

Graded Pieces for Tuned Percussion Book 1 – Gordon Hughes

Notes

This collection of pieces was written in response to the need for musically engaging and technically challenging works for tuned percussion instruments. The performance of these works, whilst technically challenging, should also inspire the student to reach for higher musical outcomes than simply 'playing the notes'. Whilst many of the pieces are not strictly programmatic, students and teachers should explore the imagery generated across the collection.

The works themselves are miniatures – relatively short compositions that are musically complete. Thematically, they explore the fundamental interval of the octave and traverse different harmonic and musical styles. Across the collection, a number of well known classical composers are (humbly) quoted – students and teachers should explore and discuss these musical inspirations.

Each of the tuned percussion parts were written to develop or highlight a particular challenging technique for the performer, with the piano then outlining the work's musical world. Mallet suggestions have been made, however the final decision is that of the player. Instrument suggestions have also been made with options listed in brackets. These pieces are also aimed at trying to (gently) move students away from the ever-pervasive 'concert band' keys (B flat and E flat) – don't panic, there still familiar key signatures used.

Included is a compact disc containing all piano accompaniments (with rehearsal tempo versions for the last two works). Whilst this is an excellent tool, it is no substitute for a live musician. The piano parts have been kept (on the whole) relatively simple – I challenge the teacher to learn what he or she can and give each student the inspiring experience of making music with their musical mentor.

Complete program notes and an educational guide for each work can be found at rhythmscape.com.au

Gordon Hughes July 2007



Work Original

The production and development of this collection represents a significant time and dollar investment in *our* industry. Do not photocopy this music - the purchase of this score in now way delivers a moral or legal right to produce copies. Students (led by their mentor's example) must and should invest in their education and work to enhance the health and vitality of this industry by purchasing their own, personal copies of the music they study.

Drive the industry that drives us all – **work original**

Captain Henderson's heroic march

A march; very simple, very straight-forward. I imagined a rather dowdy old Captain who is more pomp than ceremony, riding a tired old horse perhaps not off to battle, but maybe just to show-off.

Students

Watch the evenness of your notes – are you playing with both hands?

Explore the rhythms of the pieces – are the rhythms you play the same or different to that of the piano accompaniment?

What can you do as the performer to convey the story of this piece?

Jack's song

We all seem to start musical life with rounds (either sung or played). They are such a wonderful musical device. Jack's song quotes '*Waltzing Matilda*', a very well-known Australian folk melody. The ground bass and the ever-growing chordal accompaniment give the piece a grand, perhaps even heroic flavour. Not only is an Australian folk melody quoted, but the harmonic style of the Russian composer, Modest Mussorgsky is the inspiration for the accompaniment – nothing like some musical globe-trotting.

Students

It is very important not to rush the rhythms in this work – watch your tempo.

You may need to consider the sticking used in bar 5 and make sure you use this each time this part of the melody appears.

There are some leaps in the melody – make sure you look at the keys when you need to, so as to not play wrong notes.

What is the well-known Australian melody that is quoted in the piano part? Do you know the history behind this tune? Investigate the story told in the lyrics of this folk melody.

Can you think of any other rounds? List three.

What is the original title of this tune? And from what country does it originate?

Stately Air

Here we look back in time – perhaps a dance from a 16th century court, perhaps the music of a lute player entertaining diners in times of old. Whilst inspired by the harmonic style of Renaissance motets (particularly Palestrina and Hassler) this work has a modern slant using a contemporary melodic framework.

Students

The rhythm in this work is more independent from the piano. Watch your rests and counting.

What is the key of this work? Can you play the scale?

An Air is a simple type of melody. What are its features?

FLATLAND

It had to be done – a melody using only the ‘black’ keys. Whilst the melody is pentatonic, the work determinedly stays away from the cliché accompaniments and harmonic structures that seem to pop-up time and again in works of this level (i.e. so many beginner percussion ensemble works with pentatonic melodies). Although the melody itself may be somewhat straight forward, the challenge comes in combining the melody with the piano – both parts must lock together; rhythms and counting must be precise and dynamics must be played accurately. **FLATLAND** should be played with a great deal of energy and life – there is much to say here in a short amount of time.

Students

This work uses a particular type of scale. What is it? Can you play this scale? What is the intervallic structure of the scale? Could you play this scale starting on the note C?

There are articulations and dynamics used in the piece – can you identify them? What do they mean?

The rhythm is very important, are you counting correctly? Watch your rests.

You need to play two notes at once throughout the piece. What is this technique called? Make sure both notes sound together and are not played as a ‘flam’

The Odd Bar March

If Captain Henderson’s march was about a leader on horseback, this is the music for his motley crew. This lop-sided affair not only rhythmically has one leg longer than the other, but has an entire spare bar included for good measure (the question is which one?). A good bit of humour pervades this piece – the work shows the men getting into step, carrying on for a (short) while and then, in the last bar, coming to an ignoble stop.

Students

This piece encourages you to leap around the keyboard (octaves and fifths especially) – are you using your eyes to guide your mallets?

There are some double stops and some scalar passages that you should feel at home with. How are these working for you?

Make sure you keep the feel light and the rhythm strict. Can you imagine the army marching to this piece?

Sergei’s Dance

In writing this series of works, I focussed first on the tuned percussion parts and the techniques students need to develop when starting tuition. The Xylophone part for this piece came very quickly and I liked how it jumped (or danced) around the keyboard. I then needed an accompaniment that suited this melodic style and immediately thought of Prokofiev (in particular his Classical Symphony and Romeo and Juliet suite). Prokofiev is a composer who for me, can be both serious and powerful, lyrical and spirited and yet utterly captivating.

Students

Here we leap around the instrument – it is very important to look where you are going.

Are you able to look from the music to the instrument and back without losing your place? This is a very important skill – do not cheat by just committing the music to memory.

There are double stops in octaves now. There is also a coordination challenge from bar thirteen to the end. How are you working on these challenges?

There is a special effect found in bar eight. What is it? Do you know how to do this?

The tempo of the piece changes in a particular bar. Do you know which one? What does ‘a tempo’ mean?

What do the arced lines in bars five and six indicate?

Odyssey

Again the idea of travel came to mind for this work (maybe I need a holiday!). Whilst not programmatic, it is merely suggested in the accompaniment – a feeling of motion – in both the linear bass line and the moving quavers in the treble. The marimba sits atop this motion with its lyrical, scalic melody.

Students

The rolls in this work are very important. They need to be smooth (legato) and at times you are asked to roll from one note of the scale to the next or leap. Can you facilitate this technique successfully?

Correct mallet selection for this work will aid your rolls – experiment with different mallet types. Watch the tempo changes in the work – are you working with the piano?

Cannons all round

In composing this series, I aimed to explore fundamental intervals – fourth, fifth and most importantly the octave, which in this piece, reigns supreme. The melody leaps around, imparting a great deal of energy and motion. The round (as in **Jack's song**) is also used here and extended. It should be noted that this is not a strict 'round'; the theme is more canonic, with imitation occurring in the parts. Overall, the work explores something which has always intrigued me – how simple melodic lines can come together to form something complex. The whole in music can often be so much more than the sum of its parts.

Students

Can you identify the melody which forms the basis of this piece? Describe its melodic features. List the intervals that outline the melody?

Explore the differences between a round and a canon. How do they apply to this work?

There is imitation occurring in the piece – is it strict or is there some freedom in the imitation?

Discuss the idea of balance between you and the piano. Who has the most important part? Are there parts that are more important than others?

The canon found its fullest expression in the fugue – research composers who use this form in their music (you may like to start with Bach, Britten and Bernstein)

Polka

The Polka was a very popular dance form in the middle of the nineteenth century. So much of the musical forms and styles we enjoy today can have their origins traced back to dance. The melody of this piece is very straight-forward and focuses on double stops (both hands striking notes at the same time). The accompaniment began life very rhythmically 'straight' with the more lop-sided (and far more interesting) version evolving as the piece was composed. This work was deliberately composed in C major (no flats or sharps) as this is one of the most difficult key in which to play (lacking physical reference points). The work may sound light-hearted, however there is a good deal of effort required to play it successfully.

Students

Here double stops (in thirds) are used throughout the work. It is vital you can move around the instruments accurately in this way.

Have you tried exercises in other double stopped intervals (fourth, fifth, sixth etc) to assist with this technique?

The Polka is a dance form. Do you know where it originated?

Investigate the characteristics of this dance form. Does the composer use the standard polka form or a variation? List similarities and differences

In this work the composer does something different rhythmically in the accompaniment to standard polkas. What is it? How do you think this influences the piece?

Arrival at Cabin Creek

Imagery is very important in music. For this piece I imagined a scene, perhaps in the outback (or woods), in the day of the horse and cart. For some reason I imagined it was cold – snow on the ground, branches hanging heavy under its white weight. The lonely traveller is heading home, the wheels of the cart turn endlessly (the left hand of the piano) and a wind moves through the trees (the marimba). What happens next I don't know, however I feel there is a suggestion in the work's final bar. Importantly, I tried to bring both solo instrument and accompaniment together on an equal footing to tell this story.

Students

Here the roll is important. Are your rolls smooth?

Have you explored changing roll speed to add interest and texture? You may need to try different types of mallets in the playing this work.

Is the marimba really the soloist in this work? How does the piano interact with the marimba part?

Discuss the balance between the parts

Discuss the image painted by the composer. Do you experience the same scene when playing the work or something different? If you experience something different, write a short paragraph to describe the scene. Your audience may be interested to hear your version as well as that of the composer.

Brother's Waltz

I was accompanying one of my students, who at the time, was playing the marimba work, 'Brother' by Tanja Hafenstein, when we stopped to discuss an aspect of the piece. We had stopped on the dominant chord and as I started talking, my fingers unthinkingly played the chord progression now found in bar eleven of this work. And so was born, the waltz on a chord progression from 'Brother'.

The melody that came to me at that point, was very much in the form of a pop song – verse, chorus, verse – one of the simplest melodic structures. As we all know, songs need words and I think it would be an interesting experiment to have someone (more adept than I) write some lyrics. I find this melody a little infectious – you play it and it stays with you long after you have put your mallets down. But isn't that the idea of a good pop song?

Students

To successfully achieve the cantabile style intended in this work, you will need to mallet and pedal damp. Can you change easily between pedal and mallet damping?

There are a number of repeats used – can you identify them all? Do you understand their meaning?

What defines a waltz? Can you list three composers who use this style?

The composer mentioned that lyrics would work well in this piece. Could you write some? What would the song be about?

Hymn for now

Hymns for me, have always been pieces that speak to a deeper level within us all. They are reflective works – perhaps of thanks or in remembrance. This thought is the basis of this composition.

Our world hardly offers time for reflection – constant rush, endless energy. And whilst this can be exciting, it can leave us perhaps without the time to appreciate the here-and-now, to reflect on the present. I think I can sum it up as follows:

In now we hold the beginning;
for the future has past

Above all, this work is about beauty and power. Make your audience stop, listen and take notice. Give them the opportunity to reflect and give thanks. Music is a powerful tool – use it.

Students

Mallet and pedal damping are critical to the expressive line of the vibraphone. The instrument has to sing, not just be played.

You may like to experiment with different mallets – are you using the best type for this work?

Do you know any hymns? Describe the structure and musical characteristics of these works? How does this hymn compare?

In your own words, describe the emotions expressed in this piece. How do you think music can influence people's emotions? List some pieces that have a special emotional significance for you.



Industrial dance

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Whilst the title may suggest it, this work is not programmatic. It speaks more about the tone colours and harmonies of the piece. I imagined shining machines, masses of steel in motion, driving-on with an energy of their own. I really wanted players to have a stand-alone work that defines what can be exciting about tuned percussion. Power, motion, energy – drive. The melody of this piece is designed to make the player move – dance with the instrument – something that is unique to percussion. There is not much more to say other than – full power!

Students

This work is all about energy and movement. The rhythms of this piece dance around each other. Rhythmic accuracy is vital.

You might like to explore playing some sections on one hand for evenness (bar 29)

The glisses must be rhythmical (especially bars 43/44 and 36). You might like to work on these, playing only the starting and ending notes, then adding the glisses.

Accents need to be observed to add to the intensity of the piece.

You need to be aware that the piano and xylophone parts are very independent (e.g. bar 29-35). The parts must 'lock' together.

Forest escapade

This was the last work in the series to be composed. I was very much in a Russian mood when writing the piece – intense, rhythmic and driven. The symphonic works of Shostakovich (his bare, angular melodies and dynamic rhythms) were in the back of my mind. I have also briefly (and very humbly) quoted another famous Russian composer – one of my true favourites – in a moment of light-hearted embellishment. Forest escapade (a title suggest by one of my students – she couldn't really explain it) is a flight – dazzling notes running over the keyboard with every bit of rhythmic energy and accuracy being harnessed. This is a technical piece to amaze friends and audience members alike. Enjoy it!

Students

Whatever you do, do not rush the rhythm in this piece. Control is the key.

The running semiquaver lines in this piece need to be very even and controlled. It is important to bring out the melodic line indicated by the accents.

Do you know how the xylophone part 'fits' with the piano accompaniment. This will help you play the work.

Can you construct a story to go with this work? If it were the soundtrack to a scene in a movie, what would be happening at the time?

Discuss with your teacher the two Russian composers mentioned in the work's program notes. One of the composers goes unnamed – can you work out who it is? Where is the musical quote? What is the original work from which it is taken?