

The Percussion Writings of David Maslanka

An overview of selected works

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A Brief Biography

- David Maslanka was born in 1943 and grew up in the New England area
- He passed away in 2017, after being diagnosed with colon cancer
- Maslanka was a faculty member at 4 colleges in his career, all of them in New York



Education

- Mozarteum University Salzburg- 1964
- Bachelor of Music Education- Oberlin Conservatory in 1965 ('61-'65)
- Master of Music Theory and Comp.- Michigan State University in 1967
- Doctor of Music Theory and Comp.- Michigan State University in 1971



Influences

- Maslanka studied with Joseph Wood at Oberlin Conservatory
- Wood was a pianist trained at the Juilliard School and composed a few Symphonies that were premiered by the NBC Symphony Orchestra
- Maslanka spent many years studying with H. Owen Reed at Michigan State
- Reed would be a very influential person in Maslanka's life, helping him discover a compositional voice that was unique to Maslanka.

H. Owen Reed

- H. Owen Reed was a professor of music at Michigan State University from 1939 until 1976. He became Professor Emeritus immediately following retirement.
- Reed studied with Howard Hanson at Eastman, where he received his Ph.D.
- Famous compositions include La Fiesta Mexicana, Overture 1940 for Wind Ensemble, and Danza Final
- Students of Reed include Maslanka, Gillingham, and Clare Fischer

Maslanka's Compositions

- Maslanka composed over 150 works
- Over 50 of these were for Wind Ensemble
 - Symphonies, Concertos, a Mass, and many concert pieces
- 9 pieces for orchestra (Some adaptations)
- 13 Choral works
- 8 solo/ chamber works
- Percussion solo and ensemble works
- Several unpublished works



Percussion writing in Orchestral pieces

- Maslanka is known for his exceptional percussion writing.
- First published piece for Orchestra with percussion was Symphony No. 1 in 1971
- Percussion list is Timpani, SD, 3 Toms, 2 Sus. Cymbals, Vibes, BD, Crash Cymbals, and 3 Triangles



World Music- 2002

- Percussion writing is much more melodic in this piece, not a lot of membranophones
- Percussion list is Timpani, Marimba, Vibes, Xylophone, Chimes, Glockenspiel, Bass Drum, Sus. Cymbal
- <https://davidmaslanka.com/works/world-music-orch-2002-8/>

(Very similar instrumentation to 11:11- A Dance at the Edge of the World)

1. Excerpts at 2:50- Glock time keeping and accentuation of melody
2. Excerpt at 4:15- Xylophone melody with Strings

In Lonely Fields- 1998

- Percussion heavy piece, written for 2 solo percussionists and 5 section players
 - Very extensive equipment list
 - Soloist 1- Vibraphone
 - Soloist 2- Marimba, Woodblock, Small Shaker, Practice Pad
 - Section players instrumentation-
 - Vibes, Log Drum, 2 Tenor Drums, Slapstick, Tambourine, BD, 6 Sus. Cymbals, 2 Shakers, Practice Pad, Congas, Tam-Tam, Maraca, Triangle, Cabasa, Timpani, Crash Cymbals, 2 Woodblocks, Crotales, Bongos, 4 Toms, Gong, Chimes, Marimba, Bamboo Rain Tree, Glockenspiel
 - <https://davidmaslanka.com/works/in-lonely-fields/?portfolioCats=229%2C225%2C227%2C231%2C223%2C224%2C221>
1. Excerpt at 8' highlighting 2 soloists with sections players as well.

Percussion writing in Wind Ensemble pieces

- Maslanka wrote most of his pieces for the Wind Ensemble and many of the works feature very difficult parts with large setups.
- First published piece for Wind Ensemble in 1976- Concerto No. 1 for Piano, Winds, and Percussion
- Instrumentation list- 3 Players- Xylo, Vibes, Marimba, Bells, SD, 3 Toms, BD, Bongos, 3 Woodblocks, Temple Blocks, 2 Sus. Cymbals, Crash Cymbals, 2 Tams, Triangles, Ratchet



A Child's Garden of Dreams- 1981

- Huge Percussion setup and one of Maslanka's pieces that is programmed more often.
- Percussion list is very extensive and requires a few unusual instruments that have found their way into the percussion section.
 - Crystal Glasses with water taped to a wooden board.
 - Slide Whistle (which has to match certain melodic lines with the woodwinds.)
- <https://davidmaslanka.com/works/childs-garden-of-dreams/?portfolioCats=229%2C225%2C227%2C231%2C223%2C224%2C221>

Concerto for Marimba and Band- 1990

- ~20 minute piece that features a lot of difficult techniques for Marimba



- <https://davidmaslanka.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Varner-Michael.pdf>

David's Book: Concerto for Solo Percussionist and Wind Ensemble

- Interesting concerto that utilizes more than one instrument
- Written for David Collier and the Illinois State University Wind Symphony
- ~40 minutes in length, written in 2006
- Instrumentation for the soloist-
 - Tam-tam, Chimes, 4 Gongs, 6 graduated drums, Tibetan Singing Bowls, Vibraphone, Metal Wind Chimes, Xylophone, and Marimba
- Section parts, (2 players)-
 - 2 Sus. Cymbals, Xylophone, Crotales, Bells, Timpani, Log Drums, Vibraphone, BD, Tam-Tam, Marimba

Give Us This Day-2006

- Short Symphony for Wind Ensemble
- Difficult piece, but much more attainable at 10'
- Many High Schools around the country perform this piece

Morning Star-1997

- Short piece for Wind Ensemble, commissioned by Grand Ledge HS Wind Symphony
- Very similar to Give Us This Day, and about 8'

8 Symphonies for Wind Ensemble

- Symphonies 1 and 6 are for Orchestra
- The other 1-10 are for Wind Ensemble, ranging from ~25-80 minutes in length
- Very difficult pieces only approached by the most serious college and professional groups
- Symphony No. 10: The River of Time was completed posthumously by David Maslanka's son Matthew

Song Book for Marimba and Alto Saxophone

- Maslanka's only chamber piece with Percussion
- Roughly 30' in length, Song Book was commissioned by Steven Jordheim and Dane Richeson of the Lawrence University Conservatory of Music.
- Many 4-Part Chorales by Bach were used as inspiration for this work.
- 7 Movements with the Marimba mostly providing harmonic support, occasionally carrying melodic figures, and sometimes creating true "duet" textures with the Alto Saxophone

Percussion only pieces

- Maslanka was not a percussionist, but wrote fantastic works for Percussion
- We have already discussed his concertos for soloist and large ensemble
- There is also a concerto for soloist and percussion ensemble
- Solo percussion works
- Percussion ensemble works, including one work for Steel Drum Ensemble

Concertos

- Concerto for Marimba and Band- 1990
- In Lonely Fields- Solo Percussion and Chamber Orchestra- 1997
- David's Book: Concerto for Solo Percussionist and Wind Ensemble- 2006
- Arcadia II- Concerto for Marimba and Percussion Ensemble- 1982, revised in 1985
- Arcadia II requires a Marimba soloist and 6 players
 - Instrumentation- 10+ small Indian bells at a variety of different pitches, 2 SD, Vibes, Marimba, Tenor Drum, Bull Roarer, 2 Gongs, BD, 2 Sus. Cymbals, Temple Blocks, 2 Toms, Anvil, Ratchet, 2 Triangles, Hihat, Bongo, Crotales, 2 Slide Whistles, Claves, Xylophone, Bamboo Sticks, Bell Plate, Slapstick, Tambourine
- Utilizes Fast-Slow-Fast, 3 mvmt. structure. About 30 minutes in length

Works for Percussion Ensemble

- Crown of Thorns- 1991
- Published by OU Percussion Press, this work is for Keyboard Percussion ensemble and is about 15 minutes long
- Maslanka's first piece for Percussion Ensemble
- Composed for 8 Players, Instrumentation- Glockenspiel, 2 Vibraphones, 4.0 Octave Marimba, 3 4.3 Octave Marimbas, 1 5-Octave Marimba (Bass)
- Sonata form gives this piece shape, and the composer writes that although difficult, the piece must be played at the appropriate tempo at the Recapitulation so that the listener can recognize it as that part of the form.

Crown of Thorns

Start at 6:30



Works for Percussion Ensemble

- Montana Music: Three Dances for Percussion- 1992
- This 3 movement work is about 25 minutes in length, with each movement labeled as a tempo marking/ feeling
- I- Quite Slow, II- Slowly, III- Moderate
- Very large percussion setup, but also includes Piano and Double Bass
- Requires 7 players, plus one extra off stage in the third movement
- The composer writes that the piece is complementary to Arcadia II, with similar instrumentation being utilized.

Montana Music

Start at 3:30



Works for Percussion Ensemble

- Hohner- 1999
- 14 Players, about 15 minutes long
- Very similar instrumentation to Montana Music, even includes Piano and Double Bass
- We have discussed how Bach chorales have influenced Maslanka's compositions, and this piece is probably the best example of that in a Percussion Ensemble setting
- Fantastic TCU recording from 2011

Hohner

Start at 4:55



Works for Percussion Ensemble

- Hurling Through Space at an Unimaginable Speed- 2011
- 12 Players, about 15 minutes in length
- Large setup, with a Double Bass and Piano needed once again
- Also uses the Wind Machine in a very cool way
- Very difficult piece with the Marimba parts exceptionally difficult
- Overtly programmatic piece that creates the sonic impression that the listener is hurtling through space. Use of the metals provides a sense of stars and twinkling

Hurling Through Space at an Unimaginable Speed

6:30- Wind Machine



Works for Steel Drum Ensemble

- Time Stream- 2012
- Written for Lead, Double Tenor, Double Second, Cello, and Bass Pans
- Not your typical Steel Band piece, as there is no Engine Room
- About 12 minutes long, this piece treats all pans the same
- Each section carries the melody at some point, and it is scored almost in SATB Chorale format

Works for Solo Percussion

- My Lady White- 1980
- Maslanka's first piece for Solo Marimba
- About 10 minutes in length, this piece is divided into 3 main sections
- I. Madrigal: My Lady White
- II. Spring...Birds sing... A Gift of Rings
- III. For Pretty Alison
- Great recording by Mycka on her CD, Marimba Spiritual, released in 2000

My Lady White

3:55- Mvmt. II



Works for Solo Percussion

- Variations on 'Lost Love' for Solo Marimba- 1977
- Maslanka's great work for Marimba
- Written for L.H. Stevens, this piece is inspired by Lost Love by English poet Robert Graves

Variations on Lost Love

Fantastic recording by Michael Coleman- 8:30



Works for Solo Percussion

- A Solemn Music- 2013
- Commissioned by Andrew Eldridge at Texas Wesleyan University
- Premiered in 2014
- 3 Mvmt work
- The piece can most easily be described as a chorale with beautiful flowing melodies. Parts of this piece depart from the chorale idea, but the title describes the piece perfectly from start to finish

References and further readings

- <https://davidmaslanka.com/>
- <https://davidmaslanka.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/David-Maslanka-CV-2014-09-12.pdf>
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 - Calhoun, Courtni Diane: David Maslanka: his life, works, and an analytical overview of Crown of Thorns.
 - Harris, Scott Holden: "Identification and Analyses of Selected Larger Percussion Ensemble Works Composed Between 1970-2000."
 - Steger, Garth Geoffrey: An examination of Arcadia II: Concerto for marimba and percussion ensemble.
 - Varner, Michael L.: An Examination of David Maslanka's Marimba Concerti: Arcadia II for Marimba and Percussion Ensemble and Concerto for Marimba and Band: A Lecture Recital