allow the timpani to sing in a new way.

Using timpani this way was an evolution from Psathas’s other timpani parts, specifically from his concerti *Three Psalms* and *Zahara*, each performed previously by Reese. Psathas would continue to use a similar style of timpani writing. *Buyan*, composed in 2017 for Diana Loomer and the Melodic Timpani Project, also uses the same melodic style of writing, separating it from other timpani repertoire. His percussion ensemble

⁷⁰ John Psathas. “Planet Damnation –Solo Timpani and Percussion Ensemble, with Omar Carmenates (2015),” John Psathas, Accessed June 17, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/planet-damnation-percussion-ensemble-and-solo-timpani>.

⁷¹ Kae Reed Pedal Cam, “Planet Damnation (excerpt) – Timpani Pedal Camera,” (video), posted Jan. 9, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1dW4SGhFtc&feature=emb_title.

timpani parts, such as the one in *Cloud Folk*, have also proven consistent to this style, remaining both percussively rhythmic while contributing to melodic lines.

Since the initial release, two other versions of *Planet Damnation* have been released, both in 2015. One version is for timpani soloist with a digital realization of the orchestra part. The other replaces the orchestra with a thirteen-piece percussion ensemble arranged by Carmenates.

3.6 Kyoto (2011)

Kyoto was Psathas's largest work for percussion ensemble and remained so until he composed *Cloud Folk* in 2017. Written for five players, it calls for a traditional mallet quartet of two marimbas (can share one 5-octave marimba) and two vibes, along with one percussionist primarily performing on three concert toms. Other percussion sounds include suspended cymbal and triangle while a mallet player additionally contributes on glockenspiel. *Kyoto* was commissioned by the Ju Percussion Group for performance at the Taipei International Percussion Convention. Premiered on May 20th, 2011, it lasts for about eight minutes. The title refers to an improvisation recorded in Kyoto, Japan by pianist Keith Jarrett in 1976. Psathas credits this improvisation and Jarrett, a known influence of his music, for inspiring him to compose and start his musical journey.⁷²

The style of *Kyoto* differs from some of Psathas's most aggressive works like *Drum Dances* or *One Study One Summary*.⁷³ However, it is still rhythmically adventurous, primarily using a sixteenth-note base to move through time and meter.

⁷² John Psathas, "Kyoto – Percussion Quintet (2011)," John Psathas, Accessed June 16, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/kyoto-2011>.

⁷³ Ibid.

While Psathas's music usually maintains a triple or quadruple meter, *Kyoto* does not. Meter changes occur because Psathas composed the melody without barlines and figured out the downbeats afterward. The percussion one part, or the first vibraphone player, is generally designated as the soloist and should be centrally located in the ensemble. Other performers also take central solo roles throughout the work, though on a more individual basis. To help distinguish between the foreground and background layers, Psathas indicates solo and non-solo markings on parts to indicate to the players which part should be on top of the texture.

Figure 3.4- Opening solo of *Kyoto*. Notice the advanced rhythmic patterns.



Kyoto is noteworthy for the melodic use of the concert toms. Calling for only three toms, they contribute rhythmically and as a percussion texture, but also provide reinforcement of impact and melody to the mallet instruments it accompanies. The toms often take solos on top of mallet ostinato-like patterns to push the piece forward. Compared to other parts written for the same instrument, the tom writing in *Kyoto* has its own voice and contributes more completely to the entire composition through melody and counterpoint. -

Figure 3.5- Melodic writing on the toms in *Kyoto*.



Kyoto has seen many performances since its release. The rhythmic energy and variety of sounds created from limited instrumentation make it accessible. Audience members appreciate the excitement and energy while percussionists appreciate the technique and execution. The piece, accessible in terms of equipment, allows for easier set up and touring capabilities.

3.7 White Feather (2018)

In the time between *Kyoto* (2011) and *White Feather*, Psathas continued to release works for percussion, though not as many with a percussion focus. This time period also represents some of Psathas's most ambitious works, many of which include percussion, such as the *No Man's Land Project*. One of the next works to bring much attention to Psathas within the greater percussion community was *Cloud Folk*, composed and premiered in 2017. It was Psathas's largest work for percussion up to that point. Details about *Cloud Folk* will be greatly explored in the following chapters.

The following year, Psathas composed an even larger work for percussion with *White Feather*. Written for thirteen percussionists, Brian West commissioned *White Feather* for the Texas Christian University Percussion Orchestra, an ensemble known for playing large-scale works. The ensemble first performed the work on their campus on October 27th, 2019 and followed up with a performance at PASIC the following month. Originally called "Our Ever-Loving Ghosts," the title of *White Feather* refers to the feather of an angel and the belief that finding a white feather in our path is a sign of

protection; The thought that these angles are sending us signs to let us know they are around.⁷⁴

White Feather grew out of the things Psathas learned while writing *Cloud Folk*.⁷⁵ The two works share many similarities. Looking at Psathas's career at the time of writing, both pieces were Psathas's largest percussion work at the time. He had to figure out how to keep each player active. In both cases, Psathas learned how to create complex, layered backgrounds with the variety of players. These layers have movement within them, as the cycles of the repeated patterns are different lengths, meaning they restart at different times. These patterns also contribute to long arcs of music, such as crescendos lasting over a minute long. Both works also show instrument pairings of similar timbre, giving the perception of subtle changes to non-pitched percussion instruments. Once through most of the writing process, Psathas admits that he found ways he could have included a few more players.

Also similar to *Cloud Folk*, Psathas asked Brian West if he could add piano or some sort of electronic playback to address the issue of a fuller bass sound within the percussion ensemble.⁷⁶ While *Cloud Folk* does use a piano, West instead denied both requests for *White Feather*. This limitation required Psathas to find other ways to address the problem. One solution was the addition of steel pans, a technique he used in the percussion soloists for *View From Olympus*. This work is the first time steel pans were used in one of Psathas's percussion ensemble works, specifically using double tenor and

⁷⁴ John Psathas, "White Feather (for 13 Percussionists) (2018)," John Psathas, Accessed June 16, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2019/11/27/white-feather-for-13-percussionists>.

⁷⁵ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

⁷⁶ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

tenor bass pans. The steel pan texture is featured throughout the work, often paired with other voices in the ensemble.

3.8 Recent and Future Projects

His output of new percussion works has increased in recent years, likely resulting from Psathas's increased notoriety as a percussion composer. Many upcoming works have been commissioned by familiar faces. Michael Burritt, commissioner of *Cloud Folk*, also commissioned *Koolish Zein*—described as a hybrid acoustic-electronic concerto. Within the three movements, the soloist alternates between marimba and vibraphone and is accompanied by a percussion quartet and audio backing track. The instrumentation of the quartet is similar to Burritt's own *Home Trilogy*.⁷⁷ The work remains under exclusivity until early 2021.

Other more recent works include *Atalanta*, *Cubasonic*, and *Connectome*. A piano and vibraphone duo with digital audio commissioned by Fabian Ziegler, *Atalanta* fits well within Psathas's rapid paced electronica style. The piano and vibraphone blend together well on top of a rhythmic, yet atmospheric soundscape. Another large-scale project involving 500 musicians and 60 speakers, *Cubasonic* was composed for the 2020 CubaDupa festival in New Zealand. *Connectome* is a trio of musical reflections based on the mapping of neural connections in the human brain. Commissioned by percussionist Alexej Gerassimez and the Signum saxophone quartet, the work uses various jazz styles and, at times, microtones as the percussionist alternates between drum set and vibraphone. The most recently finished work is a new percussion concerto for Alexej

⁷⁷ Burritt, Interview with James Vilseck.

Gerassimez entitled *Leviathan*. Inspired by Beethoven's *Pastorale Symphony* and its depiction of nature, the soloist utilizes an entire station of junk percussion made of recycled materials.⁷⁸ Originally set to be performed in June 2020, *Leviathan* will premiere with Gerassimez and the Düsseldorf Symphony in September 2021.

Psathas's website additionally lists more future projects involving percussion. A new trio for Percussion, Piano, and Clarinet is being written for faculty members at Texas A&M International University.⁷⁹ Architek Percussion Quartet has commissioned a new work for percussion quartet and digital audio. Two more percussion concertos are also listed, including a quadruple percussion concerto for percussion quartet, orchestra, and electronics in the works for Re: Percussion and WDR Funkhausorchester Köln and a double percussion concerto for Fabian Ziegler and Luca Staffelbach. Both concerti are still in discussion but are currently listed for expected completion in 2022.

With all the potential future releases, it is clear that Psathas will have a continued impact on percussion repertoire. This vote of confidence has been echoed by those who have worked closely with him. Michael Burritt, head of percussion at the Eastman School of Music, has commissioned Psathas multiple times. He says Psathas has his own voice and has contributed the evolution of percussion instruments and repertoire.⁸⁰

Percussionists should expect to see performances of Psathas's works for some time to come.

⁷⁸ John Psathas, "Percussion Concerto for Alexej Gerassimez and the Dusseldorf Symphony," John Psathas, Accessed June 18, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/projects-update-page-2/2018/11/8/percussion-concerto-for-alexej-gerassimez-and-the-dsseldorf-symphony>.

⁷⁹ John Psathas, "Upcoming Projects," John Psathas, Accessed May 19, 2020, <https://www.johnpsathas.com/commission-schedule>.

⁸⁰ Burritt, Interview with James Vilseck.

Table 3.1- List of Psathas's Works with Percussion by Year

Year	Title of Work	Instrumentation
1991	<i>Matre's Dance</i>	Multi-Percussion, Piano
1993	<i>Drum Dances</i>	Drum Set, Glockenspiel, Piano
1994	<i>Overture</i>	Brass and Percussion
1996	<i>Happy Tachyons</i>	Mallet Percussion, Piano
	<i>Stream 3</i>	Piano, Bass, Drum Set, Chamber Orchestra
1998	<i>Stream 3.3</i>	Piano, Bass, Drum Set, Electric Guitar, Organ, Audio Playback
	<i>Spike</i>	Mallet Percussion, Piano
2000	<i>Omnifenix: Saxophone Concerto</i>	Saxophone, Drum Set, Orchestra
	<i>View From Olympus: Double Concerto</i>	Percussion, Piano, Orchestra
2001	<i>Psyzyssym: Vibraphone Concerto</i>	Vibraphone, Chamber Orchestra
	<i>Fragments</i>	Vibraphone, Piano
2004	<i>Zeibekiko: Album</i>	Greek Traditional Woodwinds and Percussion, Orchestra, Audio Playback
2005	<i>Fragments (Duo Version)</i>	Vibraphone, marimba
	<i>One Study One Summary</i>	Marimba, Junk Percussion, Audio
	<i>Ukiyo</i>	Vibraphone, Marimba, Audio Playback
2007	<i>Planet Damnation: Timpani Concerto</i>	Timpani, Orchestra
2009	<i>Djinn: Marimba Concerto</i>	Marimba, Strings, Harp, Percussion
	<i>Djinn: Recital Version</i>	Marimba, Audio Playback
	<i>Waiting, Still</i>	Balinese Gamelan Solo, Piano
2010	<i>Super City Fanfare</i>	Brass, Percussion, Orchestra
2011	<i>Kyoto</i>	Mallet Quartet, Toms
2012	<i>4BY4</i>	Multi-Percussion Quartet
2013	<i>Between Zero and One</i>	Sextet and Audio Playback
2014	<i>100 Years: Commemorative Video</i>	Traditional Middle Eastern Instruments, Vocals, Guitar, Piano, Violin, Vibes, Chimes, Finger Cymbals
2015	<i>View From Olympus (Recital Version)</i>	Percussion, Piano, Audio Playback
	<i>Planet Damnation (Solo Version)</i>	Solo Timpani, Audio Playback
2016	<i>Halo</i>	Piano, Percussion
2017	<i>Buyan</i>	Solo Timpani, Audio Playback
	<i>Cloud Folk</i>	Percussion Octet, Piano
2018	<i>Mentacide</i>	Solo Snare Drum, Audio Playback
	<i>White Feather</i>	13 Percussionists
2019	<i>View From Olympus (Zeigler Version)</i>	Percussion, Piano, Audio Playback
2020	<i>Atalanta</i>	Vibraphone, Piano, Audio Playback
	<i>Connectome</i>	Saxophone Quartet, Percussion
	<i>Cubasonic</i>	Brass, Percussion, and Audio Playback
	<i>Koolish Zein</i>	Solo Percussion, Percussion Quartet, Audio Playback
	<i>Leviathan: Percussion Concerto</i>	Solo Percussion and Orchestra

3.9 Psathas Percussion Project

One of the most recent major percussion projects related to Psathas is the Psathas Percussion Project. Dr. Omar Carmenates, Professor of Percussion at Furman University in Greenville, SC, took many of Psathas's non-percussion works and created arrangements for percussion ensemble. The list of eleven works consists of a variety of chamber music and concerti. Many of the arrangements take works for solo percussion with non-percussion accompaniment and re-arranges the accompaniment for percussion exclusively. These changes have much to do with finding non-percussionist players.⁸¹ For example, the difficult piano part to *Matre's Dance* requires a high level of commitment to perform, which can discourage many prospective piano players. By keeping the works in the percussion world, the works can become more accessible to the soloist. The project additionally aims to bring new life to the works included, such as *Piano Quintet*.

After discovering the score for *View From Olympus* during his graduate studies, Carmenates had been keeping an eye on Psathas's music.⁸² Years later, Carmenates commissioned *4BY4*, a piece he included on his first solo CD "The Gaia Theory." For that same CD and on a whim, Carmenates arranged two versions of Psathas's *Waiting, Still* for gamelan and piano. The first replaced the piano part with two mallet keyboard parts. The second retained the new keyboard parts while also replacing the gamelan with vibraphone and tuned gongs. Psathas seemed to enjoy the arrangement and approached Carmenates with a proposal to arrange a few more pieces. Since a sabbatical was coming up for Carmenates, he agreed to the project. After a series of back and forth

⁸¹ Carmenates, Interview with James Vilseck.

⁸² Ibid.

conversations, the two agreed to make two CDs. Volume One would focus on a collection of chamber pieces and was released in 2019. Volume Two is currently in production and is focused on concerti. Carmenates completed the works for Vol. 1 in Spring of 2015 and has since been gradually arranging the concerti. Each year at some point in the summer, a group of performers and editors gather in Greenville, SC to record the parts of the project. Using video conferencing, the performers were able to connect with Psathas during the recording process to achieve the correct style and feel for all the works.

Table 3.2- Works Arranged by Omar Carmenates for the Psathas Percussion Project

Vol. 1
<i>Aegean</i>
<i>Corybas</i>
<i>Drum Dances</i>
<i>Jettatura</i>
<i>Matre's Dance</i>
<i>Musica</i>
<i>Piano Quintet</i>
Vol. 2
<i>Djinn</i>
<i>Planet Damnation</i>
<i>Three Psalms</i>
<i>View From Olympus</i>

The project has proven to be quite successful, as shown by the number of performances of the arrangements since their release. Multiple colleges have performed arrangements as part of their showcase concert at PASIC, including Colorado State University who performed *Drum Dances* in 2019 and University of Tennessee-Knoxville who played *Piano Quintet* in 2018. *Piano Quintet* has also been performed by Furman University, University of Utah, and Truman State. *Jettatura* has been performed at Stony Brook University and by the Escape X duo.

Though “Volume 2” is mostly recorded at this point and will requires much post-editing, Carmentes hopes to release it soon. When asked about the possibility of a Volume 3, Carmentes laughed. He says he is open to the idea of arranging another piece or two, but nothing on the same scale as the first two volumes.

CHAPTER 4. INTRODUCTION TO *CLOUD FOLK*

Composed in 2017, *Cloud Folk* was commissioned by Michael Burrirt for the Eastman Percussion Ensemble who premiered the work on November 11th, 2017 in Indianapolis, IN as part of their showcase concert at PASIC. The work calls for eight percussionists on a wide variety of instruments and one piano player and lasts approximately thirteen minutes. It utilizes a wide variety of timbres combined with the rich, dense textures Psathas is known for.

The work was approximately a \$10,000 commission paid entirely in-house at the University of Rochester Eastman School of Music thanks to a number of factors, primarily the John Beck Composition Prize.⁸³ This prize along with donors Ann Carol and Paul S. Goldberg helped pay for about half the commission. The other half of the commission was supported with funds from the Eastman Percussion Department, Michael Burrirt, Kathleen Holt, Stephen Lurie, and Ruth and Bill Cahn.

The idea to create the work came from a dialogue between Psathas and Burrirt.⁸⁴ The conversation was not originally about a commission, but the idea was brought up and Psathas became excited. Burrirt wanted a larger sized percussion ensemble work as he believed there was a lack of high-quality literature for larger percussion ensembles compared to the large number of quartets and quintets for the genre.⁸⁵ The only stipulation Burrirt gave to Psathas was the number of players and some of the instrumentation. The two originally agreed upon eight players for the work. Psathas came back with two requests. The first request was the addition of a piano to the

⁸³ Burrirt, Interview with James Vilseck.

⁸⁴ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

⁸⁵ Burrirt, Interview with James Vilseck.

instrumentation. The idea was not just for increased color exploration. According to Psathas, one of the limitations of percussion instruments is the lack of a true melodic bass sound.⁸⁶ He acknowledges the use of timpani and marimba for their lower register, but each comes with a drawback. The timpani are limited in the colors it can produce and the ability to freely switch pitches is an advanced skill set, making the part inaccessible to many players. The low end of a marimba gets weaker and projects less the farther down the range you go. Adding a piano allows more freedom with deeper bass tones. Burritt accepted this addition.

The second request was the addition of an electronic playback track, something Psathas has specialized in since composing *One Study One Summary* in 2005. This request was denied, presenting Psathas with a bit of a challenge. He had been writing so much for acoustic instrument with playback hybrid pieces that Psathas had to shift gears slightly to write this piece without one. Even without a playback track, the influence of his recent work in electroacoustic music is apparent in *Cloud Folk*. Psathas acknowledges this thought, saying the line between electronic and acoustic music can be blurry at times. Some of the inspired sounds include the heavily rhythmic shekere from the start of the piece and many of the bowed mallet textures which simulate a chorus-like synthesizer.

Psathas initially worried about providing proper parts to all players due to the large number of players involved in the work. However, this fear subsided once he reached the middle of the piece. These worries would briefly return and again dissipate when Psathas composed his next percussion ensemble work, *White Feather* for thirteen percussionists

⁸⁶ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

in 2018. In addition, understanding the reputation of the commissioning ensemble, Psathas admits he felt a large sense of freedom in composing the individual parts.

Cloud Folk is Psathas's third work for acoustic percussion ensemble and his largest at the time of writing it. The work loosely follows a brief narrative provided by the composer:

The Cloud Folk are (imaginary) visitors to earth, invisibly parked in our upper atmosphere, observing 21st century human behavior. I'd imagined an arrival driven by optimism, intense curiosity, and excitement; followed quickly by incomprehension, shock, and the hastiest possible departure (back into a wondrous universe teeming with life). With no contact made, in fact avoided at all costs, we were never aware we'd been visited. The music loosely follows this narrative.⁸⁷

Even with a story, the work is not intended to be programmatic and the narrative is not meant to be taken literally. The idea of the story starting to come in about halfway through writing the piece.⁸⁸ In an interview, Psathas expanded his explanation:

This kind of semi-chaotic, but organized, cooperation between individuals. Each doing quite independent things a lot of the time but creating something as a unit. That's where I got the idea of looking down. And then I started to think about non-terrestrials looking down on us. And then I started thinking, what would any intelligent extra-terrestrial think if they came and hovered invisibly in our clouds, and look down on us? I think we would be incomprehensible. Our behavior would be incomprehensible if you added up the whole of the human species, the whole human race. My thought was that they would come, look at us, and leave, and we would never know.⁸⁹

Instead of a story, Psathas was focusing more about the specific sounds and textures, aiming to create a particular emotional color. He says, "music is everything" and

⁸⁷ Psathas, *Cloud Folk*: v-vi.

⁸⁸ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

wants the listener to avoid viewing the piece through the lens of a title or program notes.⁹⁰

The primary emotional color Psathas aimed for in *Cloud Folk* is wonder.⁹¹ These feelings are not just aimed at the audience as they are also a reflection of the composer as he was discovering the work. The listener should achieve a sort of “aesthetic calm,” where they feel energized and relaxed at the same time, alongside feelings of warmth.⁹² Using minimal harmonic tension, the work achieves this feel regardless of its fast tempo.

From an audience’s point of view, *Cloud Folk* was written with the idea of multiple listening layers. There are many places with obvious melody and accompaniment, specifically the solo sections of Parts 2 and 4. There are other sections with multiple layers occurring simultaneously. During these sections, the idea is to listen to the totality of all the parts, not one specific instrument or part. In this sense, listeners of the work should not feel the need to focus on any specific section and should allow their ears to wander to whatever catches their attention. With each new listening, an audience member will be able to notice new and subtle details. With that in mind, the way each individual ensemble performs the piece and brings out its character can completely change the experience for the listener and what they notice pop out in a performance.

Since the premiere performance at PASIC, *Cloud Folk* has experienced an influx of performances. A YouTube search brings up a large list of recordings from many universities including University of Nebraska and Kent State, as well as some high schools. While performing *Cloud Folk*, Cedar Ridge High School was the first-place

⁹⁰ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

winner of the 2019 Black Swamp Percussion Ensemble Competition Large Scale Division. Burritt believes the piece will see many more performances in the future since it strikes a balance between being both artistically and pedagogically sound.⁹³

After the premiere, a few changes were made to the piece. Many of these changes came from decisions made by Burritt at Eastman. The rhythmic shekere part at the beginning was originally written for shakers.⁹⁴ The adjustment was made for the sake of rhythmic clarity and projection, as it was hard for the mallet parts to latch on to shaker. Additionally, placing the shekere on a stand and playing it with their hands made rhythms louder and easier to control. Additional adjustments were made to the drum set part to strengthen the locations of downbeats. Eastman also changed the bowings in Part 3 from a single note to octaves, creating a fuller sound, especially helpful as the bowings are the primary source of melodic material in that section.

While all those changes have made it into the final published score, early copies of the score include an errata summary. The errata includes the following changes: The tempo should be read as quarter note equals 200 instead of the dotted quarter note; The last chord of m. 143 in percussion 6, 7, and 8, should be an E and B-Sharp, not a C-Sharp; The G-Sharp in m. 470 of percussion 4 should be a G.

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⁹³ Burritt, Interview with James Vilseck.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5. THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF *CLOUD FOLK*

Cloud Folk centers about specific sounds and textural ideas created within the work.⁹⁵ Though it is a one-movement, continuous work, it is divided into five numerical-named parts (Part 1, Part 2, etc.) with a few additionally labeled sections within some parts. Based on the overall energy of the parts, the work is in an arch form, with Parts 1 and 5 having the most energy, Parts 2 and 4 serving as mid-energy solo sections, and part 3 being the most relaxed. Parts 1 and 5 do not share any melodic material, but they both contain similar musical ideas, rapid chord progressions, longer periods of louder dynamics, and a wider variety of textures including similar orchestrations. Parts 2 and 4 are more similar in the way they share some exact melodies in the solo voices and a few of the accompaniment parts. Part 3 is the most open and atmospheric compared to the other parts. It contains longer melodic arcs and a thinner accompaniment texture.

The four additional sections labeled outside of the main parts serve mostly as transitions. The Swells transitions the climax of Part 2 to the softer start of Part 3. Part 3 and 4 Transition is a literal title, increasing tension from Part 3 with the addition of non-pitched percussion voices to push into Part 4. The Arrival and Coda both occur at the end of Part 5. Arrival is the shortest individual section, simply used to show the climactic “arrival” of the entire piece. Coda, true to its musical term, brings the piece to a calm conclusion by recalling sounds and textures from the beginning of Part 1.

⁹⁵ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

Table 5.1- Formal Breakdown of Each Titled Section of *Cloud Folk*

Section	Measures	Timing ¹	Harmony
Part 1	1-110	0:00-3:02 (3:02)	Various
Part 2	111-191	3:02- 5:26 (2:24)	E Maj 6/5; G-Sharp Phrygian
Swells	192-215	5:26-5:51 (0:25)	A Maj 6/5
Part 3	216-299	5:51- 7:32 (1:41)	C-Sharp Minor
Part 3 & 4 Overlap	300-324	7:32-8:01 (0:29)	C-Sharp Minor
Part 4	325-416	8:01- 9:52 (1:51)	C-Sharp Minor; F-Sharp
Part 5	417-483	9:52- 11:12 (1:20)	A Lydian
Arrival	484-495	11:12- 11:26 (0:14)	A Maj 6/5
Coda	496-545	11:26- 13:05 (1:39)	Various

5.1 The First Page

In his composing process, Psathas always starts at the beginning and allows the music that follows to evolve from this earlier material.⁹⁶ These opening bars provide the basis for all the material in the rest of the piece. More specifically for *Cloud Folk*, these opening bars likely refer to the first six measures. The beginning of the work was all about creating a few percussion sounds, with a bit of texture and the beginnings of harmony.⁹⁷ One of these sounds, the tubular bell note, specifically serves a role of setting a serious tone for the work.⁹⁸ It was one of the first sounds conceived in the piece alongside the shekere. The harmony presented in these opening bars is sparse, but all fits within the confines of a single chord type, the major 7th chord. The is most obvious in the piano at m. 6, which plays a broken arpeggio of C Maj₂⁴. Other harmonic material presented in the vibraphone, chimes, and bowed small bells only provides an E-Flat and a G, the interval of a major 3rd. While not a full chord, these notes still fit into the major 7th idea as either the root and 3rd of a chord or the 5th and 7th of a chord. Tracing chord

⁹⁶ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

progressions following the first six measures, the opening chord is likely intended as an A-Flat major 7th chord, where the G and E-Flat serve as the 5th and 7th of the chord. This proposed chord additionally lines up with the chord progression from mm. 19-39.

Figure 5.1- Mm. 1-6 of *Cloud Folk*

The shekere and cabasa parts, and later the sleigh bells and low tom, provide those few percussion sounds Psathas mentioned. These voices create the most rhythmic velocity and rhythmic interaction at the beginning, especially since the different parts combine quarter note and dotted quarter note emphasis simultaneously. Instruments with similar timbre are also paired, such as the shekere and cabasa that serve similar roles. This pairing of similar timbres enhances a variety of expansive background textures, created from both melodic instruments and non-pitched percussion.

The sleigh bells beginning in m. 3 present the idea of dynamic waves, or consecutive alternations of crescendo and decrescendo. The sleigh bells also present the idea of pulse destabilization. In contrast with the shekere, both the sleigh bells and the

cabasa imply two different time signatures than the 12/8 notated, with the cabasa implying a 6/4 time and the sleigh bells implying 4/4. This destabilizing of the pulse helps impose different rhythmic layers to the work and decrease structural predictability.

Another way to decrease predictability are purposeful rouge elements, created by through-composing parts with perceived randomness. In the beginning, this randomness is demonstrated by the rhythmic material of the vibraphone and the low tom.⁹⁹ Though it is a six-bar repeat over a single tone, the vibraphone presents a non-repetitive collection of 8th, quarter, and dotted quarter notes, perceived as more percussive instead of melodic. The pattern does not follow the agogic accent pattern of any specific meter but does provide another percussive texture to work. The aggressive low tom in measure five serves the role of destabilizing the pulse by playing in a different meter entirely, switching between 3/2 and 12/8 meters while other parts remain stationary in 12/8.

The final, main element of the opening bars is seeing how Psathas layers the textures of the piece. At the onset, there are already three percussive layers in the background with minimal harmonic information presented by the chimes and bowed small bells. Soon after the sleigh bells add in followed by the floor tom in quick succession. Psathas is known for writing dense textures and this idea is presented immediately. The sounds include a combination of short, percussive sounds and legato bowed sounds.

The basis of *Cloud Folk* builds off of these ideas presented in the first six bars: structural unpredictability, the use of major seventh harmonies, dynamic waves, pairing instruments of similar timbres, and changes and destabilization of the pulse.

⁹⁹ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

5.2 Structural Unpredictability

In order to keep the music interesting and more varied, Psathas strives to avoid predictable turns in his music. One purposeful attempt at avoiding predictability in *Cloud Folk* is varying the transitions between sections.¹⁰⁰ The first movement reaches its apex and transitions to Part 2 at the moment of highest tension. By immediately removing many voices and transitioning to a new key, the change allows Psathas to now build Part 2 as its own idea. By contrast, the transition from Part 2 to Part 3 is a decrescendo. The transitions out of Parts 3 and 4 are both crescendos, Part 3 using the addition of percussion sounds to grow and Part 4 using a repeated rhythmic phrase that occurs more frequently as the new section approaches. Both of these later transitions are followed by changes in instruments and the number of voices playing to introduce the new section. Part 5 grows into the Arrival, which finally decrescendos into the coda, a long diminuendo leading to a final chord from the chimes and piano.

Psathas also avoids predictability with a frequent use of anticipations, a form of non-chord tone where the melody or pitch will be played before the arrival of the harmonic change. In *Cloud Folk*, this arrival usually occurs a quarter note or eighth note before the next chord, but can be as early as a half note as is the case of the Percussion 4 solo entrance in m. 360. Anticipation also leads to many up-beat based rhythmic figures, especially as transitional measures. By placing emphasis on weaker parts of the beat, Psathas builds tension in different ways, often in contrast with ostinato patterns around it.

¹⁰⁰ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

Figure 5.2- m. 191 (left) and m. 445 (right). Both use upbeat figures to lead into the next phrase.

The image displays two musical staves for percussion and piano. The left staff (m. 191) shows eight percussion parts (Perc. 1-8) and a piano part. Perc. 1 is a melodic line. Perc. 2-8 and the piano part feature rhythmic patterns with accents and dynamics like *ff*. The right staff (m. 445) shows the same parts with different rhythmic patterns, including accents and dynamics like *sfz* and *ff*.

A third way to avoid predictability is by controlled entrances and exits of the voices. Many times, as a new voice enters the texture, it begins underneath the texture on a weaker beat.¹⁰¹ Adding voices in this way allows Psathas to gradually morph and control the textures rather than change them abruptly. This is not always the case, as many entrances are specifically meant to be heard, such as the addition of shekere at the downbeat of Part 3 & 4 Transition.

¹⁰¹ Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

5.3 Harmony

Harmonically, Psathas has stated that the entire work is homogenous and based upon different inversions of a major seventh chord.¹⁰² Each inversion of the major seventh chord comes with its own flavor and emotional texture, with the intent that hearing the same chord multiple times will intensify the texture it exudes, similar in style to minimalist music. Basing his example on an A maj⁷ chord, Psathas discussed the effects of different inversions. In first inversion, with the C-Sharp on bottom, the chord feels more like a C-sharp minor triad with an added minor sixth. Second inversion feels grander. Finally, third inversion provides the most dissonance between the G-sharp and the A in the bass of the chord.

Psathas begins the piece by cycling through the different inversions with each chord in the progression. The piano starts in m. 6 with a C Maj₂⁴, followed by E-Flat Maj₃⁴ and then G Maj₅⁶. The following chord returns to root position where the pattern restarts. The pattern of switching inversions is made stronger with the entrance of the marimba in m. 19. Starting in root position with the piano, the marimba works through the inversions in the retrograde order of the piano.

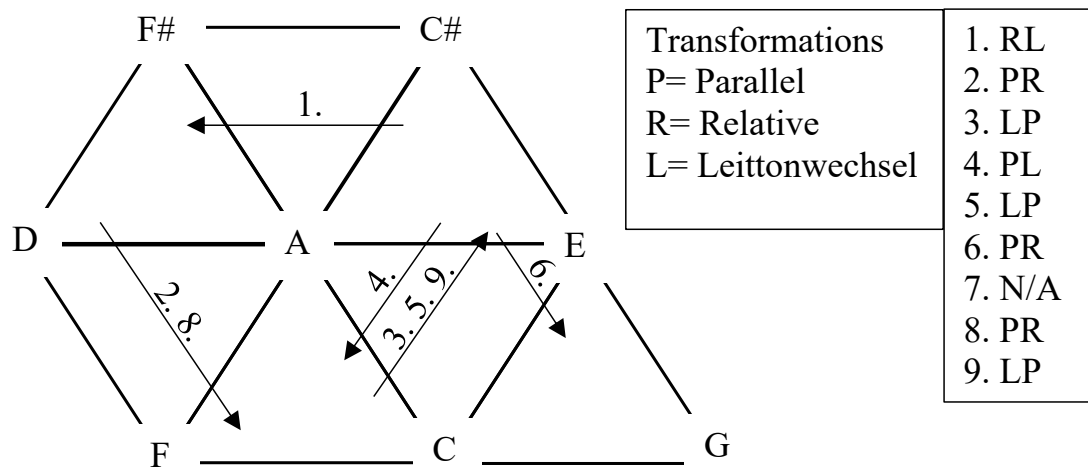
From the beginning until m. 82, there is a consistent pattern of the root notes of each chord spelling out a major triad or major seventh chord. There are two likely reasons for this. The first is to connect back to the idea of basing the harmony of the piece on major seventh chords. The other thought is the use of neo-Riemannian chord progressions to avoid a more predictable, functional harmony.¹⁰³ Outside of Part 1, Part 5 uses the

¹⁰² Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

¹⁰³ Neo-Riemannian music theory relates the harmony of different chords directly to each other rather than a chord's relationship to a tonic pitch.

most chord progressions. In contrast to Part 1, these chord progressions do not spell out major seventh chords. Instead, the progression focus on neo-Riemannian transformations, alternating between A Maj⁷, F Maj⁷, and D Maj⁷, with a single C Maj⁷ in the middle to add variety. With the single exception of C Maj⁷ moving to D Maj⁷ in m. 474, each of these chord changes follows a two-step neo-Riemannian transformation. Excluding again the C Maj⁷, each chord rotates around the pitch A. Unlike Part 1, these chords do not follow a pattern of chord inversions. Though the inversions regularly change, they occur more for smoothing voicing and accommodation of the melody than they do for exploration of the different feels of the inversions.

Figure 5.3- Chords from mm. 446-484 displayed in a Tonnetz with transformations



Parts 2, 3, and 4 are much more reminiscent of the minimalist-like feature of fully saturating a single chord. With some rare exceptions, such as the Swells sections, each of these parts are primarily based on a single chord. Part 2 builds an ostinato pattern based on E Maj₅⁶ with heavy emphasis on the bass-note G-Sharp, almost giving a feel of G-Sharp Phrygian. These harmonies are used from the start of the section at m. 111 all the way until m. 170. The harmony switches to A Maj⁷ alternating with D/G-Sharp, a much

more tense chord helping to lead to the next section. The descending bass line starting at m. 179 helps push finally to the Swells, the climax section of Part 2 with constant changing harmony every two bars.

The resolution of the swells sets up the primary harmony for Part 3, A Maj₅⁶ which ultimately gives way to C-Sharp minor. C-Sharp minor fully established by the entrance of the low marimba notes in m. 233 and is constantly reinforced as the tonic by lead-ins from the piano and marimba of A, B, then C-Sharp. The harmony stays consistent all the way through most of Part 4, finally changing at m. 401 to F-Sharp. The following progression leads to an authentic cadence in m. 416 that sets up A Lydian for Part 5.

Most of the harmony of the piece is transparently-written, rarely involving non-chord tones. When building up to more tense moments, this cleanliness starts to get a bit muddier. Growing to the climax at m. 105 in Part 1, the harmony takes unexpected turns and involve more non-chord tones. The B-Flat Maj₂⁴ of m. 82 is consistent with material before it until m. 89, when an E is substituted in for the D, creating a half-step clash between E and F. The subsequent chord at m. 91 is A-Flat Maj⁷. In addition to the progression differing from earlier in the work, there is an added F in the chord. The climax of Part 1 is built from a cluster of A-Flat, C, D-Flat, F, and G, containing all the notes of D-Flat Maj⁷ and the notes of A-Flat Maj⁷, with the exception a missing E-Flat in the later chord. The E-flat is later played in the melody by the tubular bells and bass piano. This melody is exclusively built off of notes from D-flat Maj⁷ for three bars and then switches to exclusively A-Flat Maj⁷ for the last three bars of Part 1. The final melodic note, E-flat, played by four separate players, serves the role of an imperfect

authentic cadence leading to the emphasis of G-Sharp on the downbeat of part 2, which respelled enharmonically, becomes A-Flat, forming the authentic cadence.

5.4 Dynamic Waves

The idea of a dynamic wave is the consistent alternation of crescendos and decrescendos to create ripples of volume gradually emerging and immediately receding back into a texture. The idea is first introduced by the sleigh bells in mm. 3-5. Each occurrence of the sleigh bells throughout the entire work is accompanied with this dynamic idea. Immediately following the sleigh bells at the beginning is the entrance of the piano. Playing a repeated figure, the piano's dynamic waves are longer, extending on average for about five bars each from beginning the crescendo to ending the decrescendo. The piano is soon joined by the marimba and vibraphone, each playing matching harmony and dynamic shape. Occasionally, the peak of the wave occurs at different times for each instrument, though only a few beats apart. These waves remain nearly constant until m. 69 and provides the dynamic motion for the piece until that point. Breaks in the waves only occur between harmonic figures when only ostinato instruments are playing. Psathas often uses these breaks to change chords, using the softest dynamics to smooth harmonic transitions.

The climax of the work starting at m. 446 establishes much of its excitement based on the constant ebb and flow of the dynamics. Five of the nine players crescendo for two bars and decrescendo for two bars without fail until the Arrival at m. 484. Other non-melodic players provide a surface-level, constant dynamic for these waves to rise and fall against. The Arrival at m. 484 also follows the wave-like pattern, albeit with a longer, more-unison shape from the entire ensemble.

Figure 5.4- Dynamic waves in mm. 470-3.

The image shows a musical score for five parts: Perc. 1, Perc. 4, Perc. 6, Perc. 8, and Piano. The score is in 4/4 time and features dynamic waves. Perc. 1 starts with a *p* dynamic and transitions to *ff*. Perc. 4, Perc. 6, and Perc. 8 all start with a *ff* dynamic. The Piano part starts with a *mf* dynamic and transitions to *ff*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

A subset of dynamic waves is used a few times. More specifically, subsets involve an intense crescendo followed by a *subito* drop to a soft dynamic level followed by another crescendo. The most notable use of this technique is the Swells section beginning at m. 192. As the title of the section suggests, the main effect of this section comes from massive crescendos performed by all players. Loud tones sustained by the chimes, timpani, and low register of the piano complete the peak of each crescendo while all other voices immediately drop back down to a softer dynamic. The final two swells are extended by two beats before a final, long decrescendo leading to Part 3.

5.5 Instruments of Similar Timbres

Many of the textures created in *Cloud Folk* are created through subtle changes, creating blended, hybrid timbres. Much of this idea comes from the way Psathas paired instrumental voices together, especially for non-pitched percussion voices. In the beginning of the work, a shekere is paired with the cabasa. Both instruments create a

short, tic-like sound. Thanks to a similar timbre, the two instruments can blend together to sound like a single, more-complex hybrid percussion sound. A similar idea comes again later at m. 65 where the maracas enter as a transitional instrument leading to m. 69. The maracas, like the shekere, create a short tic-like sound using beads and a gourd. Since maracas are smaller, they will likely create a similar but higher pitched sound that pairs well with the shekere, almost like a different-pitched shekere. Starting at m. 69, a closed hi-hat enters and the shekere ends. If the top to m. 69 is led by two short percussive sounds, the shekere and cabasa, then m. 69 is also led by two short percussive sounds, the maracas and hi-hat.

The pairing of similar timbres to combine voices is also used melodically, especially between piano, marimba, and vibraphone. The dynamic waves at the beginning pair these three instruments, though they peak their crescendos at different times. This change in timing at the loudest part of the crescendo adds variety and produces a subtle shift in the timbre. A similar pairing occurs near the end at m. 511 where the three instruments collectively play short gestures where none of the voices should stick out more than the others.

5.6 Destabilization of the Pulse

Cloud Folk often deals with instruments implying multiple meters simultaneously. The primary example from the beginning of the work is listed above. Many subsequent examples are allusions to that first page. Each time the sleigh bells come in, they perform a dotted eighth-note rhythm, regardless of the meter. Since the sleigh bells are the first entrance in Part 3, they imply a triple meter on top of the established duple meter.

While Part 2 and Part 4 are similar, one of the main ways the contrast is through the meter. Part 2 is written in triple meter while Part 4 is in duple meter. This difference, however, does not stop Psathas from reusing Part 2 ostinato patterns in Part 4. For example, the Piano pattern used in Part 4 is rhythmically the same as Part 2, implying a different meter than other voices performing simultaneously.

The Piano in Part 4 also demonstrates another way of destabilizing the pulse, resolving ostinato patterns at different times. Within Parts, 2, 3, and 4, there are many ostinato parts played simultaneously. Within each individual part is some form of repetition and an implied strong beat most easily felt at the beginning of the repeated pattern. Psathas makes each individual pattern different lengths. On top of beginning each pattern at different times, different lengths mean strong beats between multiple parts rarely line up, creating a murkier texture than one with a strong feeling of resolve every couple of measures. In contrast, when the strong beats of parts do line up, it creates a more significant event.

CHAPTER 6. PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS FOR CLOUD FOLK

With an understanding of the construction of *Cloud Folk* along with Psathas's style, we can examine performance considerations of the work. This chapter explores specific technical, physical, and musical challenges related to mounting a performance of *Cloud Folk*. It will introduce strategies to bring out musical nuances that demonstrate the greatest sense of wonder and musical journey, as described by Psathas, as well as specific performance techniques and considerations.

6.1 Architecture

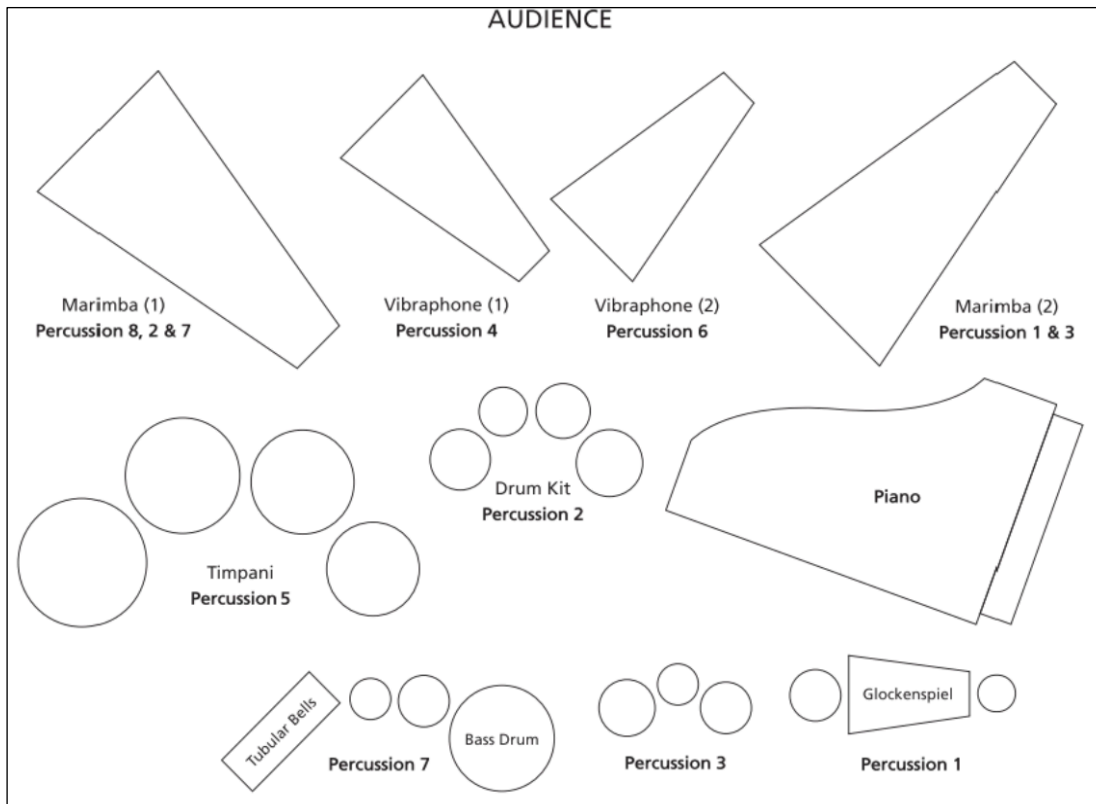
When deciding where to place the instruments for staging a performance, begin by looking at the diagram provided in the score. It uses three distinct rows, placing the marimbas and vibes in the front, the timpani, drum kit and piano in the middle row, with the remaining auxiliary percussion, toms, and glockenspiel in the back row. This set-up allows the main time-keeping instruments to be at the back of the ensemble, creating smooth communication to the rest of the ensemble and to the audience. The main issue with this set-up is the ability to see across the ensemble. With three rows, players in the back row may be unable to see a conductor or cue from players up front. In particular, the view for Percussion 1 can be blocked by the piano, who will likely have the lid raised.

The provided diagram is a great place to start as a default on the first rehearsal. Adjustments should be made by each ensemble to fit their rehearsal and performance spaces, as well as equipment needs. Because of the possibility of sharing instruments, players 2, 7, and 8 should remain closer together in the set-up, with players 1 and 3 similarly paired. Due to the characteristics of the instruments, it is also recommended to

keep the marimbas and vibraphones closer to the audience and the floor tom and glockenspiel farther away. The marimba especially struggles to project in its lowest range and would be hard for an audience member to hear when placed behind a large drum. A glockenspiel is bright in the timbre and will not struggle to be heard when paired with the other instruments in the work.

Video evidence shows that most ensembles use a similar set to the provided diagram, including Eastman, McCallum High School, and University of Nebraska. Often times, the piano player is pushed a bit further out or all the way to the side of the ensemble to keep sightlines clear. Some ensembles, like University of Nebraska tilt the marimba and vibes on a bias, allowing the drum kit player to move farther forward. Along with moving the piano to the side of the ensemble, this change eliminates the need for a third row by combining the back two rows. Other small adjustments include duplicating shared instruments. For a performance at the University of Kentucky, an extra marimba was placed in the front row to allow Players 1 and 3 to each have their own instrument. Some ensembles may also add an extra shekere or set of chimes to avoid the need for performers to walk across stage while sharing instruments.

Figure 6.1- Recommended set-up for a performance of *Cloud Folk*¹⁰⁴



6.2 Instrument Selection/Requirements

Cloud Folk calls for a large amount of standard percussion equipment as outlined in Tables 6.1 and 6.2. The shekere should be mounted on a snare stand or doumbek stand and placed with the opening facing down. If mounted on a snare stand, use the arms to hold the main portion of the gourd. When playing the shekere, the performer should use their hands to strike the outside of the gourd where the beads are loose, likely towards the bottom. The stand is necessary since both hands are needed to perform the part. Also due to the aggressive nature of the part, the stand will provide stability during a performance.

¹⁰⁴ Psathas, *Cloud Folk*, vii.

The beaded maracas may or may not have beads on the outside, similar to a shekere. The beads on the outside will provide more projection and clarity but are not crucial. Maracas should have a crisp, light sound which is most easily achieved with smaller internal beads. A good example of clear maracas would be a pair of joropo-style maracas.

Certain instruments and accessories can be shared between performers including sleigh bells, maracas, tubular bells, shekere, and some bows. Depending on the performer's placement in the ensemble set-up, it may be easier to use two instruments instead of sharing. For example, though there is time to share the sleigh bells, transporting them across the stage would be difficult without creating extra noise. Keeping the sleigh bells in one spot would require extra music stands and movement across the stage.

Additionally, In the absence of the small bells called for in Percussion 7, a set of crotales or an additional glockenspiel can be used.

Table 6.1- Instruments Utilized by each Percussion Player

Percussion 1	Glockenspiel, Medium-sized Shekere (mounted), Suspended Cymbal, 5.0 Octave Marimba
Percussion 2	Cabasa, Kick Drum, 2 Mounted Tambourines (headless), 5.0 Octave Marimba, Bow
Percussion 3	Beaded Maracas, 2 Concert Toms (12” and 14” recommended), Low Tom (16” Doubled-Headed Tom recommended), Sleigh Bells, 5.0 Octave Marimba
Percussion 4	Vibraphone
Percussion 5	Concert Bass Drum, Medium-sized Shekere (mounted), 4 Timpani, Triangle (6” recommended), Tubular Bells
Percussion 6	Sleigh Bells, Vibraphone, 2 bows
Percussion 7	Concert Bass Drum, Beaded Maracas, China Gong, Finger Cymbals, 5.0 Octave Marimba, Small Bells (song bell or equivalent), Tubular Bells, 2 Bows
Percussion 8	5.0 Octave Marimba, 2 Bows

Table 6.2- Minimum Instruments Required Overall

5.0 Octave Marimba	2
Vibraphone	2
Glockenspiel	1
Tubular Bells*	1
Sleigh Bells*	1
Pair of Beaded Maracas*	1
Concert Bass Drum*	1
Medium-sized Shekere*	1
Concert Toms	2
Low Tom	1
China Gong	1
Pair of Finger Cymbals	1
Set of Small Bells	1
Cabasa	1
Suspended Cymbal	1
Kick Drum	1
Piano	1
Mounted Headless Tambourine	2
Set of Four Standard Sized Timpani	1
Bows	7

*This instrument is shared. A second instrument can be used for variety and convenience.

6.3 Inserting Rehearsal Marks

One notable quality of the score is the lack of rehearsal marks or checkpoints between the titled sections, leading to periods of over 100 measures lacking any visual arrival point for the individual musicians. The following table provides recommended rehearsal marks which should be established early in the rehearsal process. These rehearsal marks will increase communication in rehearsal, let the performers know where to listen, and provide stable check points in the practice room and during rehearsal.

Table 6.3- Potential rehearsal marks and cues by measure number.

Measure #	Cue Description/ Lead In
19	Tom Fill beginning in m. 17
39	Tom Fill beginning in m. 37
69	Maraca entrance in m. 65
91	Accent Pattern in m. 90
111	Part 2; Piano groove
120	Groove settles; Perc. 4 arrives to ostinato
145	Timpani adds on beat 2; Solo phrase simultaneously concludes
170	Solos finish on beat 2; Sixteenth notes simultaneously begin in ostinato
192	Accents in bass instruments starting in m. 188 lead into the Swells
216	Part 3; Sleigh Bells begin
233	Percussion 3 Bass Marimba enters
261	Piano strums strings
300	Part 3 & 4 Overlap; Shekere enters
325	Part 4; Maracas enters
361	Percussion 4 Vibe Solo begins; Vibe anticipates the entrance in m. 360
401	Chord Changes; Crescendo begins
417	Part 5; Accent Pattern in m. 416; Groove changes; Hi Hat enters
436	Chord Change; Melody from previous phrase ends
446	Climax begins; Accent Pattern in m. 445.
484	Arrival
496	Coda; Tom Fill beginning in m. 493; Shekere begins
511	Gestures in Percussion 6, 8, and Piano

6.4 Conducting

Many performances of *Cloud Folk* do not utilize a conductor. Some of these include the Eastman School of Music, University of Nebraska, Cedar Ridge High School, and McCallum High School. The absence makes *Cloud Folk* a larger piece of chamber music, requiring the musicians to use their ears much more than their eyes to remain connected to each other. Some other ensembles instead use a conductor, such as JAMU percussion ensemble during the European premiere of the work or Millikin University. Either option is perfectly acceptable depending on individual ensemble experience and needs.

One possibility, a sort of middle of the road option, would be to begin rehearsals with a conductor and later remove the conductor. Due to the large amount of time between clear arrival points in the music, a conductor early in the process can help clarify cues and entrances to instill confidence in the players. During this process, a conductor should clearly identify listening points. After the performers have demonstrated moderate success, the conductor should remove themselves from the podium and allow the players to focus on visually cuing each other and listening to the rest of the ensemble, transitioning from a focus on self-performance in the early rehearsals to a focus on the group. This process is what found the most success for the October 2019 performance at the University of Kentucky. Michael Burritt, in his work for the premiere performance with the Eastman Percussion Ensemble followed a similar process, though not purposefully. Burritt says:

We were messing around with a bunch of different things because ultimately, I decided I wouldn't conduct it. I had started rehearsing it as a piece I was going to conduct but I felt it was the kind of piece that had so much groove in it that conducting it, at least two thirds of the time, felt like I was in the way. I wanted them to be listening. You know, it's not like conducting *Ionisation* or something

which is obviously a very different kind of piece. That's a piece you would conduct. Anyways, I think in the end of all things, making that decision actually brought the piece together really, really great.¹⁰⁵

Ultimately, the coach for the ensemble should make the decision for using a conductor in performance. Using a conductor can make a performance safer for the members, but possibly at the cost of less organic realization.

6.5 Balancing layers

Like many of Psathas's pieces, *Cloud Folk* is filled with a variety of dense textures. Each named part consists of a unique layering of all nine parts with a different focus. It is helpful to think of the extended, often repetitive textures like the surface of an ocean. It has waves that move up and down independent of each other while also moving together. Melodic layers meant to be heard are considered above surface level while repetitive parts that should blend in are below surface level. When discussing balance, it is helpful to identify which parts fit above or below this ocean surface level.

When in doubt, in a performance of *Cloud Folk*, it is always better to play too much below surface level, or too soft. The piece quickly loses a sense of groove and becomes heavy if all performers play too loud. Many of the notes are not meant to be heard, but instead interact with parts around them. It is also common for the melody to be performed by fewer players than those playing background parts—particularly in the two solo sections, Parts 2 and 4. Within these sections, individual parts may have isolated notes that need to exist closer to surface level than others, such as the bass notes of Player 3 in Part 3. Other sections are more about interactions between parts and all nine parts

¹⁰⁵ Burritt, Interview with James Vilseck.

have important material, often the case in Part 1. In each section, focus on identifying important parts and to isolate them in rehearsal. All performers should know what to listen for in each section.

6.6 Individual Section Breakdown

The following section will provide solutions to specific problems contained in each Part of *Cloud Folk*. The guide is based upon a target analogy developed by James Campbell along with the saying “Awareness of expression cues a specific technique that develops accuracy and arrives at consistency.”¹⁰⁶ The primary idea is to understand the style or character of each section first, then explain what techniques should be utilized to achieve it. After that, specific examples for each section will be referenced.

6.6.1 Part 1

Part 1 can be broken down into two distinct sections, from the top to m. 69 and m. 69 to the beginning of Part 2 at m. 111. The musical responsibilities and effects for both sections are distinctly different, requiring different listening and technical skills.

The opening bars up to m. 69 most accurately depict the sense of wonder Psathas was aiming to portrait with the piece, achieved by the colorful major seventh chords and progressions, the focus on dynamic waves, and an atmospheric soundscape. Knowing how Psathas composes his pieces, these opening measures serve an important role in presenting the main source materials and setting the tone for the entire work.

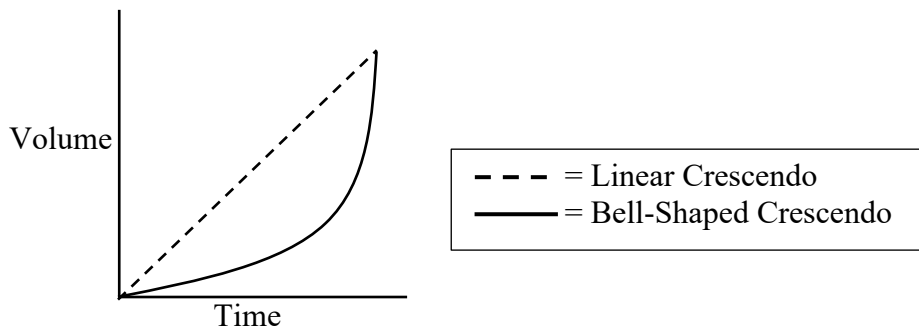
¹⁰⁶ James Campbell, “Rehearsal Strategies for the Concert Percussion Ensemble,” Unpublished manuscript.

From the beginning, the ostinato instruments should immediately lock in with each other. These include the Percussion 1 shekere, Percussion 2 cabasa, and Percussion 4 vibraphone. This grouping of instruments remains consistent until m. 60 and is the primary listening point and timekeepers for the ensemble, with the shekere being the most important instrument of the group. While remaining in the background, the shekere must be audible to all ensemble members. Using the ocean analogy, Percussion 1, 2, and 4 create the surface level for the majority of this section. The Percussion 3 low tom adds on to the trio in m. 4. While playing a more through-composed part, the floor tom should enter above surface level and then balance with the trio. Accents should remain above surface level. The floor tom will not need to fight to be heard, as the instrument fits in a different frequency range compared to the other instruments playing. It is recommended to spend time isolating Percussion 1, 2, 3, and 4 at the beginning to achieve the best feel; a feel that should be on the front side of the beat and forward-moving. If working farther along, include Percussion 5 triangle, which mimics the Percussion 4 vibraphone part starting at m. 13.

The greatest sense of wonder emerges from the other parts, Percussion 6, 7, 8, and Piano who perform much of the harmony and dynamic waves. All dynamic waves should be performed with bell-shaped crescendi. Bell-shaped crescendi increase dynamics exponentially rather than linearly, waiting until later to get louder and then growing more quickly. Though marked to begin at a piano dynamic, these waves should start closer to *niente*, or nothing. The audience should not notice the entrance of these voices until they are already in the middle of the texture. Additionally, *niente* soft sections better hide changes in harmony, creating a greater sense of wonder and mystery. When the three

main harmonic voices are all playing together at m. 39, including Percussion 6 vibraphone, Percussion 8 marimba, and piano, balance to make the marimba the primary color. The marimba can easily get lost in the texture and the most colorful blend comes from hearing the marimba sound lead at the start of the sustains. Following bell-shaped crescendi, the individual voices, which peak at different times, should wait until around two dotted quarter notes before their peak to begin emerging from the texture.

Figure 6.2- Bell-shaped vs. linear crescendo



At m. 17, the marimba is instructed to perform double lateral rolls, instead of the more traditional double vertical rolls. Double vertical and double lateral are both terms referring to four-mallet performance technique. Double vertical strokes are created as two mallets in one hand strike the bars simultaneously. Double lateral strokes occur when one mallet strikes after the other. Lateral rolls would be more legato and provide a more similar texture to the vibes and piano. The drawback to double lateral rolls comes from a decreased dynamic range and control, especially at louder dynamics. As stated earlier, the marimba will already struggle to be heard as a solo instrument in the texture. To give better control and dynamic contrast, the performer can choose to play these as double vertical rolls instead, though either method is acceptable. The primary goal is to

maximize the crescendos while presenting a clear, balanced harmony. Players should choose their method of rolls based on what will best achieve that goal.

Figure 6.3- Double lateral and double vertical rolls notated



As stated earlier, the ostinato instruments should play at surface level. Other instruments with crescendo effects, such as the bowed small bells, should start as soft as possible and end well above surface level. The sporadic bass notes in the piano paired with Percussion 4 vibraphone, such as in the downbeat of m. 28, should stick out above surface level and be allowed to decay naturally. A two-measure tom fill leading into m. 19 and m. 39 creates to points of cohesion. The shekere should remain unchanged leading up to m. 69 as all other parts fade out. Percussion 3's maracas should slightly outbalance the shekere as the new voice in the measures leading up to m. 69. In the case that some musicians have lost their place before m. 69 and there is no conductor, it is recommended that all players take the cue from the maracas. No matter where each player is in the piece, they should agree that the beginning of the maracas is the downbeat of m. 65.

Figure 6.4- Percussion 3 in mm. 17-8. Tom fill often used to lead into new phrases.



The second section of Part 1 beginning at m. 69 is one of the more difficult sections in terms of balancing all voices. Compared to earlier, where the main voices stayed on the same instruments, the melodic voices and pairings change nearly every

couple of measures. This shifting of material after m. 69 changes the listening focus from a select few melodic sounds and effects, to the total sound of all the voices combined. Much of the minimal melodic content is doubled, particularly by the bass piano or marked with accents to be emphasized. Performers should aim to blend-in the with full ensemble by playing slightly softer than the marked dynamics in this section unless told otherwise by their conductor or coach. Additionally, the meter has switched from a compound 12/8 to a simple 3/2, meaning strong beat emphasis has changed from every third eighth note to every fourth eighth note. Though it is composed in 3/2, the feeling is one closer to 6/4, making the perceived pulse every other eighth note, more rapid than the previous section. With this in mind, playing should remain light and forward-moving.

The role of the shekere from before has switched to the hi-hat in Percussion 2. The hi-hat should remain light in touch, focusing on the driving quarter note and be just loud enough to be slightly audible for the ensemble members. Accents can be played using the shoulder of the stick on the edge of hi-hat, though this should be avoided if it compromises tempo control. Opening the hi-hat slightly when there is an eighth note or other notes that need more emphasis can also provide variety. For example, the accents in mm. 90, 94, 98, and 101 would all benefit from slightly opening the hi-hat to better reinforce the accent pattern.

Melodic material is sporadic, occurring in short phrases throughout. The first of these melodies to rise above surface level comes from the left hand of the piano and timpani in m. 70. A similar idea is repeated in m. 74, with the addition of vibraphone from Percussion 4. This melody is the closest things *Cloud Folk* has to a melodic motive and should be brought out any time it occurs. A less obvious melody occurs with the

vibraphone from Percussion 6, right hand of the piano, and timpani in mm. 78-81. The pairing of Percussion 6 and piano continues until m. 90, with the joining of glockenspiel from Percussion 1 starting in m. 84.

Figure 6.5- Recurring melody from bass voices in mm. 70-3.



Measure 90 begins a call and response. Most voices play a syncopated accent pattern together in m. 90, followed by a three-measure crescendo with occasional melody. These accented bars serve as an arrival point for the ensemble to stay together without a conductor. Measures 90, 94, 98, and 101 should each focus on this accent pattern. Material between these accented measures should use bell-shaped crescendos, waiting until the last few counts to grow. The final push to Part 2 begins at m. 105. The kick drum in Percussion 2 should enter somewhat abruptly and serve as another arrival point for the ensemble. These final six bars contain an obvious melody which should balance around the tubular bells of Percussion 7. Though not written, a final crescendo in m. 110 would be appropriate to push the music to the next part.

6.6.2 Part 2

The next section of *Cloud Folk* is far more repetitive and straight forward. In the big picture, a texture slowly emerges one instrument at a time, later accompanying a quasi-improvised solo line. Though it shares meter with the second half of Part 1, the meter feels perceptually closer to 3/2 than 6/4, feeling more relaxed and slightly laid back even though the tempo has not changed. Due to changes in harmony, Part 2 also feels

darker. Ostinato parts should play with a warmer sound by relaxing the grip on their mallets and moving the mallets with a slower velocity.

The groove that makes up the majority of Part 2 fully arrives at m. 121. Everything before is building to that point. This growth should not feel forced. For the ostinato parts, playing exactly what is written on the page is best practice. The agogic accents from the chords in the piano compared to the single tones should help drive a sense of groove and syncopation. Allow the drum set part of Percussion 2 to form naturally, without a need to emphasize any added parts. The only real moving line during this opening phrase is Percussion 4's vibraphone, which plays a slowly descending line before settling in at m. 121. In terms of timekeeping, the piano groove established at m. 111 is the main timekeeper until Percussion 2 takes over at m. 121. In rehearsal situations with no conductor and no piano player, another performer in the ensemble may need to conduct or audibly keep time from the beginning of Part 2 to m. 121. Percussion 1, 5, and 8 are all good options as they do not play during this period of time.

Once m. 121 arrives, Percussion 2, 3, 4, and piano will maintain the tempo and feel for most of the movement. Their ostinato is later joined by Percussion 1 marimba in m. 133 and Percussion 5 timpani in m. 145, both at the conclusion of a phrase from the solo voices. These parts should blend in with the established ostinato, slightly thickening up the texture while avoiding overplaying. The soloistic voices come from vibraphone and marimba of Percussion 6 and 8 in m. 125, with the addition of another marimba from Percussion 7 in m. 133. These voices play the solo lines in unison. Each part should be balanced equally and should follow a traditional dynamic contour, meaning crescendo when the line travels upwards and decrescendo when the line travels down. Dynamic

countering allows the solo line to have more direction, as well as farther separate it from the static ostinato texture of the other parts. In between the solo passages, some of the solo voices will temporarily join the ostinato. These places include mm. 133-9, 146-9, and 161-3. Individual players should aim to blend in with the texture, as though the line itself will slightly dominate due to doublings.

The resolution of the solo passages begins on the third main pulse of m. 170, indicated by the addition of sixteenth notes. From here, the piece begins building all the way to the Swells at m. 192. Until m. 192, there are no strong anchor points for the ensemble to be aware of cohesion. There are two small connections that can help boost confidence in ensembles without a conductor. For a slight period in m. 179-80, Percussion 1 and Percussion 6 play in unison. Furthermore, a small visual cue, such as a head nod, can be used for the meter change at m. 185. While the music does not audibly change to common time and many parts ignore the change, a brief gesture will allow all performers to know they have arrived together. As another affirmation, performers should listen for the accent pattern from Percussion 5 timpani beginning in m. 188. This pattern concludes with three consecutive upbeat accents in m. 191, joined by Percussion 2 and Piano.

The Swells beginning at m. 192 are the climax of Part 2. Voices which play the accents at the top of each phrase should sustain through the *subito* piano dynamics. These voices include Percussion 5 timpani, Percussion 7 tubular bells, and the left hand of the piano. All other voices should utilize bell-shaped crescendos. It is recommended to wait one full bar from the *subito* piano marking to begin the crescendo to maximize the swelling effect. A slight visual gesture should accompany the peak of each crescendo to

assist the timing for Percussion 5 and 7. The flurry of sixteenth notes from each player does not provide the clearest tempo amidst the peaks of the crescendos. A miscue from the accenting voices can throw off the perception of timing for the entire ensemble, making it tough to recover until the downbeat of Part 3.

If played at written tempo, some of the sixteenth-note patterns written at swells are impractical to perform correctly and verge on the edge of proper execution. One example is the triangle pattern created for the right hand in the vibraphone for Percussion 6. Starting at m. 206, the only appropriate sticking (which hand should be used to play each note) for each sixteenth-note gesture is R L R L R, R L R L R, and repeated until m. 213. This sustained pattern forces the right hand to play consistent eighth notes while making harmonic leaps for an extended period at a rapid tempo. It is possible to make slight adjustments to these parts which retain harmony and improve endurance and rhythmic clarity. Ensembles which have done this demonstrate that these changes are possible with virtually no perceptible change to the overall soundscape.¹⁰⁷

Figure 6.6- Percussion 6; Measures 206-7; Normal part vs. an adjusted part.



6.6.3 Part 3

Part 3 is the most atmospheric portion of the piece, almost like a ballad. The melodic material is primarily made through the bowing of marimbas and vibes. All other

¹⁰⁷ Evans Drumheads, “Cloud Folk by John Psathas | Eastman Percussion Ensemble PASIC17” (video), posted March 6, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bvh1z3jPfAI>.

sounds should be as dark as possible. Ostinato textures should sound more distant. Those who make up the ostinato should strive to use the slowest velocity stroke possible for each note. With the exception of the bass notes in Percussion 3, no individual part should stick out of the texture. For the bowed notes, listen to the tone and volume of the note when first starting so that the crescendo is controlled and does not change the mood of the section by suddenly overbalancing the ensemble. The crescendi should be paced and last as long as possible.

Beginning at m. 244, Percussion 1 and 3 share the same instrument. While the parts are written to allow both players on the same marimba, the players can get uncomfortably close. For example, on the second main pulse of m. 244 when Percussion 1 comes in, Percussion 1 plays an A while Percussion 3 plays the G-Sharp a half-step below, physically inches apart. If physical space allows it, consider using a second marimba. The second instrument would also alleviate any problems related to sharing music stands between both players.

Similar to Part 2, one of the primary performance issues in Part 3 is staying cohesive over a long period of time. Outside of the cues and rehearsal marks mentioned earlier in this chapter, understanding where harmonic cadences resolve will help the ensemble stay together. A three-note lead-in slowly emerging from the bass voices forms these cadential points, leading to the tonic of C-Sharp minor. The first occurrence begins in m. 247 in Percussion 3 on the low end of the marimba and is later joined by the low register of the piano at m. 288. Beginning infrequently, this resolution soon evolves to a five-measure cycle with resolutions occurring on the downbeat of mm. 249, 265, 270, 275, 280, 285, 290, and 295. Percussion 3 should give these bass notes a bit more weight

by relaxing the grip on the mallet and using a bit more arm weight in the stroke. This technique will help keep the sound dark but emphasize it more for the ensemble to hear. The five-bar pattern continues through Part 3 & 4 Overlap as well as Part 4. Entrances often occur at the resolution of these cadences, such as the shekere and cabasa entrances at m. 300 and m. 315 respectively.

6.6.4 Part 4

Though its own titled section, Part 4 slowly evolves out of texture of Part 3, making Part 3 & 4 Overlap quite the literal title. Part 4 could have begun at any point since to start of the Overlap because its opening measures resume the same ideas from the Overlap. In the overall form, Part 4 is most similar to Part 2 and is mostly a solo section. Style and characterization considerations from Part 2 should be applied in Part 4. The main difference between the two sections is that Part 4 utilizes one vibraphone soloist instead of a trio. This difference means a smaller number of voices are fighting to be heard against a greater number of voices in the background. Since there is only a single soloist this time around, all background voices need to play especially quieter than the marked dynamics during the solo, potentially two dynamic markings lower than marked to achieve balance.

Also, in contract to Part 2, entrances should be noticeable and begin slightly above surface level, including Percussion 7 maracas in m. 325, Percussion 6 vibraphone at m. 330, Percussion 1 marimba and Percussion 2 drum set at m. 335, Percussion 8 marimba at m. 345, and Piano in m. 353. After establishing their pattern, these voices should slowly back off the volume until completely blended into the texture.

As a continuation of the Overlap, Part 4 begins with five-bar phrases. This phrase grouping continues until m. 345, where the music switches to four-bar phrases, most easily indicated a changed bass pattern. The bass now omits the second C-Sharp of the pattern and switches to C-Sharp, E, A, then B. The four-bar phrases are especially helpful for the Percussion 4 vibraphone soloist to understand, as many of their entrances and phrases line up with the resolution of the four-bar phrases, or in anticipation to the four-bar phrases. Their entrance at m. 360 is in anticipation to the resolution at m. 361. The pickup to m. 369 leads to the resolution that same measure. The entrance in m. 377 is also in the first bar of the four-bar phrase. Additionally, some of the solo material is completely borrowed from Part 2, though it is played by a different performer. To create the most effective performance, Percussion 4 should refer to Percussion 6, 7, and 8 about additional phrasing outside of dynamic contour during the solo. Other performers are playing repeated measures, each of different lengths and beginning on different measures. Extra markings concerning these four-bar phrases can be helpful to notate into the parts.

Like earlier, Part 4 consists of an extended duration without an obvious anchor point for the ensemble to adhere to, especially without a conductor. The chord change at m. 401 is the easiest, perceptible change for the entire ensemble before arriving at Part 5, but can still be easily missed if a player is distracted. The obvious forces in this change are the left hand piano and Percussion 3 bass marimba, both of whom are instructed to project the F-sharp harmonic change. Other voices are instructed to increase dynamic to slightly higher than *forte* or crescendo slowly. Voices jumping to *forte*, Percussion 2, 3, 4, and right hand piano, should increase volume here, but should hold back enough to still

allow room for the extended crescendo into part 5, especially mm. 408-9 when *crescendo poco a poco* is repeated.

One other secondary anchor point for members to be aware of is the melody that occurs in the bass voices starting at m. 406. This motive helps push harmonic tensions forward until the resolution into Part 5 at m. 416. The bass voices should be the most prominent layer from m. 406 to Part 5. All other voices should blend equally with each other and crescendo as a group, making sure there is enough room in the volume for the syncopated accents in m. 416 to be emphasized. This entire phrase is a long crescendo, so delay the dynamics until closer to Part 5.

6.6.5 Part 5

The final main section of *Cloud Folk* is most similar to Part 1 because of its diverse use of texture and harmony. The overall tone of Part 5 should be one of arrival, excitement and climax. The tone of the section slowly brightens up from darker previous sections until reaching the climax of the entire work at m. 446. All music at the beginning of Part 5 pushes to the arrival at m. 446 and there should be a feeling of momentum up to that point. Once the ensemble arrives at m. 446, the tone should be at its brightest and the work should feel victorious.

Perceivable arrival points occur more frequently in Part 5, making recovery from error easier in this section. Allow Percussion 5 timpani to lead the ensemble to the double-bar line at m. 424 and stay in the forefront of the texture with Percussion 3 marimba, Percussion 7 tubular bells, and left hand piano. This same group will push to a harmonic shift at m. 436 where the harmonic tension and excitement from the whole

ensemble will push towards the climax. Measure 445 should be louder than m. 446 as the phrase approaches the climax.

Unlike much of the work, melody drives the climax of *Cloud Folk* beginning at m. 446. Instruments take one of three primary roles during this time: melody, harmony, or rhythm. Proper balance of these layers, with the right blend within each layer, will provide the most effective outcome up through the Arrival. The melody is played by Percussion 6 Vibraphone in its high register, Percussion 7 tubular bells, and the left hand of the piano. The melodic voice should stay elevated above the other two layers throughout. Isolating these three voices will help find the most effective blend of the trio, which should be slightly dominated by the color of the tubular bells. The next layer, harmony, is played by Percussion 1 glockenspiel, Percussion 4 vibraphone, Percussion 6 in the lower register, Percussion 8 marimba, and right hand of the piano. These voices play a rhythmic ostinato throughout while adjusting for the chord changes. The most distinct and important quality of this layer is the constant dynamic waves. Bell-shaped crescendos are essential to avoid over-balancing the melody. The bulk of the crescendo should occur in the final two counts before the peak, with most of the swell below surface level about three counts after the peak. This allows these voices to have noticeable energy and impact without covering the melody. Percussion 6 vibraphone and piano should give extra attention to isolate the melodic and harmonic layers, as they play both simultaneously. The melodic layer should stay static dynamically while the harmony should be expressive. It is also recommended for Percussion 6 to use four mallets and place a slightly harder mallet in the highest voice to increase distinction between the layers. The final layer of rhythmic support at m. 446 is played by Percussion 2 drum kit,

Percussion 3 low tom, and Percussion 5 timpani. This layer should stay somewhere in the middle of the ensemble blend, louder than the low end of the harmonic layer's dynamic waves but quieter than the melody by at least a perceived dynamic level. Since the open hi-hats in Percussion 2 can easily cut through the sound of the ensemble, moderation is needed. Percussion 3 Low Tom and Percussion 5 Timpani play in complete rhythmic unison until the Coda at m. 496. The primary articulation should come from Percussion 3 low tom with Percussion 5 timpani providing a fuller sound and resonance. Very articulate mallets are necessary on the timpani to provide the best clarity of rhythm when playing in the lowest registers of the instrument.

The Arrival serves as an extended resolution to the phrase before it. Character and stylistic choices used at the climax should continue to be used here.

Figure 6.7- Mm. 470-3; Dynamic waves in melodic and harmonic layers

The musical score for measures 470-3 is presented in five staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The instruments and their dynamic markings are as follows:

- Perc. 1:** Treble clef, starting at *p* (piano) and moving to *ff* (fortissimo).
- Perc. 4:** Treble clef, starting at *ff* (fortissimo).
- Perc. 6:** Treble clef, starting at *ff* (fortissimo).
- Perc. 8:** Treble clef, starting at *ff* (fortissimo).
- Piano:** Grand staff (treble and bass clefs), starting at *mf* (mezzo-forte) and moving to *ff* (fortissimo).

The score illustrates dynamic waves for each instrument, showing the progression from *p* to *ff* for Percussion 1 and from *mf* to *ff* for the Piano. The Percussion 4, 6, and 8 parts maintain a constant *ff* dynamic level.

6.6.6 Coda

The closing section of the piece recalls the very beginning of the work, led by an atmosphere created with the shekere ostinato and varying major-seventh harmonies. From here to the end, the piece should sound like it is fading away. Instruments that fade out should make their exit as subtle as possible. Sounds should be lighter in touch but warm in color.

Small gestures begin at m. 511 between Percussion 6 vibraphone, Percussion 8 marimba, and Piano. This trio of instruments should strive to sound like a single instrument, in which all parts rise above the texture slightly but balance well together.

Beginning at m. 529 are chords with the Piano and Percussion 7 tubular bells. The primary voice in the chords should come from the shifting chords of the piano, which rotate around the static pitch of the tubular bells. Percussion 7 and Piano should visually communicate with each other for each of these notes, even in the presence of a conductor. Also starting at m. 529, Percussion 6 and 8 will start to join the Percussion 4 six-bar loop pattern. As these two voices join, they should aim to make the ostinato sound richer, but avoid making it louder. To assist the fade at the end, these players should slowly move from the center of the bar to the node of the bar. The node of the bar produces a hollow, non-resonant sound. If the performers are already playing pianissimo by m. 540, simply moving to the node over the course of the final four bars will provide an organic fade out.

Figure 6.8- Combined parts of Percussion 6, 8, and Piano for the gestures starting at m. 511.

p

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CHAPTER 7. PEDAGOGICAL USES FOR *CLOUD FOLK*

Now that the full context of *Cloud Folk* is understood from a theoretical and performance-practice aspect, this chapter examines the pedagogical uses of the work, including benefits to studying it and skills required by each individual part to assist with assigning parts to match the abilities of the players.

7.1 Programming *Cloud Folk*

A performance of *Cloud Folk* provides many opportunities to advance the musicianship and problem-solving skills of the performers. While each part contains a different individual skill set, some nuances of the piece are equally demanding for all parts. Mounting a performance requires an advanced level of focused listening and cognitive skills, especially without a conductor. Performers must be independent enough to play their individual parts while interpreting many elusive performance contexts involving melodic and non-pitched instruments. The piece also contains varying levels of transparency, ranging from high exposure in solos and trios of Parts 2 and 4 to low exposure by blending into the variety of textures.

Orchestration presents another unique situation as many instruments are doubled, such as the tubular bells, sleigh bells, and shekere. Based on equipment availability, students can decide to share instruments, the most consistent way of making the exact sounds or elect to use two different instruments. For the sleigh bells used by Percussion 3 and 6, the players could use bells made of similar material to add a wider variety of color to the piece and contrast the beginning of the piece from the end.

Cloud Folk is a large-sized, advanced-level piece of percussion chamber music that is most appropriate for mature university-level students. This cohort will benefit the most from the pedagogical insights listed above. As evidenced by YouTube recordings and the Black Swamp Percussion Ensemble Competition, the piece is also accessible to advanced high school students. Even though it is possible to play the work at a high level in secondary-school settings, an average student will have not likely developed the independent, creative skills required to fully realize the piece. For example, percussion performers must first be able to understand their musical function within an ensemble setting.¹⁰⁸ It is likely that an average high school student will focus on his or her personal contribution so much that they would struggle to reach appropriate awareness of style and articulation nuances. The constraints of equipment inventory and implement availability are also more suited to a university-level setting.

7.2 Assigning Parts

Unlike other chamber music genres, percussion ensemble parts are often considered interchangeable, as a percussionist should reasonably be expected to perform any part. This flexibility requires the unique challenge of assigning parts to individual players with disparate skill sets. The following section provides guidance to the skill sets required by each part with the goal of assisting directors to properly assign parts with the strengths of each performer.

Percussion 1- Being the main shekere performer, Percussion 1 needs to have good tempo control and the ability to focus on control, particularly in Part 1. The part also calls

¹⁰⁸ James Campbell, “Developing the Musical Percussionist,” Unpublished manuscript.

for marimba and glockenspiel, though these parts are repetitive much of the time. Only two mallets are needed.

Percussion 2- Though labeled as primarily a drum kit part, it is not a standard drum kit. The most important skills required are music reading skills and foot pedal control. Even during repetitive parts, the two feet on kick drum and hi-hat are often intended to be more random. Double strokes on the kick drum are common. Since a hi-hat is used simultaneously with the kick drum, a double-bass pedal is impractical.

Percussion 3- This part also requires strong reading skills, as it contains many of the purposefully randomized parts, such as the floor tom. The part also requires 4-mallet independence on marimba, especially with the important bass line. This part balances multiple layers over a six-beat loop. The remainder of the mallet parts are fairly repetitive.

Percussion 4- Much of this part is background-based material, with the exception of two important spots: measure 69 in Part 1 and the solo in Part 4. A player who can execute the high exposure at those two parts should be able to execute the remainder of the piece. Some four-mallet skills are required.

Percussion 5- This part is arguably the most difficult to execute. When talking specifically about the timpani parts, it was described by Michael Burritt as “on the verge of unplayable.”¹⁰⁹ The timpani is often written melodically and pitch changes are employed freely. In addition, the part requires excellent control of articulation due to fast rhythmic passages in the extreme low end of the instrument. The 32” drum will need to be tuned to play a low C, a major second below the normal range. The player also

¹⁰⁹ Burritt, Interview with James Vilseck.

doubles on triangle, shekere, and tubular bells, requiring possible extra copies of music and a high level of awareness as they move across stage to share an instrument.

Percussion 6- Similar to Percussion 4, much of this part is repetitive, specifically in the second half of the work. It has a lot of moments of high exposure, such as the solo in Part 2, bowing in part 3, and simultaneous melody and harmony at the climax in Part 5. It requires four-mallet technique for much of the piece, especially fast double-lateral skills in Part 1.

Percussion 7- This part provides many of the important supportive voices, specifically in the tubular chimes. It doesn't contain as many notes as other parts, but the notes it does play are important to the coloristic aspect of the work. It switches instruments often and accommodates many rests while doing so. Additionally, this part also plays the solo in Part 2. Outside the solo, it is one of the easiest of the individual parts.

Percussion 8- The bulk of the challenge is in the first half, including intensive and exposed parts at m. 69 and the Part 2 solo. Four mallets are necessary. There are many rolls, particularly in Parts 1 and 5, possibly causing an endurance issue towards the end of the piece.

CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION

Within this document, we have explored Psathas's background as a composer and highlighted some of his greatest accomplishments. We also discussed the impact of his works for percussion and explored some of his compositional techniques. All these characteristic traits were applied to his work *Cloud Folk*, giving an in-depth look at the analysis and performance techniques required for informed performance success. There is plenty of room to continue future study on the topic of this dissertation. Original manuscripts for many of Psathas's works, including but not limited to *Matre's Dance*, *Kyoto*, and *View from Olympus*, can be accessed as part of the John Psathas Collection (MS-Group-2332) in the Alexander Turnbull Library at the National Library of New Zealand in Wellington, New Zealand. Included on the manuscripts are notes on the works which must be accessed in-person. These manuscripts can lead to more insight on the compositional process and background of his works. Additionally, there is currently minimal academic writing on Psathas, limited as of this writing to a dissertation by Joohae Kim about piano music from New Zealand¹¹⁰ and an extended program note by Kellen King about the marimba work *One Study One Summary*.¹¹¹ Additional studies of Psathas's works could include a study of his electronic and playback works or on his large-scale projects, both areas that Psathas plans to expand his catalogue.

¹¹⁰ Joohae Kim, "Contemporary New Zealand Piano Music: Four Selected Works from Twelve Landscape Preludes: Landscape Prelude, The Street Where I Live, Sleeper and the Horizon from Owhiro Bay," PhD diss., Florida State University, 2012.

¹¹¹ Kellen King, Kellen "A Performance Guide to One Study One Summary by John Psathas and its Influence on Electroacoustic Marimba Literature in the Twenty-First Century," Lecture Recital Document, University of Texas at Austin, 2018.

The percussion music of John Psathas has made its profound impact on the modern literature of percussion. Psathas feels great about his position in the percussion world and has many plans to continue writing percussion works.¹¹² His previous collaborations with percussionists such as Evelyn Glennie and Pedro Carneiro have brought forward many standards while current collaborations with percussionists like Alexej Gerassimez are producing more large-scale works. With the creation of new pieces each year, his recent output can almost be thought of as “peak Psathas.” In talking about this thought, Omar Carmenates says:

...if we were to deem the present as “peak Psathas”, he’s contributed a lot but he is undoubtedly going to contribute more and write more incredible pieces, so how can we to place that label on an era or time while we’re still possibly in it with more room to grow? *One Study One Summary* will be probably looked as a masterwork later on down the road if it’s not already. I think *Matre’s Dance* will be looked at as a multi-percussion masterwork, I hope. I think *Kyoto*, it already gets a lot of play, but those pieces need time and retrospective to be considered a masterwork. I think it’s much more fun and rewarding to not worry about those labels and just keep playing music, like his, that we feel pushes our art form forward.¹¹³

It is indeed this recognition that continues to keep Psathas relevant in a percussion era that is constantly evolving. *Cloud Folk* serves as a testament of Psathas’s evolution as a composer of percussion music and promise of what is still to come. This work has experienced immense popularity since its premiere in 2017. Taking what are fairly traditional percussion instruments, Psathas has created a vibrant work that explores the entire spectrum of colors available to him and serves to influence many of his future works, and others, for a long time.

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¹¹² Psathas, Interview with James Vilseck.

¹¹³ Carmenates, Interview with James Vilseck.

PART 2

PROGRAM NOTES

A candidate for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Kentucky must present three recitals in partial fulfillment of program requirements. The following recital programs will provide all recital information as well as comprehensive program notes about each work performed. The recitals include the following: DMA Chamber Percussion Recital, DMA Solo Percussion Recital , and DMA Lecture Recital. The DMA Chamber Percussion Recital took place on March 20, 2019. Due to the COVID pandemic, the DMA Solo Percussion Recital and DMA Lecture Recital were recorded virtually and took place between March and October 2020. Links are provided for all virtual performances.

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
PRESENTS

James Vilseck

In a Doctoral Percussion Chamber Recital

With

Austin Shoupe

Luciano Medina

Jeffrey McCall

Matthew Tremmel

Nathan Stites

Brady Harrison

March 20, 2019

Singletary Center for the Arts, Recital Hall

8:00 P.M.

Program

Spherical Music (1985; rvsd. 1998) Eve Beglarian (b. 1958)

Surface Tension (1993) David Hollinden (b. 1958)
Austin Shoupe, Percussion

Once Removed (2003) John Fitz Rogers (b. 1963)
Brady Harrison, Marimba

Bullet Hell (2018) Brian Nozny (b. 1977)
Austin Shoupe, Jeffrey McCall, Matthew Tremmel, Luciano Medina

- Set Change -

Sculptures in Wood 1995) Rüdiger Pawassar (b. 1964)
Austin Shoupe, Jeffrey McCall, Luciano Medina

Drum Dances (1993) John Psathas (b. 1966)

I.

II.

III.

IV.

Nathan Stites, Piano

For recording purposes, please hold applause until after each set/piece and have cell phones on silent. As a courtesy to performers and other audience members, please turn off and put away all electronic devices. The use of recording and photographic equipment is permitted only by approved University personnel. No food or drink is permitted in this performance venue. We ask that you remain seated throughout the performance and, if you must exit, that you wait until applause.

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctorate of Musical Arts in Percussion Performance and Pedagogy. James Vilseck is a student of professor James Campbell.d

Program Notes

Spherical Music

Eve Beglarian

Spherical Music was originally part of an electronic piece called *The Garden of Cyrus* written in 1985. The work is “algorithmic music where the rule-based events feel like more than mere arithmetic, where they become a kind of magic numerology.” The composer uses this quotation from the *Divine Comedy* to embody the goal of the piece:

Dante, *Paradiso* II: 133-138

And as the soul within your mortal clay
Is spread through different organs, each of which
Is shaped to its own end; in the same way
The high angelic Intelligence spreads its goodness
diversified through all the many stars
While yet revolving ever in its Oneness.

John Cirardi’s translation

The first version of *Spherical Music* was written for twelve marimbas where Daniel Druckman performed a solo with eleven of the parts on tape. In 1998 Beglarian rewrote the piece for twelve players on six instruments. The solo part of this work is created by performing one of the twelve parts while the others are performed by electronic playback. The performer has placed his own rules on the solo and electronic playback to envision the themes of *Spherical Music*.

Surface Tension

David Hollinden

Surface Tension is a metrical and beat-oriented multi-percussion duo based upon rock and jazz themes. The two players share a similar set-up consisting of various drums, cymbals, and toys while interacting rhythmically in various way. Heavy unison passages, tight counterpoint, notated and improvised solos make up the bulk of this forward moving duet. The work was composed in a methodical manner, with the opening rhythmic motive serving as the primary theme of a sonata form. An array of metric modulations help outline the work’s secondary themes and development sections until it concludes with a recapitulation of the various themes.

Once Removed

John Fitz Rogers

Once Removed is a duo for two marimbas and click track. The theme of this work is the idea of two separate parts which come together to form one picture. The click track is slightly off-set between the performers so that when executed correctly, one player’s part fits in the spaces of the player’s part. This creates a paradox where the performers must almost ignore each other throughout the work. In a sense, this takes away the ability to make music as a duo as each individual is solely focused upon their part and click track, hence being *Once Removed* from the music making process. Beginning with simple two note broken harmonies, the piece creates variety through constantly shifting dynamics and different rhythm exchanges.

Bullet Hell

Brian Nozny

"The term "bullet hell" comes from a video game sub-genre also known as "shoot 'em ups" where a player is tasked with destroying enemies while simultaneously evading an overwhelming number of incoming projectiles. At the same time, one might say we live in our own bullet hell with regards to the astonishing amount of gun violence in our country. From the tragedies during a country music concert in Las Vegas (2017) to the almost inconceivable scene at Sandy Hook Elementary School (2012), if we have learned anything, it is that no one is truly safe from this type of violence. And yet it keeps happening. *Bullet Hell* as a piece of music is not meant to lay blame with any one entity. As many viewpoints as possible are represented within it. Its purpose is to shed light on the idea that everyone is talking, but no one is listening, and until people from different viewpoints are willing to listen to each other and work towards a common goal, nothing will be accomplished." -Brian Nozny

Sculptures in Wood

Rüdiger Pawassar

Sculptures in Wood was written for Marimba Art Ensemble Basel, based out of Switzerland. The piece is filled with vast amounts of space, tricky syncopations, and a pleasing impressionist tonality based upon 70s and 80s jazz harmonies. "The composer comments that when writing this work, it resembled to him the making of a wood sculpture where in his drafts, many parts were cut off, added again, shifted, and intertwined with one another. Not to mention the semicircular formation of the marimbas quartet is a sculpture of wood in and of itself." After its initial premier, the work became popular and has been played all over Europe and the United States.

Drum Dances

John Psathas

Commissioned by Dame Evelyn Glennie, *Drum Dances* is a duo for drum set and piano inspired by the music of Dave Weckl and Chick Corea's Elecktric Band. In particular, Psathas was inspired by the interaction between the drums and keyboards in the Elecktric Band. Each strictly-notated movement is inspired by a certain kind of rhythmic interaction with a gradual transition from a battle for superiority in the first movement to tight unison playing in the last. The first movement consists of a fast and heavy solo-like drum part over top the piano part, which is keeping a solid sense of time. The second movement employs glockenspiel, which duels with the high register of the piano. The third movement features a tight and well-synced groove featuring much rhythmic displacement. The final movement uses shifting meters as the two instruments play in closer unison.

I would like to send a huge thank you to all of those who support me in my musical journey including: my parents Margie and Keith Vilseck, my fiancé Holli Fitzgerrel, the entire University of Kentucky Percussion Studio, current and previous teachers James Campbell, Dr. Brian Mason, Dr. Chris Butler, Frank Oddis, Rick Polera, and many more. All I do is only made possible by the tremendous amount of help and support I receive on a daily basis. Thank you!!!!

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY
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PRESENTS

James Vilseck

In a Doctoral Percussion Solo Recital

With

Alexander Wingo

Luciano Medina

Holli Vilseck

Virtual Recital Playlist:

<https://bit.ly/31gTAmu>

Program

- Trilogy* (1981/1985) Tim Huesgen (b. 1957)
I. A Vision in a Dream
II. A Fragment
III. With a Mazy Motion
<https://youtu.be/ftsSyDwXPC>
- Murasaki (Purple)* (2006) Andy Akiho (b. 1979)
Luciano Medina, Cajon
Alexander Wingo, Bass- Pearl Malletstation
<https://youtu.be/uugXBVFyKwA>
- Deus Ex Metronome* (2018) Russell Wharton (b. 1990)
<https://youtu.be/ZLpsglmCwes>
- In a Jolly Mood* (2000) Eckhard Kopetzki (b.1956)
Holli Vilseck, Flute
https://youtu.be/FjHi_BSmNCI
- Blue Burn* (2011) Joe Tompkins (b. 1970)
<https://youtu.be/e0gQ9KJFrI8>
- Wallflower, Snowbird, Carillon* (1985) Gary Gibson (b. 1960)
I. Wallflower
II. Snowbird
III. Carillon
<https://youtu.be/2fViSga8vic>
- Isla* (2012) Ian Dicke (b. 1982)
Holli Vilseck, Flute
<https://youtu.be/bTx6ZdX7CKs>
- Udacrep Akubrad* (2001) Avner Dorman (b. 1975)
Luciano Medina, Marimba
<https://youtu.be/JuJjI8xEIM>

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctorate of Musical Arts in Percussion Performance and Pedagogy. James Vilseck is a student of professor James Campbell.

Program Notes

Trilogy (1981/1985)

Tim Huesgen (b. 1957)

Trilogy is a three-movement work for vibraphone. The first movement, *A Vision in a Dream*, was first written in 1981 for the composer's graduate recital at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The other movements, *A Fragment* and *With A Mazy Motion*, were later composed in 1985 at the request of the publisher. Each movement utilizes pop chord progressions, collections of borrowed chords, and repetition to create an accessible piece for audiences and performers alike. Musical details in the score are purposefully infrequent to allow a wide range of personalized interpretations. Movements are connected by similar harmonic progressions and minimal thematic connection and can be performed individually or as a set.

A Vision in a Dream uses a static, two or three-note melody over harmonic planing in the bass, which often moves between three separate chords. This creates some of the wonderful harmonies as the melody moves from the stable tonic to the more tense leading tone of chord while only moving the left hand. Being the shortest and calmest of the movements, *A Fragment* is more experimental in its harmonies while remaining in the realm of easy listening. *With a Mazy Motion* is similar to the first movement, taking three-note melodies played over a moving bass and repeating motives from the first movement.

Tim Huesgen is a percussionist with the United States Army Band in Washington DC. His articles about polyrhythms on drum set have been published in *Percussive Notes* and he has received music degrees from the University of Tennessee and Indian University of Pennsylvania.

Murasaki (Purple) (2006)

Andy Akiho (b. 1979)

Murasaki, the Japanese word for the color purple, is a solo for tenor steel pan. It is part of Akiho's *Synesthesia Suite*, a series of short works composed for steel pan, jazz combo, and chamber orchestra. Synesthesia is a neurological condition where information intended for one of the senses causes an involuntary reaction to another sense. In this case, certain sounds translate to the perception of color. Each work in the *Synesthesia Suite* is based around a color, with the intention of the work to sound the way Akiho sees that particular color.

Murasaki is one of ten pieces in this suite and was originally a quintet for steel pan, harp, cello, bass, and drum set. The work can be performed as a solo for tenor pan or with any number of additional

instruments from the quintet. The work follows typical song structure. It begins with a arpeggiated introductory passage that mimics a harp in free time. This soon leads to alternating verses in E Minor and choruses in G Major within a reggae style, which the composer says is inspired by the works and energy of Bob Marley. The bridge returns to the harp-like arpeggios from the beginning, spanning two octaves and played strictly in time before reintroducing the chorus melody. The solo repeats one final chorus before ending in the middle of the melody, avoiding full resolution.

Andy Akiho is a American composer and performer, particularly as an active steel pannist based out of New York City and Portland, OR. His compositions feature exotic timbres and intricate rhythms often inspired by the steel pan. Commissioning ensembles include the New York Philharmonic, LA Dance Project, Shanghai Symphony, China Philharmonic, Oregon Symphony with Soloist Colin Currie, Chamber Music Northwest, among many others. Akiho's music has been featured by Bang on a Can and PBS and was featured in four concerts at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC.

Deus Ex Metronome (2018)

Russell Wharton (b. 1990)

Deus Ex Metronome is a work for snare drum and tape. What stands out in the tape is the source material for the sounds: a BOSS DB-90 Dr. Beat Metronome. Every sound in the tape is sampled from the metronome directly into Logic Pro X. Using Logic's EXS-24 mkII software sampler, Wharton created different synthesizers with the metronome samples. Many of the samples were later adjusted with pitch-bending, EQ, automation, cutoff filters, compression, reverb, and other effects.

The tape serves a variety of roles throughout the piece. At the beginning, it serves the simple role of time keeping with minimal adjustments from what would be heard with the Dr. Beat alone. It soon transitions to a drum set beat with bass. By the end of the piece, multiple layers occur simultaneously to create an head-bopping groove, with drum set, bass, melody, and harmony accompanying the snare drum. Many other familiar sounds from the Dr. Beat are heard within the work, such as synthetic bongos and vocal counts. Wharton does a careful job of creating interesting accompaniments that shift over time, while not detracting from the unique rhythmic language of the snare drum soloist.

Wharton says the goal of the snare drum part is to create something appealing to performers while still feeling fresh to the listener. The shift of the work changed from rudimental vocabulary to instead center

around rhythmic interest. Wharton attributes inspirations to Kendrick Lamar's album *DAMN* and Armenian jazz pianist Tigran Hamasyan. Particularly from Lamar's work, Wharton cites the way that his rap verses contain a harmonic rhythm contrasting with the meter. This lead to the frequent use of rhythmic cells, often in odd-numbered groupings. Many cells move across bar lines and rhythmically clash with the tape parts, creating a level of tension that resolves when cells land on a strong beat. One particularly odd grouping comes in the third minute of the work. The snare drum plays a rhythmic cell consisting of the first, third, and fourth notes of a five-let rhythm, lasts a half-note triplet in length and starts on the second quarter note triplet of a bar with intermittent rests pushing back the start of the next cell by a triplet partial. This leads to a polyrhythm of five notes over three notes, placed on the upbeat of the rhythm. All this while the tape plays an unsupportive 16th note pattern.

Using a wide variety of rhythm groupings and lengths, a lot of groove, and a unique playback track, Wharton has created a piece with its own voice in the quickly growing genre of snare drum and tape. Performer must live up to the name of the work and play with virtuosic rhythmic control and a sense of articulation to bring about the true flavor of the piece.

Russell Wharton is currently an adjunct faculty member at Middle Tennessee State University and focuses on bringing a well-rounded approach to all musical situations. Additionally, he is the Battery Coordinator for the Cavaliers Drum and Bugle Corps where he has taught since 2015. He received a bachelor's degree in Music Education from Texas Christian University and a Master of Music from Indiana University. He endorses Innovative Percussion and Remo and his works are published by Tapspace Publications.

***In a Jolly Mood* (2000)**

Eckhard Kopetzki (b.1956)

In a Jolly Mood is dedicated to two of Kopetzki's former students. The work "jolly" comes from a combination of these student's first names, Johanna and Oliver. Kopetzki was aiming for a similar style to Keith Jarrett and Chick Corea, rock and jazz styles influenced with romanticism. The instrumentation and style aim to create an immediate charm and "a jolly mood." In the piece, thematic material is often introduced in the flute and imitated in the vibraphone.

Eckhard Kopetzki is a German composer who currently teaches harmony and percussion at the Berufsfachschule Für Musik in Sulzbach-Rosenberg. His compositions range from solo to chamber and music for

elementary education. His works have received various awards, including first place in the Percussion Arts Society composition competition in 2002 and 2003.

Blue Burn (2011)

Joe Tompkins (b. 1970)

Blue Burn is a percussion quintet written for five similar multi-percussion set-ups. The name derives from two elements. “Blue” comes from the commissioning ensemble, University of Kentucky, for their performance at PASIC in 2011. Though all schools have their own colors, Tompkins explains, the color blue is more strongly associated with Kentucky than most schools. The “burn” comes from the fast ending, though Tompkins admits it can also be from the burn of a good Kentucky bourbon.

Each player utilizes at least a bass drum and some sort of smaller drum, either a tambourin or small roto-tom. The work is divided into three main sections. In the first, all performers play a shaker in one hand while the other is using caxixi, a small African, cone-shaped shaker with a hard, plastic or gourd bottom. One by one, players transition to their drum set-ups and lead to the second section. Different implements provide contrast as groove is created by two players using brushes while the others perform a pseudo-solo based on opening material. The final section is a rapid Presto, pushing to the end after an accelerando. Through the work, a chorus effect is created through consistent unison writing. Players are often paired together, with players 1, 3, and 5 together often and players 2 and 4 being the other group.

This particular performance is unique in that all parts were performed by the same player. This is made possible thanks to the minimal equipment required and the use of a click track. The click track contains only downbeats, with a higher pitched click on the first beat of a measure and a cymbal sound on each rehearsal letter.

Joseph Tompkins is an orchestra percussionist and composer who has performed with many major orchestras around New York City, including the New York Philharmonic and Metropolitan Opera. He has received commissions from the New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra and Atlanta Symphony percussion sections. He is most known for his compositions on snare drum, particularly his collections of French-American Rudimental solos.

Wallflower, Snowbird, Carillon (1985)

Gary Gibson (b. 1960)

Wallflower, Snowbird, Carillon is a collection of three independent vibraphone solos in a jazz style. While the pieces do not contain improvisation, each is written in a pseudo-improvised style. *Wallflower* takes a simple, but lush opening theme and develops a melody over it, following a normal jazz form with repeats of the head followed by development sections. *Snowbird* is more subtle, taking a simple repeated figure in different registers to create a calmer environment. *Carillon* is the most optimistic. The hands take independent roles with the right hand playing the melody and the left hand playing a repeated ostinato in five. Each movement can be performed individually or as a set.

Gary Gibson is an active clinician and performer who was first inspired by a performance from the U.S. Navy Steel band as a child. Initially starting his career as a traditional percussionist, he later leaned on jazz and Caribbean styles. After becoming a jazz musician in Seattle, he traveled to Trinidad to learn steel pan where he became a national champion with the “Exodus Steel Orchestra” in the 2004 Panorama Competition. Additionally, his compositions won two out of three categories of the first ever “Symphony and Steel” composition contest in Trinidad.

Isla (2012)

Ian Dicke (1982)

Isla is a chamber work for flute, vibraphone, and live electronics. Commissioned by the Peterson/Hayes Duo, it follows a typical popular song form, alternating between verses, choruses, and remixes. The work is largely inspired and remixed from “Isla de Niños” by Elisa Ferrari. The composer was also a song editor for the work by Ferrari, as the singer of the song is his wife. He had all of the sounds and samples in his possession and decided to make *Isla* with those sample.

The unique electronic element is what helps the work stand out. In addition to their instruments, each player has a MIDI foot pedal and a microphone connected to a computer. Depending on the section, the foot pedal can record incoming sounds, allowing the computer to manipulate the sound and push out something different, or instead trigger samples. Since this electronic element is largely controlled by the performers, *Isla* has a greater degree of artistic freedom compared to other pieces with electronic playback.

A variety of techniques in addition to the electronics give the work an individual voice. Dicke masterfully blends the sound of the flute with the bowed vibraphone at the beginning and end of the piece, also

utilizing pitch bending in the flute to create an uneasy atmosphere. Solo sections for each instrument, unison sections, and rapid canons make up much of the work.

Ian Dicke's works are often inspired by social-political culture, utilizing a variety of multimedia and audio processing techniques. He is currently an Associate Professor of Composition at the University of California, Riverside and the founder and curator for the Outpost Concert Series, presenting virtuosic performances that connect Riverside's musical culture with artists across a contemporary landscape.

Udacrep Akubrad (2001)

Avner Dorman (b. 1975)

“What determines the special character of a piece of music written for percussion instruments is the very choice of sets of instruments,” states Dorman. In this sense, he purposefully chose for both players to use a similar set up, a marimba, two darbuka (a middle-eastern drum originating from Egypt, Turkey, and Armenia), and a tom-tom. Commissioned by the duo PercaDu, *Udacrep Akubrad* is inspired from “Eastern” music, taking scales and rhythms from the traditional classical music of the peoples of the Mediterranean, minimalism and tradition from the Middle East, and Western Music techniques. Knowing the commissioning ensemble and instruments used, the interesting title can be understood simply by reading it backwards. Dorman composed a percussion concerto version of *Udacrep* in 2003.

Udacrep involves an intense conversation between the two performers, who constantly trade melodic and accompanying material. Dorman also avoids sticking to one idea for too long, using gradually changing material, the addition of drums, and the entire five octave range of the marimbas to create variety. Additionally, a section in the middle consists of using the fingers instead of mallet, serving as a cool down from the section prior before pushing toward the end.

As a native of Israel, Avner Dorman draws on a variety of historical and cultural influences. These qualities include complex rhythmic vocabulary and unique timbers in a variety of settings, including full orchestra, concerti, chamber works for percussion, winds, and strings, as well as solo works and chorus. He recently won the 2018 Azrieli Prize for Jewish music and his opera *Wahnfried* was a finalist in the World Premiere category of the International Opera Awards. He is currently an Associate Professor of Music Theory and Composition at the Sunderman Conservatory of music at Gettysburg College.

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Cloud Folk

The Percussion Music of John Psathas

A DMA Percussion Lecture Recital

Presented by James Vilseck

Topics Include:

Biography of John Psathas

Psathas's Composition Process

Theoretical Breakdown of *Cloud Folk*

Major Seventh Chord Inversions

Performance Considerations

Virtual Lecture:

<https://youtu.be/KYtroXTOCLE>

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctorate of Musical Arts in Percussion Performance and Pedagogy. James Vilseck is a student of professor James Campbell.

Clips

The following links lead to clips meant to accompany the lecture. All clips start at the appropriate time and should be watched for about 15-20 seconds.

Clip #1: Excerpt of *Matre's Dance*

<https://youtu.be/hNUgmHeqLEw?t=106>

Clip #2: Excerpt of *Etude* from *One Study One Summary*

<https://youtu.be/2RC0qjMn2IE?t=67>

Clip #3: Excerpt of *Kyoto*

<https://youtu.be/aNqJVvDCThI?t=288>

Clip #4: Beginning of *Cloud Folk*

<https://youtu.be/Bvh1z3jPfAI>

Clip #5: The Swells from *Cloud Folk*

<https://youtu.be/Bvh1z3jPfAI?t=320>

Clip #6: Part 5 Instrument Pairings, Dynamic Waves, and Harmonic Transformations

<https://youtu.be/Bvh1z3jPfAI?t=607>

Clip #7- Alternative Scale in the Part 2 Solo

<https://youtu.be/Bvh1z3jPfAI?t=207>

Clip #8- Ending Piano Chords

<https://youtu.be/Bvh1z3jPfAI?t=607>

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW WITH JOHN PSATHAS¹¹⁴

CONDUCTED ON FEBRUARY 13, 2020

- JV: Starting specifically with *Cloud Folk* first, how did the commission with Michael Burritt begin and what information did he give you when he started?
- JP: With Michael, I'm pretty sure that he got in touch with me about something. He might have been programing another piece of mine with some students and we started having a dialogue. It was a great dialogue. Then he came up with the idea of a commission and I was very excited about it. He suggested a large percussion ensemble, which I had never written for before. You know, there are a few things I've never done. I have written one percussion quartet but it's four drum kits. I haven't done a typical percussion quartet kind of format. So, I was really into the idea and the only thing that he stipulated was the instrumentation, that it was for a certain number of players. I then asked him if I could add the piano because the piano wasn't originally part of the instrumentation and that was it! And you know, Mike is so experienced. He really knows what he's doing when he's talking to composers because he's a composer himself. He kind of knew what not to suggest, what to suggest, and what to leave up to me. I felt very free. The other thing was that I felt like I was going to be writing for really good players. I had a bit of a license in terms of parts and what I could write for individuals and that was it. It was just a duration, like, let's do something around ten minutes which seems to be a very common suggestion.
- JV: You mention that have not written for an ensemble that large. Do you think that was enabling or limiting at all?
- JP: Well, it was very challenging for me because, specifically the time of writing that and especially more so now, I'm writing a lot of music that is for acoustic instruments and playback. There's a piece of my which has done really well called *One Study One Summary*. That was one of the first pieces I wrote for percussion and an audio track and I've gone deep into that since then. It's a big part of what I'm doing these days. So, I was keen to do something for the project with Michael that included a backing track and Michael was like "I'm sure we don't want that. We just want an acoustic piece." Subsequently, I've written a new piece for an even larger percussion ensemble called *White Feather*, which was just premiered at TCU (Texas Christian University) and I am very happy with that piece. I also pushed for having a playback part to it and they said no. Even when I asked for a piano, they said no.

¹¹⁴ Also published by John Psathas at <https://www.johnpsathas.com/catalogue-1/2018/4/10/cloud-folk-2017>.

This was all leading towards answering your question about limitation. The thing I find hardest about large percussion groups or just percussion in general is the lack of a bottom end in the sound. There's no real low register. The timpani are great in that they give you that, but it's a certain type of low sound that they give you. So, I was keen on that. For instance, with the *White Feather* piece, I asked several times if I could use a bass, like an upright bass, because that's what I love. Write for large percussion ensemble and a bass instrument of some kind because the range gets very weak as you go down the marimba. It doesn't project in the same way. Especially within a large ensemble, the lower end actually gets weaker compared to the penetration of the mids and the highs in the group, especially if you start adding drums and things like that. That was the only limitation, but the limitations are good. Actually, really good because they force things out of me that make me find solutions to things that I might not have tried hard enough to find otherwise.

JV: Specifically in that piece (*Cloud Folk*), like in parts 2, 3, and 4, there's a lot of ostinato work that has all nine players going at the same time, usually with a soloist or something on top. I was very curious if having the limit on a number of players was limiting in creating the texture...almost like an ocean. I hear something ocean-like, of fading in and out.

JP: That's nice! We can talk about that later actually, but the thing about the number of players is that it was the opposite. I spent a lot of time thinking "what do I do with all these people." You know like, "What am I going to do? There's so much going on." Especially with the *White Feather* piece. I think I got up to 13 players and I was just thinking, "This is so many people, what do I give each of them." And then, eventually once the piece started building, you realize that I could do with a few *more* players at certain points of the piece, because everybody's kind of pushing.

JV: You mention the electronic playback. One of the things I notice, because I'm working on *One Study* right now for example, is that a lot of the sounds that were coming from *Cloud Folk* are kind of similar, I think, in style. For example, the bowed song bells that comes immediately at the beginning of the piece and the shekere, just remind me very much of an electronic influence. Is that something you've noticed in some of your acoustic works?

JP: Absolutely! I think it's the fact that I've been working so much with these hybrid pieces with the acoustic instruments and playback that it does get quite blurry for me. So, you'll get in the playback itself (like *One Study One Summary*), you get unadulterated tubular bells being played. That's an acoustic percussion instrument that's on the playback. Then, as you say, in the live instruments, there will be this kind of simulation of loops and things like that, that you would get in the electronic environment. So it's a bit of a hazy border between those two things for me. But on that note, just because you mention *One Study One Summary*...It's slightly sideways but might be interesting for you. In the creation of electronic

backing for live performance there's a fundamental rule that I stick to, which is that the live performer - in this case you playing the marimba in *One Study One Summary* - has to be the main musical storyteller at all times. They have to hold the narrative of the piece. The extreme example of that not being the case is if you go to a big techno gig and there's somebody with a laptop and they press a key and there's a massive launch of sound and energy and yet all the performer has done is press one button on a keyboard. For me, there's a huge mismatch between the live performance energy and the audio energy that's coming out of the system. There's a thing for me, a very important part of all writing, which is the matching of the visual narrative, what you're seeing, and the energy that's being generated by the performers, what you're hearing. If we were talking about *One Study One Summary* and you were asking about limitations, that would be a very significant one, which is holding back very much in the audio, what the audio can do in terms of telling the story. So, the audio is very much an accompanist to the live performer. I've heard other pieces that have digital audio and live performance where the audio takes over and it becomes this sort of main character from time to time. I actually think that's when you lose a lot of intensity in the work because you're not seeing that energy being articulated live. It's a bit of a diversion.

JV: Could you talk a little bit about the short narrative that *Cloud Folk* is based on? Where it came from or any influences?

JP: Firstly, in general, titles and program notes especially, start to kick in halfway through the composing of the work. Titles especially come afterwards. People are often disappointed when I say that because I think that they want to think that there's a kind of design, a real design. But for me, the music is first. Music is everything. It's about creating a coherent, compelling, memorable piece of music. The thing about titles and program notes is that they create a resonance around the experience of hearing the work. You notice that *One Study One Summary* is actually almost completely devoid of any kind of meaning as a title. It doesn't give you anything to go and so you just listen. The second movement of that, *The Summary*, is based on an idea of post-human earth. What the world will be like when there is no one here. That's why you have the birds and the crickets and things at the end because it's life without us. That's why in the middle of that piece you'll have very faint things like children in a playground or the sound of a city far away. You know, the sort of ages-of-man kind of thing. There is a narrative there, and it varies a lot piece to piece.

What I started to develop with *Cloud Folk* as I was writing, was the specific sound and textural ideas emerging, because almost everything in that piece is built on one chord. It's built on this idea of a major seventh chord but in various inversions. It's different if you put the third in the bottom. It's different again if you put the fifth at the bottom. That means something else. If you put the semitone at the bottom, they all have different emotional colors, those things. If you go through the score of *Cloud Folk*, ninety percent of the harmony that's going on is that chord. That's not because I think it's clever to do that, because I'm

not interested in clever. That doesn't interest me at all in composing. That thing about it is that it had a particular emotional color to it. It matched the harmony and matched really well with all the percussive sounds and textures that were gradually forming. The idea of the narrative grew out of the groove and the sounds and the layers that I was making.

You mentioned before the idea of an ocean, like a sort of feeling. You know, I'm often very organized in the way that I write. Everything lines up and all the T's are crossed and the I's are dotted and things land together and things build up in the right way so that there's a cadence that works. I've put a lot of time into that, but there's something a bit rigid about writing like that as well. I wanted to loosen it up. I've been listening to a lot of Radiohead. In particular, there's a fantastic DVD of them doing the album *King of Limbs* and it's called "The Basement," which is a recording studio. In my opinion, it is one of the great performances in the genre of pop music, I really recommend it. What I felt in that performance was a very special thing that Radiohead does. Throughout a lot of their music they have very unpredictable and unexpected entries and exits of layers, so that when something comes in it's not on a downbeat after eight bars. It might be halfway through bar 13, and it might be something really significant, like the bass coming in at this very weird place. They always make it work. And so in *Cloud Folk*, I was putting a lot of effort into trying to have entries and exits feel very loose and organic so that things would start and end in places that you couldn't predict, but they didn't interfere with the flow (because flow is everything).

The other thing, if you start breaking down those layers, is different cycles and different parts. In *Cloud Folk*, there's a kind of reduced drum set part which is often doing things in five. The kick drum is just going one, two, three, four, five, one, two, three, four, five, and then there is another part like a shaker that might be in seven. All these things are going on together. Overall, it works because there's enough reinforcement of an overall 6/4 or 12/8. You know, there's an overall time signature that you kind of feel as everything. But within that there's these overlapping cycles that are just going and going and going. It was a huge breakthrough for me in this piece to understand that you can do that and still have a sense of meter. But the meter isn't really clunky. You're not just feeling downbeat after downbeat after downbeat. There's a kind of fluid motion through the meter and yet it's still there, because when you're writing you also have to think very practically about the ensemble and what is everybody hearing. How do they stay in time with each other? Does everyone actually know where the downbeat is? So there's the balancing of that ensemble consideration with the writing process itself. That was one of the great breakthroughs. Anyway, as I was writing it, I just started to have an idea of observing this from above. This kind of semi-chaotic, but organized, cooperation between individuals. Each doing quite independent things a lot of the time but creating something as a unit. That's where I got the idea of looking down. And then I started to think about non-terrestrials looking down on us. And then I started thinking, what would any intelligent extra-terrestrial think if they came and hovered invisibly in our clouds, and look down

on us? I think we would be incomprehensible. Our behavior would be incomprehensible if you added up the whole of the human species, the whole human race. My thought was that they would come, look at us, and leave, and we would never know. That was just the thinking that was going on at the time. I could go on and on but it starts to get quite abstract and I'm not sure how useful all that stuff is.

JV: I've read a lot of your other interviews and you've said that you spend a lot of detail at the beginning of your works.

JP: Yeah

JV: When it comes to *Cloud Folk*, what was some of the earliest material that came to mind and how did that influence other material until it eventually formed the whole piece?

JP: That's a great question! With *Cloud Folk*, all you've got to do is look at the first page. That's what it is. It just started with tubular bell and the shaker. There's a groove. The tubular bell always has a kind of a sense of something significant going on. Like any bell, it's symbolic. It creates a kind of seriousness about the piece. The groove is established. The sleigh bells, the crescendo that they do up and down in the beginning, that's something that comes back a lot. Out of this, slowly, some kind of tonality or harmony emerges so that you get that first riff happening in the piano when it comes up. That's all that I got. Once I got there, I knew I was away. I knew that I had a piece that I would be able to figure out. I had no idea what it would be, but I know that I had enough potential, like I was creating a seed, you know, that you're going to plant. It's creating a seed and it's knowing that the structure of that seed, or the internal potential of that seed, is going to give you a piece. I've never written a piece where I know what's going to happen. Ever. It's always starting at the beginning and seeing. And that's why in *Cloud Folk* in particular, there's a very strong sense of wonder in the music. You can feel it in the music. And that's not just creating it for the listener. It's also my sense of wonder as I discover the work, as the work reveals itself to me. That's how I compose. It's risky if you are locked into commissions and deadlines because there's no guarantee you'll get it finished in time. Because you don't know what the piece is. You don't know if you're going to fail a lot during the writing of it. So that beginning, it's all about a few percussion sounds and creating a little texture at the beginning, some potential tonality, some ideas like the sleigh bells doing that crescendo, that little wave that they do. That was a thing I threw out there. I really like that. I know that's going to come back because that also sort of destabilizes tempo a little bit. Well, not tempo, but feel, because it imposes something else above what's going on. And then, with the vibe, percussion four part, there's a kind of randomness built into that layer that goes all the way through. It's a kind of rogue element, as is the floor tom. That's the other thing. I don't just want to set up loops and think, "okay, I'll write a piece that's based upon a bunch of loops." There has to be something that is unpredictable. It's like

an independent entity within the work. Percussion four's vibraphone and the floor tom part are both that. You look at those parts and try to make sense of them and you can't. It's like they're listening to everything else, and they're responding to it, but they're not completely paying attention. It's like they are listening and playing but also looking out the window at what's going on outside. It's that kind of idea of a part within the work and those parts take forever to write because you're actually trying to create something that's independent and free but has to fit it. So there's a lot of trial and error with each bar and with the phrases and gestures to make that work.

JV: *Cloud Folk* is divided into five specific parts and then a coda. Did the separation of the parts come naturally as you were composing material or is that something that happened after the composition was already done?

JP: No, I only ever write linearly. I never jump ahead. What happens invariably with my writing is that I'll start something and that will build to its own culmination. The way the piece starts and the way everything comes in, there are builds. More parts coming in and it intensifies. For instance, there's a gentle hill that gets us up and down to bar 59. Once we get to that, it's a kind of ebb, that all sort of goes away. Then the next thing comes in, which is a new idea, at bar sixty-something. Then that all builds up to a kind of a first climax, which gets us to bar 104. That reaches its culmination and can't go any farther. It completes. It does what it can. But I'm very careful to make sure the harmony itself doesn't resolve. It completes, but it doesn't resolve because you always need to go on. You have to need to go on. Otherwise, you've reached the end. Then Part 2 begins with what is quite a different idea. That shift from one tonality to another is quite a hard thing to get to feel natural. The thing about *Cloud Folk* is harmonically, it is very homogenous. I see there is this one chord most of the time being shifted around. Anyway, Part 2 works and it does the same thing. You stagger in these lines over the groove and the groove builds up and it grows and grows. Then that gets to its own culmination which is the Swells. That is its own climax and then it subsides. That's the other thing about moving from one part to another. For me, I feel you have to do it in different ways because there's a structural predictability as well. You don't want to arrive then change, arrive then change, arrive then change. The way you change needs to vary so that the piece feels like its constantly unfolding in this organic structure to it. So that why at the Swells, after that, the whole piece kind of takes a while to subside and then it comes down into Part 3, which is the next major part. Coming out of Part 3 it's the opposite. It sort of grows out of Part three and it gets us to Overlap. Then that gets us to Part 4, which is different again. Then Part 5 is the culmination. The thing to me that I'm very happy about with this climax is that the major climax of it, which is, let me find where that is. Have I labeled it?

JV: Like measure 446?

- JP: It's where the tubular bell melody kicks in. Yeah, that's it. You're right. The thing with the overall climax of the piece is that it's obligated to outdo all the other climaxes. The final one has to be the biggest one. Otherwise the piece doesn't feel proportionally balanced. If you imagine classical symphonies, that's all in there, that way of creating long shape. What I was really happy about with this climax is how controlled it is. It just happens comfortably over time. There's no real anxiety about the climax. It's more of an aesthetic culmination of the work and a celebratory culmination of the work. Every part follows on from what happens before. That's the only way it ever works for me. It's interesting, when I used to teach at university my students would often come to me and say, "I've written something really great but it only goes so far. I don't know how to carry on?" It's a common problem for composers. How do I continue my music at this point? My answer is always the same. The way forward is hidden in the way behind you. How did you get here? The answer is in what you've already done. You have to look at what you've done and understand it really well because a lot of people write music and they get to a certain point and they love what they've done. Especially if they work with technology and you can write music quite quickly, you know? You can write it without really understanding the harmony and the rhythms and all the potential that's in what you've done. That's what I often do. I'll go back at some point and I'll look at it and I'll go "How have I gotten this?" and I'll go "Ah, that's really interesting." There are all these things in the music that I wasn't consciously aware of. I can start exploring some of these now consciously as a way of moving forward in the piece.
- JV: One more question about *Cloud Folk*. Is there any specific thing you would want a listener to feel, or notice, or listen for in the piece?
- JP: Yeah, okay, that's a good question. In *One Study One Summary*, the first movement of that, the general feeling is one of excitement. That's if you reduce it to a single thing. It's excitement with some anxiety because there's the diminished elements and modality which give you some sense of unease and tension. In *Cloud Folk*, it's interesting, there's very little tension in the harmony of the piece. It's mostly very relaxed. If you take that chord that I was talking about, which is this [Plays chord on a piano]. That's like an A-maj⁷ chord. If I put an A at the bottom, it makes it an A-maj⁷ chord. If I play C-Sharp on the bottom, it's a C-Sharp minor with a minor sixth. It's a different quality of chord. It's a different emotion. If I play this, with an E in the bass, it has something more grand about it. And if I play the G-Sharp (in the bass), then the A becomes quite dissonant, and that has the most tension. Now I thought of each of those as its own chord, as its own harmonic/emotional color. Each of them has their own emotion, but the other thing about working with harmony like that is that the effect of it also changes over time so that if you're listening to one of those harmonies for quite a while, then the emotion that's wrapped around it impacts on you more and more over time. That's a feature of loops and minimalist music. What I was doing was changing the flavor of harmony, the color nuance of emotion, rather than making you feel like you were going through a chord

progression... the overall feeling that I was trying to get for the listener is one of a kind of aesthetic calm, if there is such a thing. Which is to actually be energized but to feel very calm at the same time. That's why if you get the harmony that I just played you like this like (plays opening piano riff? 29:44), it's that kind of idea where it's actually moving very, very fast. That's kind of exhilarating because it's fast. Something that's really fast is kind of exhilarating for a listener. So there was that and also I want the experience to be one of experiencing warmth. You know, like warm music. That it's reaching out with warmth to embrace. That's with this piece, not with all the music that I write. There are very different things going on in different pieces, but this piece definitely has that warmth. In terms of listening in, there are obvious places where there is a melody and accompaniment. You've got solo lines happening in the mallets and the ensemble is accompanying that. But in other places, it's more to experience to totality of it, so that you're not listening to any particular thing. You're enjoying the whole ensemble at once. Even though I put a lot of things into the music, I don't write with the expectation that the listener will remember specific things earlier in the piece. I don't think they remember things that are earlier in the works very well. That's interesting because if you're a performer or a composer, you listening in a certain way, right? We listen in a certain way. Audience members don't. Non-musicians don't listen like that. And they're not going "Ah, that's from the middle section of the exposition. I remember that." People don't have those moments. Very rarely. You can have them when you're listening to a symphony or sonata, because there's a kind of sledge hammer hitting you on the head saying "hey, remember this, remember this?" And you have to remember because that's how the music is designed. But I don't think to do that because my experience has been talking to people and understanding how they listen and it is more about continuity and flow and the moving forward through time.

JV: If you don't mind, I'd like to go ahead and move on to percussion music in general. Would you mind talking a little bit about how you feel your relationship is with modern percussion music and maybe how that's changed over time?

JP: Sure. The short answer is it's fantastic! I feel incredible. I'm writing a whole lot of percussion music at the moment. I've been for years now, several years, almost exclusively (writing for) percussion. I just finished a new percussion concerto and it's one of five that I'm writing over the next three years. I'm writing a whole bunch of percussion chamber music. I'm writing a new piece for Michael Burritt *Koolish Zein*. It's a concerto in quotation marks because he's the soloist but the orchestra is actually a quartet of percussionists and playback. So that's the backing for the soloist. I've just written a new duo for piano, percussion, and playback (*Atalanta*) and I recently wrote a saxophone quartet with drum kit piece (*Connectome*), which I was super happy about. I'm really happy with all this music and I'm just finishing off this new percussion concerto. I feel like I've landed as one of the percussion writers. That's what it feels like. A lot of percussionists know my music and it gets played a lot, which is absolutely amazing. There have been pieces that have really taken off. The way that it started

was with Evelyn Glennie. When Evelyn emerged, which was in the early 90s, she came to New Zealand and the festival here said, "Would you play a New Zealand piece?" She said, "Well send me some scores and I'll have a look and see if there is something that suits me." They sent her, in that package, a piece of mine called *Matre's Dance* which is for drums and piano. She liked that piece, she performed it here, and then she championed it...I would say she played it more than a thousand times. Easily. She just played it so much. She took that piece to the world and over the last thirty years she just constantly played it. Then I wrote another piece, *Drum Dances*, for drum kit and piano, and then a few more pieces, including the Concerto *View from Olympus* for percussion, piano, and orchestra. Since then there have been a bunch of percussion pieces. Both *One Study One Summary* and *Kyoto* have really taken off. *Kyoto* is getting picked up so much. And what's interesting about both of them is that at their premieres, when they were first being launched, I basically got the vibe that I had written something that was just too hard and wasn't going to have a lot of life. That wasn't the performers telling me. That was what my understanding of what I had done. It's really interesting to see *One Study One Summary* having entered the repertoire now. It's incredible, because back when it was first born I thought "Ah man, I've overdone it. I've written it too hard and no one's going to play it." But then Pedro Carneiro did these two great videos, one of each movement and I think people just saw those. It's that psychology. You look at it and you go "eh, it's playable." You just see it being done and you go "oh, it can be done." So then no one questions it. They just go and learn it. It was the same with *Kyoto*. I didn't think it was going to have a life. So those two pieces have done a lot and now there is a whole bunch of new music coming out of mine for percussion. I think percussion is a huge part of my future.

And on that note though, because one of the questions I've been asked before is why? Why percussion? What are you not like a string quartet writer? And the reason is that I'm really interested in a lot of things connecting a high velocity, because that's exciting. It's exciting when rhythms interlock or parts come towards each other then come away or they interlock in a very precise way while there's groove going on. Percussion is the place to do that. It's not with the string orchestra. It's not with the brass quintet. It's percussion that'll do it. And the other thing is my rhythmic concepts have come out of a lot of percussion music from other cultures. So I spent a lot of time listening to the percussion music of the middle east, or north Africa, or Greece, which is where my background is from. Or Africa itself and South America. And I've done a lot of transcribing and I love that music. So what better medium for me to explore those ideas, which can be quite complex, than in the world of percussion, with percussionists? That's where you'll find the most willing punters that'll have a go with this material. And the other thing too is that percussionists will put more time into solving rhythmic conundrums. You know, they'll put the time into figuring rhythmic stuff out. The thing is, there's an attitude, generally speaking, an attitude of percussionists towards challenge which really suits my writing because the way I write is challenging to play. It's not easy. Nothing I've written is sight readable. Ever. It

all requires putting the hours in. And its high stakes because you go on stage to play *One Study One Summary*, and it could all go badly. There's no room to breathe. There are hardly any rests and you're playing all the time. And so, it's high risk high stakes. It's percussionists that'll go there. They're the no-harness free-climbers, putting it all on the line. So that's kind of why I'm in that world, I think.

JV: Little bit of a personal question. Do you have a certain favorite instrument family to write for, like mallets vs. drums?

JP: That's a great question because I don't love the marimba.

JV: Really?

JP: Yeah...look. I love the marimba being played. What I don't love is the limitation of the sound of the instrument. You know, I would love to write for amplified marimba so that there's more grunt in the sound. Like there's more body and power because I think the marimba is in some ways the weakest one of the instruments that I often write for. The piece I wrote for Michael just now, this sort of electronic concerto, starts off with quite a lot of marimba writing, but once it really takes off, he's on the vibes all the time. That's because the vibes punch through and there's a kind of articulation. A power and articulation that to me kind of beats the marimba. But the marimba is the poet of the percussion ensemble. It's where the poetry can happen. I think part of it is that I don't write a lot of quiet music. So, the marimba is something I don't go to very often. And then I had an amazing session with Pedro Carneiro when I went to visit him two years ago in Lisbon where he took me through the marimba in a very deep way. You know, in a certain way I do also love the instrument. I think for me; the marimba is a solo instrument actually... or it's like you get at universities where there are five of them in a massive ensemble. It's either/or. It's interesting. I guess it's not that I don't love the marimba; it's that I wish it was a stronger instrument. In terms of melody, vibes are the one for me. And also, for vibes, I've been using the motor a lot lately because I just love the motor on the vibes. It's like a cliché for a lot of people but I've realized I don't hear cliché the way others do, so I've been using the vibes motor a lot and I really love it.

JV: Are there any trends you anticipate happening in future percussion music?

JP: I'm really enjoying the growing body of work that is for percussion and electronics or playback. I'm really enjoying that. One of the things that I can see coming, it's kind of already here but I mean more and more people will probably get into it, is percussionists working with looping technology to create much bigger worlds with their playing. It is already happening, but it's not kind of standardized yet I think. With one of the percussionists I've talked to in the states, we have a plan at some point to develop a piece that is for percussion and looping that I can write and he can play. Another trend - which I'm late getting into - is

controlled improv. This new concerto I'm writing is a big step for me in the sense that for the first time, I've let go of some control. There are passages in it where the percussionist is improvising but in a very focused way. There is a real purpose behind the improvisation and that's only because I know the player really well and we've been working together. What do you think? I mean what do you think is ahead for percussion? What are some of the things that might be coming up?

JV: Honestly, there's a lot with electronics. There might be more with live sound manipulation. You know, you said you want marimba to be more powerful. Well, you can set up mics and put it through logic and you can manipulate it right there on stage in front of people.

JP: Absolutely!

JV: That's something I imagine definitely being out there. Going to PASIC every year, I hear a new sound every five minutes, every single year and I just can't imagine what we're going to come up with. My professor says someone is making a new instrument every day.

JP: And some of them are extraordinary. Like, some of them really take off. I remember when the hang drum came out and everybody was just completely blown away by that instrument. You know the drum, the hang drum?

JV: That's the hand pan, right?

JP: Yeah, like the UFO.

JV: Yes. Those are cool.

JP: Yeah. The other thing for me that me that I would love, I don't think it'll happen in my lifetime, is that where people are getting their doctorates in percussion all around the world, that there's more going into world music traditions. For instance, if I want to use a djembe in a piece, I have to think "okay, well this is going to be somebody that's come through university." They wouldn't have lived in Senegal for years learning this instrument. So the way I can incorporate that instrument into the work is actually quite limited. We don't yet have the cultural environment where a Senegalese djembe specialist can easily be brought into a project to play. That's the kind of area I would love to see develop. Where it's crossing over and there are percussionists from lots of traditions being involved in the same work. I think that would just explode the whole landscape.

JV: We just had a guy from Venezuela come to our campus and talk about Venezuelan maraca playing. He has a method book and it is incredible. It's the first one I've ever seen. How long has Venezuelan maraca been a tradition?

JP: Yeah.

JV: I read that you hand write your scores and then send them to someone to notate. Do you think that influences the way you compose? Not using the computer technology?

JP: Yeah. Firstly, I compose at the computer but it does influence the way that I write in that it completely frees me up, because I'm not thinking about the score at all when I'm composing. I'm not thinking about what it looks like, I'm only thinking about what it sounds like. I think that is the problem with the way some composers use programs like Sibelius and Finale. They're constantly looking at a score when they're composing, and you can really fall into the trap that thinking this piece of music is the score that I'm looking at and it's not. The piece of music is what an audience hears in performance. That's what a piece of music is. So, what I'm creating is the music that people are going to hear. That's what I think about. Then afterwards, I figure out what the score is. That's been incredibly liberating, and it's been like that for a really long time. It's completely freed me up. You know, my students would be writing something, and I'd go, "Look, it just seems absolutely ripe here that you would split this in this way and do this thing with these parts." And they would go "Yeah, I thought of that. I really wanted to that, but Sibelius just doesn't know how to do that, in the software." I would go "well that's not the right reason for making that decision in terms of composing."

The thing about handwriting. I'm in the process right now of handwriting out this new percussion concerto which I just finished. The piece is 844 bars, so it's a long piece. There are, I figured it out, 34 staves on the score because there's a lot of parts. I'm handwriting nearly 30,000 bars of music. It just drives me crazy, but there's a very interesting part of the process. I did it with *One Study One Summary*. I'll create this piece and I'll go "Ah, that sounds awesome. Here's my piece." Then I'll start writing it out by hand and I'll go "uh, actually that looks like a really awkward corner now that I'm writing it out. Maybe if I just shift that note then the percussionist doesn't have to do that." So, there's something about microscopically going over every single thing that happens in the piece in a later stage than writing it. Where you go "Oh, I've divided the strings up beyond the numbers that exist in the string section." So, I have to change what I've done, or I have to find another solution. There is something about going to that detail at that time. It drives me mental doing it because it takes forever. Look, I'll show you. For instance, these are all my pencils [Holds up pencil cup] and I have to sharpen them every couple of hours. I sit here day after day writing it out, but it is invaluable because you have to know your music when you write it. You have to know what you've done. I could go on about that forever. The handwriting has been really good. Then I give it to a copyist who is going to do a much better job than me at creating a score and parts. Somebody whose job it is to do that. The copyist that I work with I've worked with for 20 years. He just knows my music really well and he knows how I work, and we've got a great relationship. It just means I don't have to wrestle with software, you know, score writing software.

- JV: You said you do use a computer to help and I know that you've said you use Logic and you often create these robot-like MIDI versions. How does that help in the composition process?
- JP: Well firstly, it means that I have a visceral relationship with the audio of my music as I'm writing it. I'm hearing it and I'm getting really excited about it. And by hearing it, it suggests what's next. It's a kind of timeline being propelled through music. I think this is why my music has great momentum. My music really pushes forward. I think that is because I am hearing it and I am feeling it moving forward and I can grow that energy. You think of *One Study One Summary*. I don't have the ability to figure that out in my head. I can't imagine that and then write it down, not that incredibly long rhythmic continuity with all of the little speed bumps and little quirky accents and things there are coming out. All of that detail. I don't think even Beethoven could do that. There's a limit to what you can do in your head when it comes to asymmetrical groove-based music with a lot of rhythmic detail. Computers have really enabled me to do that. And the complement to that is that I create pretty good sounding MIDI so that when I share it with people, like I just finished this concerto, and I sent the MIDI recording to the soloist and he wrote back and said, "This is amazing. I can't wait to get started." Now you won't get that reaction from somebody looking at a score. You know, they won't look at it and understand how it sounds. They'll have to wait until the rehearsal with the orchestra to actually understand how the piece sounds. It's absolutely a way of getting people excited well in advance of learning the piece. Because normally, you have to wait until someone records it and then you can share a recording, but that takes too long and is often not guaranteed anymore. This is my way of preempting that. I think my MIDI stuff has led to a lot of things happening in my career. It's really aided my development as a composer.
- JV: Two more quick questions and then I think that'll be it. I talked to Omar Carmenates last Saturday actually. He talked specifically about your *Piano Quintet* that he did for the Percussion Project. He said to specifically ask you about that because he said you were quite passionate about that piece.
- JP: Yeah, I really love what he did. It's extraordinary what he's done. You know, it's a beautiful, beautiful version of the piece. I actually just got the CDs from. I'm very, very happy with what he's done with all of it. All of that music.
- JV: Are there any specific details about your career or works I should make sure I include in this research project.
- JP: I think *Kyoto* is probably a really good piece to look at in terms of percussion ensemble, because it was for a long time the biggest ensemble I had written for until *Cloud Folk*. And obviously *One Study One Summary* is an important one as well. It's a shame the newer stuff isn't available yet. *White Feather* is there online. Have you heard that piece?

JV: Yeah, at PASIC this last year.

JP: That's amazing! I'm super happy with *White Feather*. You could say that it is actually grown out of *Cloud Folk*. That's what *Cloud Folk* has led to, and there are certainly similarities between the two pieces. That would be a really good piece also to make some comparisons with. *White Feather* was the first piece I used steel pans, which I really enjoyed using. Those would be the key pieces, I think.

JV: Awesome. Do you have any other comments or things you think I should know?

JP: No, I think I've talked enough.

JV: Are you alright with me publishing your name and these responses in the dissertation?

JP: Yeah, absolutely.

JV: Alright. I really appreciate your time!

JP: Real pleasure man. It was great talking to you.

JV: Thank you very much.

JP: See you later.

APPENDIX 2. INTERVIEW WITH DR. OMAR CARMENATES

CONDUCTED ON FEBRUARY 8, 2020

JV: About the *Psathas Percussion Project*, what lead you or inspired you to begin the project? Was there something that made you decide that this project needed to happen?

OC: The project came from my first solo CD called *The Gaia Theory* which was released in 2013. In the process of getting that CD out, one track was a consortium-commission for John to write a percussion ensemble piece named *4BY4*, which ended up being a multi-percussion quartet that resembled four drum sets. On a whim, I also arranged a piece of John's called *Waiting, Still* for piano and gamelan for the CD. I took the piano part and split it for two keyboard players. Then I recorded a version with the original gamelan part and another where I adapted that part for vibraphone and tuned gongs. So in the process of all of that, John seemed to like the arrangement and asked something to the effect of "...you know what, this arrangement sounds so great, I have some piece that I've always thought would sound really great as percussion pieces. Do you want to keep doing this?" The timing just worked out that my sabbatical was also coming up, so I said "Sure!" Shortly after, we got to talking and came up with a plan and we decided on two CDs worth of arrangements, Volume 1 and Volume 2, with one CD being chamber works and one CD being arrangements of his concerti. Volume 1 was released this past January (2019) and Volume 2, hopefully in a year or so.

So I took all of the Spring of 2015 and arranged all of the chamber works. Since then I've been piecemeal arranging the concerti as time has gone on. Also, just about every summer since then a small army of people have come to Greenville to record the arrangements. After each session, we've tackled post-production as well, with all of those duties being split between me, John Parks, Brian Nozny, Matt Filosa. With it just being a small handful of people, we've sort of operated like a little boutique operation that has just constant trading sessions over Dropbox as we each finish our part.

JV: Did you have any works in mind before you started?

OC: There was one that he felt really good about and that was the *Piano Quintet*. I was familiar with it at the time, but I remember taking a deep listen to it and thinking that it wouldn't work. It's got a lot of microtonality and extended techniques that string players can do but that percussionists can't...even something simple like a *glissandos*. Even though I was reticent at first, John really thought it would work well, so I said, "sure"

I vividly remember writing *Piano Quintet*. It was the last one I did in my sabbatical semester. I had the score on my desk the whole time and as I'd finish

each piece, working down the pile, I would see *Piano Quintet* moving up the queue and I would become more and more fearful of it. However, it ended up being, I think, the best piece on the disk and also my favorite one, maybe precisely because the birthing process was so difficult. I had to come up with some creative equivalents for some of the sounds I was hearing from the string players. I'm really proud of that one because of how passionate John was about including it...it was sort of a centerpiece for him. The centerpiece for me was *Matre's Dance*. I wanted to center the disk around that because it has been played a lot all around the world and I know how difficult the piano part is, so I thought a percussion ensemble arrangement would really be a nice addition to the repertoire.

JV: Yeah. I performed *Drum Dances* and it's the same thing.

OC: Same thing. I thought percussion ensemble versions of those would be great to bring into our world so that we only have the option of hiring that out to a pianist. Granted, the ensemble parts ended up being just as difficult (laughs). I thought more people sharing the original piano part would make it easier, but I don't think it did. The *Matre's Dance* arrangement is still incredibly hard. Same with *Drum Dances*. From those three pieces, we just kind of build out. He would send me works. I would send him ideas.

JV: So it was a back and forth? He didn't just say "I want these?"

OC: Total back and forth over a couple of Skype calls.

JV: Got it. Other than some of those extended techniques, what other challenges did you experience while trying to arrange Psathas's works for percussion?

OC: Yeah. There are a lot of layers to this question. I think the first and foremost thing was deciding how true to stay to the arrangements or when to change something. John and I never actually explicitly talked about how much liberty I could take with each piece and I really want to be respectful of the works because they are great as is. So I didn't want to be sure I demolish them but I also wanted them to sound great for percussion instruments. I think that's the goal when you are an arranger, right? To make it sound as if the work had existed for percussion first? So that was my goal with every piece.

That lead to the next challenge. You take every piece, then you have to decide "how does each moment, or each line of music, translate to our instruments?" For example, any of the pieces with strings in it - *Corybas*, *Aegean*, *Piano Quintet*, etc... How do you reconcile what percussion instruments do or don't do well with string instruments can and can't do well? For instance, we can't really create a pure sustain, so we mock it by rolling. Is a roll a good enough analog for some of the melodies that John writes in the strings or do I use a bow on a keyboard instrument? And then if I bow, what do I do if the bow is 16 beats long at 80 beats

per minute? How do you reconcile that? How do you reconcile the balance of that sound with other instruments in the ensemble? The bow won't be as loud to some other things around it in a really dense texture, which John is known for. So there's all this reconciling and adjusting.

Like I alluded to before, in *Piano Quintet* I had to come up with creative percussion analogs to string sounds - the microtonal stuff, and the Bartok *pizzicati*, etc.... But then there was a piece like *Matre's Dance* which was really monochromatic melodically speaking, as it's just piano along with the drums. Do you write it similarly monochromatic but for percussion - all marimbas for instance? Or do you add colors to bring out certain melodic lines? For that piece, I ended up going with a primary marimba quartet, but two of the players also play vibraphone and one also plays xylophone. So, I mostly emphasized the woods as an analog to that insistent piano color. However, he (Psathas) is really specific with many of the melodic lines about note length and articulations, extensively using accents, tenutos and staccatos. So in those moments, I used the vibraphone since that instrument is better at creating a variety of articulations. In addition, that shift changed the color enough so that it also differentiates from the marimbas a bit and sounds like a melody.

However, at the start of *Matre's Dance*, which starts as just two pitches on the lowest notes of the piano, I initially wrote it for one marimba and it just didn't sound right. After some experimentation, I actually wrote it in unison between two players. I knew this would be incredibly difficult to play well, but in actuality, the tiny imperfections that would arise because of how hard it is to line up creates a small chorusing effect, and it ended up being a nice way to get at the grit of those thick low-end piano strings.

Through the whole of arranging, I was always making these decisions that had to be made in order making the jump to percussion instruments. This was to ensure that it sounded natural and organic on our instruments and not just like a straight one-to-one arrangement where, perhaps, violin one goes to marimba one, violin two goes to marimba two, etc... To continue the analogy, there was a lot of putting the violin one part on one instrument for a couple bars and then maybe moving it to another, and then moving it to another, depending on the context that would make it sound natural and flowing and voiced appropriately within the ensemble.

Then there was also the question of when do I add something of my own... When do I add something that wasn't in the piece at all to begin with? In *Piano Quintet*, I ended up adding a lot of percussion colors. There are six players in addition of the piano player and, in this instance, one player is playing accessory percussion and other colors full-time. I added rain sticks, ride cymbals, and other things to color each moment. I also did something similar with *Corybas*. The first large section of that piece struck me as something out of a Pat Metheny record, so I added some Paul Wertico-kind of ride cymbal. In another section I added a Davul

or dumbek because it had John's classic Greek/Middle Eastern/Eastern European sound that he loves to write in. In the climactic sections, after I realized that I couldn't pull the percussion grooves I composed from the previous phrases out, as it would be detrimental to the momentum of the piece, so I wrote a tom part that doubled the melody as a nod to John's *Kyoto*.

- JV: What did you learn about Psathas's music? Did you learn any common trends? Was it easier to identify Psathas's style in writing? Are there common rhythms or harmonies?
- OC: I had been studying John's music since 2006. In graduate school, I was in the North Texas library and I randomly pulled out a score for *View from Olympus* having never heard it. In that first encounter, I saw a rhythmic vocabulary that really spoke to me. If I were, in some alternate life, a composer, I have a feeling my rhythmic language would be something like his. So his rhythmic language really resonates with me and makes sense to me. So going into this project, I already had a strong sense of his sound, but what I didn't have a sense of was his progression as a composer. You take the works like *Drum Dances*, *Matre's Dance*, *Spike*, and *Stream*. They all have this language of very dense harmonies and rhythms, very chromatic, almost crunchy. And then there is this long transition to this really groove-based sound that almost mixing popular and jazz styles with his harmonic vocabulary... a sort of stylistic evolution. But then there's also his sense of form, which is real striking. He utilizes recapitulations or repeats of sections, as most composers do, but the way he treats them...the recap is never exactly the same and there's an added element of momentum or propulsion in those recapitulations that really creates his signature style of climax in his pieces. I say this jokingly, but I don't think there is a single repeat sign in any of his music, it's never just a standard copy and paste. In fact, I'm pretty sure that he never even uses *Dal Segno* or *Da Capo* marks to denote the return of a phrase. So, even if there might be a repetition of a section, you are actually reading it again on the sheet music, linearly, with subtle added elements and changes that give his pieces a sense of through-composition, like everything is snowballing to one clear climax even though there might be other peaks throughout.
- When he talks about his pieces a lot, he talks about energy. Not so much about the music in terms of notes and rhythms, but the energy of the moment and I think that that idea of the "non-repeating repeat" is what keeps the energy moving.
- JV: You can't just sit back and say, "Oh, I know this." There's always something new to the mix.
- OC: Yep. I think there is also another component to it, I think he writes first by hand and also in Logic.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Referring to the Mac OS software Logic Pro X, a digital audio workstation.

- JV: From what I've read he does both. He has someone who then takes his music and puts it into notation.
- OC: Yes. So I think there is something about writing it by hand that you can't copy and paste. You know, I don't want to speak for John, but I think that's what give his music this ever growing energy, that he has to actually write out every repeat and it changes every time. Even now in his new piece *Koolish Zein* which I'm learning, there's this opening cadenza for the solo marimbist. In just a single minute, there are things that repeat three or four times. Something will repeat here, then here, then here, but every time it gets a little longer or it extends a little bit or a note is different. I wonder if that's just because he writes it out every time or writes what's appropriate for that repeat. Then, typically, in a final recap, he'll stretch. Right at the peak of a section, which you'll have heard earlier in the piece, he'll stretch it a little more just to get a little more energy. For instance, he'll transpose it up or he'll extend a rhythm longer. He'll stretch that rubber band just a little more. So there's definitely that about his formal structure.

His rhythmic vocabulary is so unique. and I think it's the most identifiable trait of his style. But. one thing I learned about it that I didn't catch until I really dove in to arranging his music, are some of the really intricate rhythms he writes, things like melodies that incorporate the second partials of triplets or the sixth partial of sextuplet. What I think of it as it that he's write out *rubato* rhythmically. So the effect is that of a melody with a very natural or organic *rubato*, but he with the underlying energy and groove keeping going. When you hear it, it just sounds like the melody is floating with a natural ebb and flow in and out of the exactitude of the pulse, but it's actually very controlled and very prescribed. I catch it all the time now in his music. Even now with the piece I'm learning, there's a couple instances of it and I'm like "oh yeah, I know what this is."

- JV: It's like the end of *Summary*. All the voices kind of trail off.
- OC: But, you're thinking (the performer), like you're doing calculus in your head.
- JV: One of the things Psathas said on his website when reviewing *The Percussion Project* is "Omar's understanding and response to these works, and what he has achieved translating them into the percussion realm, has been miraculous and I am very excited about the upcoming recording releases." Did Psathas ever tell you what specific aspects he liked about your translations or what things he specifically enjoyed? What made him excited about these arrangements other than the fact they were his own music?
- OC: On some level, with some of the pieces, what I think was nice for him was to see some pieces that got premiered or recorded then maybe didn't get played a lot...for those pieces to get new life in a field where his music is really hot right now and I'm sure they are going to get played. *Piano Quintet* has already been played a bunch. So I think there's an aspect of that, just to seeing some of them

get new life like that. Beyond our original conversations he was very much open to letting me do my thing. Whenever needed, I would send him the scores obviously when I was done or to ask him a question. I remember there was a piece that he had just finished right around the time I started. *Musica* for solo guitar, which is now for two guitars. This was an interesting one because, relatively speaking, it was new to both of us. Initially, there were a lot of discrepancies between the written score and the MIDI recordings, of which he always has really nice recordings.

JV: Yeah. When learning *Cloud Folk* I used the MIDI.

OC: Yeah, but there were a lot of tiny discrepancies pitch wise. We managed to get to the bottom of it and we actually let the publisher know. I think that was nice to catch a few errors, maybe, but I would always send him the scores and he would come back with a few comments or color things. He was never like “go back and redo this whole thing.” He was very open to my ideas so I don’t know anything specific necessarily that he enjoyed. I think he just loved the entirety of the scope of the project. He loves big projects and collaborations. I think having twelve of his pieces get new life in new clothes was nice as well (laughs).

JV: And they are clearly being played. *Drum Dances* was in a showcase concert at PASIC this year.

OC: And the year before, University of Tennessee-Knoxville played *Piano Quintet*. The year before that Escape X played *Jettatura*, a keyboard duo. So yeah, it’s getting around. We played *Piano Quintet* at the McCormick Marimba Festival and on-campus at Furman. Utah played it recently and Truman State played it as well. There’s also great recording of two percussionists from Stony Brook playing *Jettatura* on YouTube. So yeah, the project is starting to make the rounds, which is nice.

JV: Specifically related to The Psathas Percussion Project, where do you go from here? You know there’s a second CD.

OC: Yep, which I’m in the middle of right now.

JV: Yeah, so what are the future plans?

OC: Oh man, it’s been so long to get to this point, I hadn’t even thought about anything beyond those two CD’s. We were joking about a Volume 3 when we had a recording session last summer for *View from Olympus*, the piano percussion double concerto.

JV: Oh, so that’s already recorded?

OC: Yeah. The ensemble parts. We haven't recorded the soloists yet, which I'm one of. But we were joking at that session in Summer of 2019... We pulled up my sabbatical proposal and some of the grant proposals I had written at the start of everything and the plan, which was a very strict timeline, was to finish everything, done and published, by 2017. You know, there's that rule in software where you take your deadline and double it, then you're about at the right point for planning your release date... well, I didn't know that then (laughs). I should have. We're about right now at a doubled timeline. Right now, there's still a lot of post-production left, we need to record the piano soloist for *Three Psalms*, and piano and percussion soloists for *View from Olympus*. So with that and the whole post-production and publishing process, there is at least another year of work left. That's all I'm thinking about at this moment.

Joking aside, there were some thoughts in my head for if there were to be Volume 3. When I had come up with a name for the first CD, *John Psathas Percussion Project Vol. 1*, John told me "I really like that name because it leaves it open for future volumes beyond the first two." And I was like "Oh gosh," because I was in the thick of writing at that point. Now that I'm looking at the sunset of it a little bit, the tail end of the work, I'm not sure I'll do anything of this scope and intensity again, but I do have a sabbatical coming up in two years. I may try an arrangement here or there but nothing like "bam, here's 12 pieces all at once."

JV: Cool! Let's go more into about John Psathas as a person. As the director of *The Psathas Percussion Project* and all the other things you have done. I would say you are one of the leading authorities in the world on his percussion music.

OC: Thank you.

JV: You may have already answered this, but what value do you find in his music? If you're performing or rehearsing his music, what value do you find specifically in the percussion aspect?

OC: On a very macro, 10,000-foot view level, I think it's the amount of connection points people can have to his music. It can be the sense of groove, it can be the popular and even jazz styles that he brings in, or just the visceral sense you get from the sheer difficulty of it. There's a reason *One Study* and even *Summary* are big hits because they bring all that together. They're groovy to listen to but they are very rewarding to play. As a performer, it's like a hit of endorphins when you are done with a marathon. Incredibly challenging but in a rewarding way. His music I find to also be accessible because of the energy and the number of musical worlds he brings into his writing, especially these days. That makes it really fun to listen to. It works at all those levels.

JV: Why do you think his music works so well for percussion?

- OC: His rhythmic vocabulary. Having gone through a lot of his pieces and rewriting them for percussion and having gone through the recordings of other instrumentalists playing... both versions are perfectly valid but are two different experiences. Selfishly, I think percussionists also love taking on tough challenges which is perfect for the way he writes (laughs). I there's other things too, like why *Piano Quintet* ended up worked so well for percussion. I remember looking at the score and hearing the strings players play and thinking "that has to be so hard for them but it's so easy for us." There's this one section in particular that was like two sixths (musical interval) in alternating sixteenths or inverted double-stroke sixteenths. For us that's a no brainer to play as double vertical strokes and it sounds good. That has to be really hard for a string player who is holding two sixths, going back and forth, and with all of the string crossings. So I think there's this flow to the percussion version of *Piano Quintet* that is different than the original. The second movement of *Piano Quintet*, the one with all the extended techniques, is really difficult for percussionists. I had to write for things like micro-tuned steel pipes, micro-tonal *scordatura* guitar, and Christopher Deane-esque pitch bends on the vibraphone. But for the string players, those extended sounds were perfectly natural for them... like Bartok *pizzicato, col legno*, you know, all these things that are normal for them and totally work on their end. So, to sum up, it's a little bit of give and take but definitely I think his rhythmic vocabulary and his groove are why percussionists are attracted to his work and they keep commissioning him.
- JV: Yeah. There's definitely no end. You can see a list of his future projects and there's at least two more percussion works.
- OC: There's like a percussion concerto I saw for Alexej (Gerassimez) and then *White Feather* just came out. *Koolish Zein*, we're doing that now at Furman. He's writing something now for a duo I believe as well?
- JV: There's more coming which is exciting. Jim Campbell likes to talk about in our percussion history class that we are in the golden age of percussion. Similar to the violin in the classical era, all of our greatest works are currently being written or have just come out or have not been premiered yet. How do you think Psathas fits into this idea?
- OC: It certainly feels like that, but it's tricky to know that... A lot of people say that, but how do you know until we are out of it, and can look back retrospectively? I'd like to think that we are in the golden age of percussion writing... we are definitely in a moment of peak percussion, as it were, but the art form could go even higher or become even more popular. It could. With John, especially like we were talking about, maybe before we turned this on (referring to the microphone), *Matre's Dance* was 1991. That was his big percussion hit. Essentially, Evelyn Glennie took it, and made it famous but it's practically standard repertoire now. Then *View From Olympus* comes around in the early 2000's and brought his percussion writing to a whole different audience. The CD came out and won a

bunch of awards. I'm sure there were a lot of steps in between there but considering, if we were to deem the present as "peak Psathas", he's contributed a lot but he is undoubtedly going to contribute more and write more incredible pieces, so how can we to place that label on an era or time while we're still possibly in it with more room to grow? *One Study One Summary* will be probably looked as a masterwork later on down the road if it's not already. I think *Matre's Dance* will be looked at as a multi-percussion masterwork, I hope. I think *Kyoto*, it already gets a lot of play, but those pieces need time and retrospective to be considered a masterwork. I think it's much more fun and rewarding to not worry about those labels and just keep playing music, like his, that we feel pushes our art form forward.

JV: But you do see some form of longevity?

OC: Oh yeah! Yeah, definitely.

JV: Do you have any tips for those analyzing or practicing his music?

OC: Patience! I'll talk about analyzing first. John tends to write very thick textures, especially where there is a soloist, a lead voice, or soloist with tape or ensemble.

JV: Especially when there is a soloist.

OC: Yep. I'll take *One Study* since we were just talking about it. It's almost all incessant sixteenth notes but you have to treat it almost like a Bach *Cello Suite Prelude* with hidden melodies and structures inside those incessant rhythms. His music is actually really transparent if you let the density just be the figurative heat on the pot, not the dish, or what's in the pot. The reason a lot of his music has energy and grit is because of that dense writing, the undulating and groove-based textures.

We're doing an all Psathas concert this semester with the Furman Percussion Ensemble. So for most of my students, it's their first time playing his music. At first, a lot of them play some of that inner stuff too loud, trying to give it integrity and clarity like we're often taught to do... but the effect is the opposite and that density clutters up the texture. That's very easy to do with his music if you don't treat it with the care that it needs. Those types of textures need to come down, to create propulsion, but still give room to the melodies on top of that. Sort of like creating layers of a cake right?

JV: It's like in *Cloud Folk*, in parts two and four there's the vibe solo and everyone else is playing.

OC: They're just jamming on other things.

JV: It just has to be way softer.

- OC: I remember when we had a rehearsal on *Drum Dances* with John via Skype during a recording session. He was in New Zealand and we were in Greenville. That was crazy to begin with, that we could do that, but a lot of that session was just making sure that the lead melodic voices were playing with the energy that the moment needed. I don't want to say it was as simple as just playing louder, but it was playing like you would see Dave Samuels in front of a band or someone like that. Since that's the focal point, that's where the energy of the moment is being dictated from. So, if you balance everything too soft the soloist doesn't have to try, it doesn't have the visceral energy of the moment, but you also can't let the whole ensemble overplay because then the listener will be overwhelmed with information. I have this joke with all of John's pieces that if you slow them down by five clicks they're playable, Right? But that little extra bit, that extra five clicks, stretches the performer a bit...
- JV: But it gives it that edge.
- OC: Because it gives it edge. Right? Like I said before in his formal structures, when he recaps he always stretches it a little bit at the peak because that's what give it energy. That edge is what makes his music his music. So it's important to have that. That's even why when I play *One Study* or coach it now, I don't let my students play it under tempo even if it is more accurate there. David Maslanka was like that with his music as well. He would always dictate when conducting bands, "No, it has to be this tempo because I wrote it for this tempo." He was almost dictatorial about it. John isn't, but I think it is a really important part of it. I remember learning *One Study* and those last five clicks are always the hardest to get. I remember finally getting to tempo and thinking "This is so difficult." A bit slower just feels so much better. Can I just do it there?" And then recording myself and hearing me do it slower was like, "Oh, that's not the tempo. It doesn't have that edge, that sense of risk."
- JV: Yeah, that's true with *Cloud Folk* now thinking about our rehearsals. If you can't get up there, it's just not quite the same. Any specific interpretations you think people should be aware of?
- OC: I think the biggest thing is to perhaps say what I said already in a different way. Make sure you give each piece enough time so that you have enough command with the technical aspects, which then allows you to have fun with it.
- JV: I haven't found much academic writing on Psathas. Are there any specific aspects of his music that I should make sure to include in this research?
- OC: If not talking about certain pieces, I think it would be interesting to try to analyze or create eras of his writing. I think there are lynch-pin pieces that you can hear his style turn on. *Matre's Dance* being one of them. *View from Olympus* being the

other. And chronologically there may be pieces as well. Just inside my head, those are the lynchpin.

JV: I believe he said that *One Study* was one of his first experiments with playback and Logic. It immediately influenced *Ukiyo*, and now he has a bunch of pieces with tape.

OC: Yeah, I was going to say the tape thing as well. The incorporation of string writing style percussion...maybe? The first time I heard his string writing style come through in his percussion writing might be *Cloud Folk* to be honest with you... these long melodic arcs that he had been doing in his string writing for a long time, in *Cloud Folk* I kind of heard it for the first time. How many sections are in *Cloud Folk*? Five?

JV: Five main sections.

OC: I think it's the outer ones, maybe?

JV: They're definitely the most intricate. The first one, the coda, and the end.

OC: It's intricate. I'm not super familiar with the piece, but I've score studied a bit.

Oh, his collaboration with Serj Tankian from System of a Down. He has a CD called "Elect the Dead" where he rearranged a lot of the music for Serj, the singer, plus orchestra. At that time, from my view anyway, that's where his sense of groove in his writing started really happening, where a lot of the pieces had really unique grooves. Since then, he also started collaborating with a lot of people outside of the circles of concertized music. There's the film "No Man's Land," a World War I memorial film that he wrote the music for and collaborated with an incredible variety of musicians from across the globe...and a show called *Between Zero and One* which was for a percussion group in New Zealand, Strike Percussion, for their stage show. In that show is actually a percussion ensemble arrangement of *Songs for Simon*, which is another piano and playback piece. You could almost tie a line to all of those from the *Elect the Dead* symphony in my view.

JV: You used that at the Cadets, didn't you? One of the movements?

OC: Yeah, we did. That was also a piece I wanted in this arranging project, I just never got around to it, one of the ones that got left on the cutting room floor. Maybe it'll be a part of volume three (laughs). But where popular music... I say pop music but I really mean groove-based music, really starts infiltrating his chamber writing is from that collaboration with Serj for *Elect the Dead*. you can start seeing it. Then there's the *Good For Nothing* soundtrack, it's a spaghetti western which we wrote the soundtrack for. There are couple of stylistic off-shoots from that like his guitar piece *Musica*. Those could be grouped together in a particular kind of

stylistic era. Going even earlier than that, *Jettatura* sounds like it's part of that earlier, highly dissonant, chromatic era, sort of like *Matre's Dance* or *Drum Dances* or *Spike*. If you could catalog this sort of stylistic evolution of his writing, it would help inform an analysis of say, *Cloud Folk*, because there would be aspects of all of those previous works in there. In fact, there's a melody in *Cloud Folk*, I could be wrong, that is straight from *Waiting: Still*, a piece that I arranged.

JV: Okay. The gamelan one?

OC: Yep.

JV: I'll check that out.

OC: Which is interesting because *Waiting: Still* is very slow. It's at eighty BPM, but then this piano melody that shows up in *Cloud Folk* which is much faster. There's a lot of that, a lot of little tiny melodic fragments that find their way in to new pieces. I think every composer has that happen probably, especially when you have such a distinct style like John.

JV: Two more quick questions. One of the things we talked about as a common trend is difficulty. Is that an accident or does he aim to write "difficult music?"

OC: I don't think his aim is to write "difficult music." Not my sense. He's never said that explicitly but in our conversations he definitely acknowledges it. At the outset of composing a piece, I don't think he says, "I'm going to write a difficult piece." There is this element that I think you can tie in to composers who write at the piano. A composer at the piano has ten fingers but we as percussionists have four. I've found it with the music of David Gillingham and Eric Ewazen with his marimba concerto. Certain things probably feel great on the piano but come out harder on a marimba or vibraphone. It's subconscious things like that. However, there's also the element of energy in a piece which is too important to John. I think that for the audience to feel the heat of this music you have to literally be perspiring (laughs).

JV: Any other thoughts or comments?

OC: No, I think we covered a lot of ground.

JV: Perfect. Are you alright with me publishing your response and transcript in the dissertation?

OC: Yep.

JV: Cool. Thank you for your time!

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APPENDIX 3. INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL BURRITT

CONDUCTED ON FEBRUARY 2, 2020

JV: When you commissioned *Cloud Folk* from Psathas, did you give him any information or request any specific details?

MB: I told him (Psathas) that I thought repertoire could use pieces that were larger in nature that I thought were quality pieces. Pieces that were more than quartets, quintets, and sextets. I thought there were a lot of schools in particular that have a need to be programming pieces for a large number of students and that I felt like, in my opinion, there weren't as many pieces that I thought stood up to the quality of the pieces that we have for smaller chamber settings. You know what I mean? I wanted it to be bigger. I think I started with eight. Then John wanted to add piano and he asked how I felt about that and I said "sure, that's fine." I don't recall any other specific conversations about instrumentation in that case. He may have said a few things along the way.

We actually had the resources to do it drawn from a thing that Bill Cahn started here a couple years ago. Well, not a couple years ago, actually, soon after I got here, I figure around 2012. Something called the John Beck award. So initially we had done a competition for a new piece back in 2012. We had run a festival here called Percussion Rochester and as part of that we had a composition contest with some pretty well known composers judging, like Steven Stucky and Libby Larsen. We were looking for a piece for mixed chamber ensemble and solo percussionist and that produced a piece initially. I feel like this was the next piece after that, although I don't remember. We call it the John Beck Prize or John Beck Commission. They fortunately had a donor in town that helped us pay for at least half of it and then I had money that I used from my account at Eastman to finish it. We were able to pay for it. It was about a \$10,000 commission. We did it on our own. There wasn't a consortium for this.

And you question about PASIC (Was *Cloud Folk* commissioned specifically for the PASIC17 showcase concert, or was it the commission already in process when you were informed of winning the International Percussion Ensemble Competition?). I didn't commission this with the idea that we would premiere it at PASIC necessarily, although it sort of worked out serendipitously that we could do that, which I was happy about obviously. Once we got it going and I felt like I had some repertoire I wanted to play at PASIC, I decided to apply before I even had this piece. There was another piece we played in 2017 by Matt Curley that we had played that year at Eastman and I wanted to bring that. Anymore, I feel like won't apply for PASIC unless I really feel like I have a program that's unique and new, with some interesting pieces I want to perform there with the group. This was one of those times. And the Psathas, because of the timing of it came together that way but it wasn't started because of that.

JV: Got it. Yeah, that concert was definitely very unique. It's what inspired me to do this dissertation.

MB: Oh, I'm glad to hear that. I was proud of the students. They did a good job that day. They made me proud.

JV: There is a short narrative that *Cloud Folk* is based on. Did you have any input on that?

MB: No, nothing to do with that. That was all John and his idea, his creative energy.

JV: You said earlier that you didn't talk too much about instrumentation other than you wanted it to be larger. Was there anything else special about the collaboration process? Did you get drafts or early copies?

MB: I might have gotten an early MIDI sample of some of it, but I don't recall actually getting a draft of a portion of it. Maybe I did, to be honest with you, I don't remember. I don't think so though. I don't recall seeing snippets of it. I think I heard a MIDI. It was a rough MIDI of some stuff initially and we just kind of moved from there.

JV: What challenges did you experience when you started to put the piece together?

MB: You know, it's a big ensemble piece. You have a big piece like that and it's a piece that relies on...sort of an inner sense of groove, if you want to call it for a lack of better word. I think it's always easier to get a really strong and comfortable groove going with a smaller group. The bigger the group, the more diverse the personalities and the experiences of the people. So I think some of that was a little tricky and I think it was also tricky finding a set-up as I recall. It wasn't even two weeks before our show that I had moved some of the instruments up front that I had in the back and switched things around and put the piano in the middle. We were messing around with a bunch of different things because ultimately I decided I wouldn't conduct it. I had started rehearsing it as a piece I was going to conduct but I felt it was the kind of piece that had so much groove in it that conducting it, at least two thirds of the time, felt like I was in the way. You know what I am saying? I wanted them to be listening. You know, it's not like conducting *Ionisation* or something which is obviously a very different kind of piece. That's a piece you would conduct. Anyways, I think in the end of all things, making that decision actually brought the piece together really, really great. We had been down the road pretty far with the piece and they knew it well, but I really wanted it to come together. He has written shakers to drive some of the feel and the rhythmic energy underneath all the keyboard stuff. Some of that is really hard to make work, so I had used shekeres that we actually played on with our hands instead of using an actual shaker to create some of those rhythmic things that go on in the piece, especially early on. If you watch the video, you'll see a guy playing shekere with his hands to make it both louder and give you a

better annunciation of all those rhythmic feels and everything. Those are some of the things we did.

- JV: Did you help contribute to the suggested performance layout that's provided in the score then?
- MB: I have to look at what the score says now because to be honest, I don't think I've seen the score he gives out now. I didn't use the exact layout that he gave to me. I think I originally tried it and then I changed it around. So I don't remember. If you look at our PASIC video, I'm not sure how well you can digest the set up from there, that's the set-up I used. John and I had a couple conversations after the premier and after the PASIC performance about things I did and adjustments we made and I had some of the students write in some of the subtleties because some of the little details I adjusted in the parts just happened in rehearsal. "Now take this out, do that. Boom, Boom, Boom, Bum." So I wrote some of it down to make sure I was actually communicating right to John that I wasn't missing something or forgetting something, that we had it changed. I know that some of that got into the score and I don't know for sure because I haven't really looked at his set up to know what that looks like.
- JV: One of my questions was about the errata that was sent out but it sounds like you guys made other contributions or edits. The shekere part at the beginning, for example, you said that was originally a shaker?
- MB: Yep.
- JV: Do you know of any other edits or things that students wrote in?
- MB: I think we did some stuff to the drum set part here and there. I had him change a few things to help solidify where the beat is in there. I don't remember the details of that but, we moved a few things around. You know, a couple subtleties in there to help solidify the feel. I know we added octaves in the bowing in the marimba part and stuff like that, instead of just one octave of bowing. So instead of bowing just the low C, we would bow the C and the C above it and that really help bring out those nice bowing sounds on the marimba.
- JV: Based on my experience performing some of Psathas's other works, I feel like a lot of the sound effects are akin to some of his electronic playback tracks. In particular, I'm working on *One Study One Summary* and a lot of the bowing effects remind me of the *One Summary* movement. The shekere reminds me of the rhythmic energy in *Etude*. Were you aware of any specific influences to any of the sounds he made?
- MB: No, I wasn't aware of that. John would certainly be able to speak to that. I can't say that I have knowledge of that.

- JV: Do you have a particular favorite part of *Cloud Folk* or a certain aspect that you enjoy rehearsing? Anything you think an audience should listen for in a performance?
- MB: With *Cloud Folk* you can listen to different things in different performances. You can listen to some of the inner voices or you can listen to some of the solo, melodic voices. You can listen to the rhythm and percussion stuff. The timpani part is fun to listen to. It is interesting. There is a lot going on there. Certainly one of the more challenging timpani parts you're going to ever play in this age. Beast. I mean, it's on the verge of unplayable.
- JV: I'll be sure to tell our timpani player that.
- MB: I think it is. I think it's tough there. It's tough. I enjoy the way he has two big arcs. You know, there's just big arches in the piece and big, long landscapes. You have the first arrival. Then at the end of the piece there's the bigger arrival. I like that. I think his later music is very different than *One Study One Summary* or *Matre's Dance*, or those earlier pieces. His later music has longer, sort of epic, arches to it, which I really enjoy. I think it's beautiful and very exciting. The piece really builds beautifully. It's super effective in that way.
- JV: Awesome! I'm going to shift a little more to talk about John Psathas himself. You've commissioned him multiple times now since you have the marimba premier next month, *Koolish Zein*. What value do you find in his percussion music? Why do you think his music works so well for the percussion genre?
- MB: It's his voice. He has his own voice. I got to know his music back in the mid to late 90's because I knew of *Matre's Dance*. I had a student from New Zealand at Northwestern when I taught there, Jeremy Fitzsimons, who actually did a great CD of John's stuff. I think it's called *Fragment*. So, Jeremy brought more of it to me because he was obviously from New Zealand and knew John's work. I like the rhythmic energy. It sort of has a jazz style to it without it ever sounding cheeky or campy. You know what I mean? I think he and I have similar listening interests so for me, it kind of resonates with me. He obviously listens to Keith Jarrett. He talks about that. So, I think the rhythmic nature of the music and his understanding of keyboards and the way he writes for keyboards, it sounds to me like it has a jazz influence to it. When I'm learning the music I can feel that sort of inflection and style I enjoy in playing his pieces. The first piece I ever played of his was *Matre's Dance*. I really loved playing that piece and I love that you can inflect the rhythmic language of that piece on the drums, what it allowed me to do, and how it worked. The piano part is super exciting and had a lot of teeth in it. It had a lot of cool rhythmic syncopation. It's funky, hip, interesting, and sophisticated. So it wasn't just jazzy and fun, it had a layer of sophistication to it that gave it that next level that made it interesting. So I think that's what works well.

Like any composer, you just see his music evolve from those pieces, like *Drum Dances* and *Matre's Dance*, and even *One Study One Summary*, to what he writes now. I've listened to his other music too. There's a great piece, *Voices at the End*, he wrote about two years ago or a year and a half ago for this huge piano ensemble. I think it is a six piano group from London called Piano Circus, and it's a great piece. You should check it out. It's with electronics and six pianos. Fantastic piece. You'll hear some of the same language that you hear in these marimba pieces. When I listen to *Koolish Zein* and *Cloud Folk*, I hear similarities in those pieces for sure. The way the arch moves, like I said, in long, epic phrases and sections. I think that's kind of where he is going now. But it still retains some of his really interesting rhythmic language as well. I think those things together work well for the instrument.

JV: Where do you think Psathas's music will impact percussion in the future? What do you think his significance will be fifty years from now?

MB: So hard to say those things, right? It really is. I look at some of my pieces that I wrote in the 80's and early 90's and I can't believe people still play them, like *October Night* and *Caritas* and things like that. There were pieces that I had written that I thought would be played more. So it's hard to always guess that. Same thing with other composers. But I do feel composers like John and Alejandro Viñao, those two people and some of these pieces are going to be played a lot for a long time. Some of them won't be played as much as maybe when they are first written but I think certainly a handful of them will. I think John's music has its own voice, represents a certain period in the evolution of our instrument and the repertoire of that evolution. I think in fifty years people are still going to play Psathas. It's hard to say because it may sound dated, but I think a lot of music goes through an arch. Almost like style, where it happens and it's almost passé and then it becomes funny. Then it comes back and becomes a classic and it becomes "wow." So I think that can happen as well to repertoire. Mostly good repertoire.

Cloud Folk, I think, will hopefully have a long life to it because it serves a good purpose too. Does that make sense? When you're a composer, and I can say this myself too, you write it because you want to write a piece of music and you have an inspiration to write it or someone asked you to write it. The layers of things you're doing is one: you're trying to create something that can be satisfying to listen to and play. Secondly: if you're writing it for someone in particular, it feels as satisfying as what they were hoping for in terms of their initiation of the process. And thirdly: you hope that it serves a purpose in a greater sense of the field and that the music that you write can be useful to people. Does that make sense? Something that's pedagogically and artistically useful in a way because great pieces, like Beethoven's music, are very artistic but also pedagogically sound. You know what I mean? So is Bach. I think some of John's stuff works that way too. I think for pieces like the one we just talked about and the new one that I'm working on right now, I don't know how much that's going to be played

because whenever you start to add solo, quartet, and electronic elements, I think it limits. I'm happy we did it. He and I talked about this. It was originally just going to be a solo piece with electronics and then we moved it to the quartet with electronics. I know full well that I may get a lot of play out of it because I can travel and play this on the road with a lot of groups and do that, but it's not going to get as much as a solo piece would get. Does that make sense? Or a piece for ensemble, for example, without electroacoustic stuff going on. When you start to add layers it becomes a little less user friendly. But hopefully it will have a good place. Like all big pieces that are multi movement, like this one for example, I can see people playing the first movement of this piece a lot and every once in a while you get all three movements. Does that make sense? To be honest with you, at this point, I finished learning the first movement and that's a handful. When I premiere it, I'm probably not going to have time to learn all three movements on my schedule, so I'll probably end up playing just one and two, or I'll go two then one for the first performance of this, and I'll get to the third eventually down the road. I just don't have time to put it all together right now. I think as I've been learning this and listening to it a lot, I really think that I will probably end up getting a lot of use out of the first movement as I travel and do thing, which is nice.

JV: Just a few more questions. In an interview with Kellen King on his website, specifically on the One Study One Summary page, Psathas says that "the only way I ever write, there's no exception to it really, is to start at the beginning and find out what's going to happen." Have you found this to be true in your collaborations with him?

MB: I guess. It's hard for me to know because I'm not with him through the process. Does that make sense? You asked me if there was anything I gave him that I wanted him to do, like "here's a motive." I can say with the new piece (*Koolish Zein*), we talked about this a lot, we decided to use more or less the instrumentation of my *Home Trilogy* piece in the ensemble. That was because I wanted to be able to use the new piece with *Home Trilogy* so if I was doing a concert and I wanted to do both pieces I could make it work set-up wise for the ensembles. But I've never said to him, "Man, here's a tune I really love. Could you use this tune in there or could you use the rhythmic stylings of this?" I don't necessarily know that I have a sense of how he starts and what his process is because we don't really talk about that a lot during this. I haven't really walked through a process with him to know. A lot of composers describe themselves as top-down composers or bottom-up composers. I think top-down composers are one that sort of make a grand plan, and they are a little more architectural in their process and bottom-up are what John's saying, I start and see where it goes. It doesn't mean that in that process you don't get on top and start looking at the architecture and start deciding what isn't going to look like, that can happen later. His music does sound more intuitive that way. It sounds like there's a very intuitive sense of how the music spells out. You know, if you listen to the arch of the first movement of *Koolish Zein*, it really just keeps going, and going, and

going. It has this long narrative to it that you would think, from my experience with a writer, happens usually in the way he's scribing it by starting and seeing where the music takes him. It's a long answer, sorry.

JV: That's great. I haven't found too much academic writing on Psathas. Are there any aspects of Psathas's music I should make sure to include in my research?

MB: I would talk to him about his influence. I remember him talking in *Kyoto* about Keith Jarrett and mentioning that. It's interesting to me because sometimes I hear sort of an influence of jazz music in a way. But I also hear almost an eastern European-like sort of sound in the way the scales work and the energy of the piece works a little bit too. And maybe there's something to do with the Greek in there. I don't know. I would ask him about that too because he would have a better, more true answer to what he is trying to get at in his music. I would also look at the combinations of instruments he uses. I would not consider him to be a composer that experiments greatly with instruments. Does that make sense? But I do think he's a composer that pushes the limit of what you can do on the instruments, and I think that is important.

JV: Are you alright with me publishing your name and responses in the dissertation.

MB: Yeah.

JV: Any other comments?

MB: No. I also want to say that when I work with composers, one of the things I find particularly enjoyable and makes me want to go back, for example with Alejandro (Viñao). I've commissioned him a lot. He's a great guy and as I got to know him it made me enjoy his music more because of how much I like him as a person and how our relationship evolved as human beings. That is also true of John as I've gotten to know him. He is a super genuine individual and someone who I've enjoyed collaborating and working with and I also support him in terms of what he does as a composer so that makes it a deeper and rewarding experience too. I think that's an important part of the collaboration.

JV: Awesome.

MB: Okay, bud. Have a good Sunday down there and let me know how this goes for you, okay?

JV: Awesome. Thank you so much.

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- West, Brian. “The International Percussion Ensemble Competition.” *Percussive Notes* Vol. 57, No. 4 (September 2019): 80-2.

VITA

James William Vilseck

EDUCATION

Southern Illinois University Carbondale; Carbondale, IL May 2017
Master of Music - Percussion Performance
Primary Instructor: Dr. Christopher Butler

Morehead State University; Morehead, KY Dec. 2014
Bachelor of Music Education- Percussion P-12 Area; Summa Cum Laude
Primary Instructors: Frank Oddis, Dr. Brian Mason, Dr. Ming Hui-Kou, Dr. Kyle Forsthoff, Dr. Jonathan Sharp

TEACHING

Morehead State University; Morehead, KY Aug. 2019- May 2020
Adjunct Professor of Percussion

University of Kentucky; Lexington, KY Aug. 2017- May 2020
Graduate Percussion Teaching Assistant

Fairborn High School Marching Band and Winter Drum line; Fairborn, OH Jan. 2015- Aug. 2019
Part-time Instructor

Matrix Performing Arts; Akron, OH Nov. 2018- Apr. 2019
Open Snare Technician- 2019 Winter Guard International Percussion Independent Open Silver Medalist

Tates Creek Indoor Ensemble; Lexington, KY Mar. 2016- Apr. 2018
Battery Technician

Southern Illinois University; Carbondale, IL Aug. 2015- May 2017
Graduate Percussion and Athletic Bands Assistant

Heartland Youth Percussion Ensemble; Carbondale, IL Jan. 2016- March 2017
Director and Founder

Carbondale Community High School Marching Terriers; Carbondale, IL May 2016- Oct. 2016
Percussion Caption Head

PUBLICATIONS

“Stick Yoga” Aug. 2020
Article; Rhythm Scene Blog by Percussive Arts Society; <https://www.pas.org/rhythm!-scene-blog/rhythm!-scene-blog-post/rhythm!-scene-blog/2020/08/26/stick-yoga-by-james-vilseck#commentsWidget>

“Scholarly Program Notes for Graduate Percussion Recital” May 2017
Research Paper; OpenSIUC; <https://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/gp/775/>

AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Kentucky PAS Day of Percussion Concert Snare Drum Competition <i>Collegiate Class Winner</i>	Mar. 2018
Lexington Philharmonic Orchestra <i>Added to the Sub List</i>	Feb. 2018
Southern Illinois Symphony Orchestra Concerto Competition Winner <i>Eric Ewazen Concerto for Marimba and String Orchestra; Mvt. 1</i>	Oct. 2016
Mary Kensar Music Scholarship	Aug. 2016
Madison Scouts: Yamaha Percussion Music Educator's Scholarship	Aug. 2014
Frances Edmunson Scholarship	Apr. 2014