

Intermediate Masterworks for Marimba from the ZMF New Music Commissioning Project Performed by Ivana Bilic, Thomas Burritt, Jean Geoffroy, Beverley Johnston, William Moersch, Gordon Stout, Jack Van Geem and Nancy Zeltsman



By Nancy Zeltsman

If you're interested in exciting new repertoire for marimba, and in getting a taste of the performance styles of many marimba players, this is the session for you! The ZMF (Zeltsman Marimba Festival) New Music Commissioning Project clinic/performance on Friday, November 13 at 2:00 P.M. in the Sagamore Ballroom will provide an overview of the 24 new concert marimba pieces recently fostered through ZMF New Music. At PASIC, about one third of the pieces will be performed by Ivana Bilic, Thomas Burritt, Jean Geoffroy, Beverley Johnston, William Moersch, Gordon Stout, Jack Van Geem, and myself.

ZMF New Music, which I spearheaded with Shawn Michalek, was the conduit through which over 200 contributors commissioned an esteemed group of 16 composers and supported an international composition contest from which eight winners were selected.

Those 24 works were premiered and recorded at ZMF 2009. The two-volume publication from C.F. Peters Corporation (containing 12 scores each), and the double CD on Bridge Records (the eight players above each recorded three pieces), are titled *Intermediate Masterworks for Marimba*.

Our goal was to create a substantial body

of new pieces to provide: 1. valuable teaching material and 2. a variety of relatively short, yet stimulating concert works that would be satisfying literature for all serious marimbists. Each piece is three to six minutes in length, and scored for a marimba of up to five octaves.

The composers were asked to create an inter-

mediate-level concert solo. Quite a few works are perhaps on the "difficult side" of "intermediate," but to paraphrase composer Gunther Schuller, the term "intermediate" can't really be expected to designate a level of difficulty but more aptly designates material that teaches something.

One of the most important aspects of the project was choosing the composers to commission. We wanted the collection to encompass a broad range of aesthetics that might give players the "key to the city" to expand their expressive potential. There is a world of music to delve into within this collection. The composers range in age from 18 to 83, hailing from across the U.S. and a dozen other countries: Canada, Belize, England, France, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Israel, China, Japan, Malaysia, and Cambodia. Chances are we will all be drawn to certain pieces first, but I think the collection has real depth; eventually, I hope players will become curious to venture onto new musical paths.

The illustrious group of commissioned composers include Pulitzer Prize recipients Gunther Schuller and Steven Stucky; multiple Grammy winners Paul Simon and Lyle Mays (Pat Metheny Group); music department chairmen Steven Mackey (Princeton University) and Robert





Aldridge (Montclair State University); distinguished professors Louis Andriessen (The Hague, Netherlands), Chen Yi (University of Missouri-Kansas City—the first woman to receive a masters degree in composition in China), and Chinary Ung (University of California, San Diego); and *Down Beat* magazine Critics Poll winner Carla Bley (multiple wins as composer and arranger).

Like Bley, Fred Hersch is a versatile master of jazz piano; his piece is in the style of a Brazilian *choro*. Anders Hillborg has written extensively for orchestra and for films. Betsy Jolas studied with Olivier Messiaen and Darius Milhaud. J.K. Randall, retired from Princeton University, was a co-founder of its computer music facility. James Rolfe weaves together many musical influences, composing extensively for chamber ensembles, orchestra, choir, voice, and the operatic stage. Errollynn Wallen, respected as much as a singer/songwriter as a composer of contemporary works, was awarded an MBE (Order of the British Empire, Member) in the 2007 Queen's Birthday Honours list.

Through ZMF New Music's Composition Contest, we received 150 pieces from 20 countries. In July 2008, a distinguished panel—William Kraft, Jack Van Geem, Amy Knoles, Peter Prommel, and Orlando Cotto—along with Shawn Michalek and I reviewed 21 finalists and selected eight winners composed by Jude Carlton, Ed Haddad, Gaetano Lorandi, Darren R. Jones, Osnat Netzer, Kaori Okatani, Alvina Tan, and Derek Tywoniuk. Their pieces are being published alongside the commissioned works.

More commissioning projects are springing up all the time—which is a great thing for percussion—and people have already begun to inquire how we did it. As far as we know, ZMF New Music was the largest-scale project that has ever been carried off in this manner, with grass-roots promotion and fundraising taking place concurrently with contracting a large number of composers.

I could never have done this by myself. Shawn Michalek, Vice President of Zeltsman Marimba Festival, Inc., who has been my personal assistant at every festival over the past seven years, was an equal partner on ZMF New Music. We took no step without consulting each other. Collaborating with someone who is equally excited and committed to a work objective is a phenomenal experience. The harder you work together, the harder you will sometimes be able to laugh together. Two heads really are better than one, especially for a really challenging project like this.

It was nerve-wracking: we planned thoughtfully—over about three years—and then took a calculated risk that we would be able to keep up with payments as they became due, and would be able to adhere to the elaborate schedule of deadlines to effectively promote/enter each next phase. From launch to completion, the project took another three years.

We are so grateful to all the professional colleagues, percussion departments and companies, performers, and other individuals who joined together to make our dream a reality. We couldn't have done it without you. I would like to extend a personal thanks to many colleagues for bearing with me incessantly talking about this project over the past few years!

Intermediate Masterworks for Marimba, volume 1 was released in July 2009 and is now available. (Incidentally, six pieces from volume 1 are on the repertoire list of the International Marimba Competition—Paris 2009 in late November.)

Being published in time for PASIC will be *Intermediate Masterworks for Marimba*, volume 2 and the complete recordings on CD! Both volumes of the books and the CD will be available throughout the convention at the Steve Weiss Music booth in the exhibit area. The eight performers will be available to discuss the collection and autograph your copies!

But first, please join us at our PASIC 2009 session for a detailed introduction to *Intermediate Masterworks for Marimba*. Celebrate with us how much can be accomplished through a positive group effort!

Nancy Zeltsman is founder and Artistic Director of Zeltsman Marimba Festival, Inc., and teaches marimba at the Boston Conservatory and Berklee College of Music. She has premiered over 125 solo and chamber works for (or including) marimba. Nancy is featured on seven CDs, either as a soloist or in duos with Jack Van Geem (marimba) or Sharan Leventhal (violin, as Marimolin: 1985–1996). She has performed and presented master classes across the U.S. as well as in Europe, Japan and Mexico, and authored a marimba method, *Four Mallet Marimba Playing: A Musical Approach for All Levels*, published by Hal Leonard. **PN**

ZMF and C.F. Peters Corp. present:

Intermediate Masterworks for Marimba

- Volume I available from Steve Weiss Music
- Volume II & CD available at PASIC 2009
- PASIC 2009 clinic/performance featuring ZMF 2009 faculty members 11/13 at 2pm

Zeltsman Marimba Festival 2010 June 25 - July 11 at Conservatorium van Amsterdam www.ZMF.us