



Pearl.

Insight and inspiration from today's top percussion artists

Advanced Mallet Technique

BY ROBERT VAN SICE

The title of this pamphlet is a bit of a misnomer. Percussionists tend to focus on technical development as an important goal in itself. There are great resources available concerning almost every skill related to the act of playing a percussion instrument, and today's percussionist is technically far superior to his predecessors.

It is therefore more important than ever to keep sight of the player's true goal: musical growth. Marimbists in particular have a great responsibility in choosing the repertoire they share with the public. Too often, percussionists choose pieces for their "flash" and technical excitement, without regards to any deeper musical ethic. Marimbists and percussionists are hard-pressed to find performing opportunities as it is – it is even more important for us (as opposed to, say, pianists or violinists) to seize these moments to present our highest artistic values.

It is important to choose repertoire according to one's technical and musical development. We've heard many times to "practice the things at which you're weaker" so as to challenge our abilities and give us room to grow. What is not always appreciated is the fact that attempting a really difficult piece too soon can be as detrimental as choosing pieces that are too easy, causing frustration and discouragement. Deep musical statements can be found all over the spectrum of technical difficulty. One of the most precious jewels of the marimba repertoire is Jacob Druckman's *Reflections on the Nature of Water*. Emotionally stunning, almost painfully beautiful, its movements are short and within the technical reach of most college-level performers. The process of learning and performing such a truly deep piece will, in the end, teach you as much or more than any experience with a "percussion teacher."

The many great works already written notwithstanding, the literature for marimba (as with percussion in general) cannot yet approach the depth to which that of the piano or violin has advanced over 350 years of growth. It is thus vital that every performer gets involved actively with commissioning new works. It is thus vital that every performer gets involved actively with commissioning new works. Students might receive new gems for the instrument merely by working with the student composers they know. Young professional composers looking for an opportunity to develop their own skills and careers are great resources with whom to work. The "big names" of today (David Lang, Michael Torke, Joseph Schwantner in the US; Magnus Lindberg, James Wood, Bruno Mantovani in Europe) found their fame through a long process, as might the younger composers more easily available to the percussionist beginning his professional career. Marimba literature is particularly limited in the area of chamber music. Outside of, for example, the Marimoin series of commissions and the occasional odd work such as Martin Butler's *Going with the Grain*, there are few chamber works involving the marimba that approach the depth of the instrument's solo literature. Young players looking for new works might find exploring this vein particularly fruitful.

I hope this information has been helpful. Good luck!

Robert van Sice is considered one of the world's foremost advocates of contemporary music for marimba. In an effort to establish the instrument as a serious artistic vehicle, he has premiered well over one hundred works throughout the world. Three of the seminal works in the modern marimba repertoire were written for him; Peter Klatzow's *Dances of Earth and Fire*, Martin Bresnick's double marimba concerto *Grace* and James Wood's *Spirit Festival with Lamentations*. *Spirit Festival* is unique in introducing the newly developed quarter-tone marimba, an innovative instrument recalling the marimba's ancient sonic roots while establishing new parameters for modern expressionism.

In his varied performing career, Mr. van Sice has appeared with symphony orchestras and given recitals in more than thirty countries throughout Europe, North America, Africa and the Far East. The *Journal de Geneve* describes his interpretation of Toru Takemitsu's concerto *Gitimalya* as "...marvelous. In his hands, the marimba becomes a voice with richness of sound and expression that one would never expect from a percussion instrument. A well deserved triumph." He is also frequently invited to appear as a soloist with Europe's leading contemporary music ensembles including the London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Contrechamps in Geneva and L'itineraire in Paris. Mr. van Sice has also appeared as a soloist with many of percussion's finest ensembles including Amadinda, Kroumata, Percussive Rotterdam and So.

In 1989 Mr. van Sice gave the first solo marimba recital at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. He has since appeared in many of the world's major concert halls including Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, Casals Hall in Tokyo, Izumi Hall in Osaka, Victoria Hall in Geneva, Georges Pompidou Center in Paris and the Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center in Dallas. His concerts have frequently been broadcast by the BBC, Swedish Radio, Norwegian Radio, Radio France, WDR, NPR among many others. Mr. van Sice is a frequent guest at major music festivals throughout the world such as Blossom, Darmstadt Course for New Music, Archipel, London Meltdown, Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, Bela Bartok Festival in Hungary, North American New Music Festival and the Ultima Festival in Oslo. This season Mr. van Sice returns to Japan, Korea and China as well as concerts throughout Canada and the United States including his first appearance at the Kennedy Center.

Robert van Sice is also one of the world's most respected percussion teachers. His former students play in symphony orchestras, contemporary chamber ensembles and maintain solo careers in more than twenty countries as well as winning prizes at numerous international competitions. In 1997 he was appointed Director of Percussion Studies at the Yale School of Music and later joined the faculty of the Peabody Conservatory in 1998. From 1988 to 1997, he headed Europe's first diploma program for solo marimbists at the Rotterdams Conservatorium in the Netherlands. Mr. van Sice has given over four hundred masterclasses in twenty five countries including the Royal College of Music in London, Amsterdam Conservatory, Vienna State Music Academy, The Juilliard School, Curtis Institute, Eastman School of Music, Oberlin College and often serves on juries for international competitions.

Robert van Sice has released four CD's on the Etcetera and Mode labels.

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