

Creating Contemporary Percussion Music Videos with a Multi-Platform Approach:
Production of Recorded Works by Seare Farhat, Thomas Kotcheff, and Keiko Abe

by

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ABSTRACT

My approach to performing contemporary music, like many others, is centered around storytelling that merges the intention of the composer with my own interpretation. The balance between the two is unique for every work, as well as the sources of inspiration that shape each interpretation. In some cases, it works well to rely heavily on the historical context of the piece and the specific inspiration and process of the composer. In other cases, the composer desires more freedom and flexibility in the performance of their work, and the story of the piece is woven from the threads of personal stories, emotions, and imagery of the performer. For this project, I made audio recordings of three pieces including Seare Farhat's *Three Children's Songs for Singing Percussionist*, Keiko Abe's *Marimba d'Amore*, and Thomas Kotcheffs *Obbligato Snare Drum Music No. 1: The Power of Love*. I then used these recordings to make music videos that blend elements of pop music videos and classical performance videos, using performance footage as well as narrative and abstract visuals to experiment with video making as a creative outlet while building a performance portfolio that represents me as an artist. In addition to a reflection of my process, this document is also designed as a resource for performers who are interested in learning how to make their own audio and video recordings, covering topics including project planning and preparation, working with collaborators, selecting gear, practicing for studio recordings, and designing and producing videos.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND PRIOR RESEARCH

My approach to performing contemporary music, like many others, is centered around storytelling that merges the intention of the composer with my own interpretation. The balance between the two is unique for every work, as well as the sources of inspiration that shape each interpretation. In some cases, it works well to rely heavily on the historical context of the piece and the specific inspiration and process of the composer. In other cases, the composer desires more freedom and flexibility in the performance of their work, and the story of the piece is woven from the threads of personal stories, emotions, and imagery of the performer. For this project, I made audio recordings of three pieces: Seare Farhat's *Three Children's Songs for Singing Percussionist*, Keiko Abe's *Marimba d'Amore*, and Thomas Kotcheff's *Obligato Snare Drum Music No. 1: The Power of Love*. Farhat's work was the most collaborative of the three, and my performance was inspired by childhood memories, indie folk music, and contemporary theatrical music. Through these interpretations, I wanted to convey a feeling of nostalgia for childhood through creating a world where the hours pass slowly with simple activities. Whether these lines are melancholy, silly, melodious, or absurd, they are always meant to be uninhibited, conveying the freedom of childhood imagination. In Kotcheff's work, there is less room for the performer's interpretation, as the piece uses an altered version of Celine Dion's "The Power of Love" as a fixed backing track, requiring the use of a click track. My goal as the performer in this piece was to let Celine Dion's vocals shine through accompanying her and highlighting areas of the track that are altered from the original version. In this case, the place for my own interpretation was in the sound, aiming for a smooth, resonant snare drum texture with glittering high metal sounds made by two halves of a jewelry box I found in an antique store. Abe's work required a fine balance of

historical context, the composer's inspiration, and my own interpretation. I listened to her body of repertoire and studied the piece with several of her students before forming my own interpretation. This piece is based on the melody from Martini's *Plaisir d'Amour*, so I also took voice lessons and studied this work before recording the piece. While this piece has a strong body of repertoire that precedes it, as well as the composer's own performance interpretation and the recordings of several people who have deeply studied the piece, Abe leaves room for the performer's interpretation through her virtuosic, free writing style. Through my prior study of her repertoire, I was able to understand her unique musical language and form my interpretation that is more rigid in rhythmic sections and freer and more expressive in sections marked "rubato" and "espressivo." Additionally, I wanted to create contrast by playing the pure versions of the original melody more sweetly and lyrically, allowing the marimba to sing, while playing the more tangled iterations of Martini's melody with more variety in color, articulation, and intensity.

These approaches to my storytelling and interpretation of the audio are only half of the project. I wanted to add another component that exposes the imagery of the performer and makes a space for the performer to include their own creation. While I have spent many years learning how to interpret the works of others, I wanted to experience making something. To experiment with this idea, I have created music videos for each work through the roles of producer, performer, and videographer that include performance footage mixed with other scenes based on each video concept. The video concept for Farhat's work uses a subtle narrative approach, with performance clips, winter scenes, and childhood videos to connect with the themes present in the music such as coming of age and the passage of time. The video concept for Kotcheff's work revolves around texture and contrast. A soft, smooth texture is incorporated using slowed down shots of fabric, reflective of the

smoothness and elegance of the snare drum sound paired with samples of Celine Dion's vocals. Contrasting performance footage is used to highlight the original and altered versions of the track. The video concept for *Marimba d'Amore* is centered around color. Strong, contrasting colors from lighting and wardrobe will be used to connect to Abe's passionate writing in this iconic work. My roles in this project include producer, videographer, editor, writer, and performer. Additionally, this project would not have been possible without the contributions of audio engineer and producer Celia Yang and composer and audio engineer Seare Farhat. A multiplatform approach will be used to present the videos, including live performance with video accompaniment, a fully digital music video published online, and a digital audio only version.

In preparation for this project, I have viewed a range of contemporary music videos including experimental works such as Antheil, Leger, and Murphey's experimental Ballet *Mechanique* (1924), as well as performance videos with cinematography as in Kagel's *Dressur* and Andy Akiho and Sandbox Percussion's *Seven Pillars Anthology* (2021). The work of Four/Ten media, including Kevin Eikenberg and Evan Chapman, is also essential to examine in preparation for this project, as they are one of the leading media teams known for their audio and video work in contemporary classical music, creating media for over fifty professional classical music clients. Outside of classical music, I have reviewed a variety of pop music videos from the 1980s-present including the work of artists such as Whitney Houston, Celine Dion, The Gorillaz, TLC, The Weeknd, Fleet Foxes, and more. In addition to these music centered videos, I have also examined the video art of Nam June Paik, Oskar Fischinger, and Norman McLaren. While all these sources were influential in my project, I focus primarily on merging the aesthetics of contemporary classical performance-based videos with pop music videos, resulting in visuals of the performance as well as other

narrative and abstract elements. With this final result in mind, this document is designed to be used as a resource for performers who are interested in learning how to make their own audio and video recordings, covering topics including project planning and preparation, working with collaborators, selecting gear, practicing for studio recordings, and designing and producing videos. These topics will be covered through an examination of each video's inspiration and creation process, including the audio recording process, to show how I was able to experiment with videomaking as a creative outlet while building a performance portfolio that represents me as an artist.

CHAPTER 2

PROJECT PLANNING

Timeline:

I began the planning process by identifying all the components needed to complete this project, including audio recording, video recording, connecting with mentors and collaborators, instruments, gear, recording spaces, editing, and writing. I then identified the actions required for these components and used them to construct my timeline (Figure 1).

Timeline

Mid Dec-Feb 1:

- Prepare music
- Practice video skills/test ideas
- Brainstorm video concepts and create outline/vision board
- Gather prerecorded materials
- Find audio engineer and videographer
- Contact potential mentors
- Apply for grants
- Journal

Feb 1-Feb 15:

- Record audio
- Record performance videos
- Journal
- Write about musical process

Feb 15-March 1:

- Record original video clips
- Finish first draft of full videos with audio
- Journal
- Write about video process

March 1-15:

- Revise written document
- Revise/clean videos

Figure 1. Timeline for this Project

For instance, learning the music, meeting with the composer when possible, and planning out recording chunks were all actions I identified under the component of “audio recording.” I put all these actions into a timeline and approximated how much time I thought it would take to complete each one, factoring in the fluctuations in my schedule

over the next several months. Additionally, since I have never done a project like this, I planned several weeks ahead of all deadlines I had to meet, ensuring that I could complete all parts of the project on time. While the order of events in my timeline was accurate, I underestimated the time it would take to complete certain actions. For instance, editing the audio took much longer than I thought, as I was quite detailed in the take selection. Despite some timeline delays, I still found it essential to have a clear order of events, as well as deadlines along the way that act as checkpoints for assessing my progress.

I received feedback early in the project from several mentors including my committee members, professional videographers, and Maria Finklemeier, a percussionist, composer, and video collaborator whose practice often involves multidisciplinary work such as film. Practicing for the recordings was the next priority, as this was the most time-consuming part of the project; I spent approximately 80 hours preparing *Three Children's Songs*, 50 hours on *Obbligato Snare Drum Music No. 1*, and 150 hours on *Marimba d'Amore*. Working with collaborators was the next priority, as I decided to work with audio engineers. Additionally, booking recording spaces had to be done early in the process so I could coordinate with the schedules of my collaborators and ensure there were still available times in the concert hall and studio where I recorded. It was also essential to complete the audio recordings before the videos so the audio track could be used to match the movement in the performance videos.

Audio:

Planning the audio portion of the project included preparing the music, recording, and editing. Additionally, I discussed goals for sound quality with the audio engineers and composers when applicable, to ensure they were aligned with the musical ideas I wanted to convey. In *Three Children's Songs*, the composer was also the audio engineer and producer, making the process more direct. Celia Yang, a PhD student at ASU with a degree in audio engineering, was the audio engineer and producer for the *Kotcheff* and the *Abe* works. Her expertise and artistry in audio engineering as well as classical piano was helpful in bringing creative ideas for the timbre and resonance of the sound, as well as connecting the edits for each piece to the musical notation.

The practice process for each recording session was much different than preparing for a live performance. To prepare for these edited studio recordings, particularly the *Kotcheff* and the *Abe*, I divided the piece into chunks and made a checklist including each section, creating a visual representation of all the material we had to record to help keep us on track during the session (Figure 2). Each chunk was defined based on natural stopping points in the music that would be manageable for audio editing, generally at the end of a phrase, and the size of each chunk varied widely based on the difficulty of each section. I practiced primarily in these large chunks and focused my practice on repairing recurring trouble spots to ensure I would get all the necessary material once in the session. I continued to play full run-throughs during the preparation process to maintain the character of each piece and to allow for cohesive musical ideas, but they were given less priority than practicing the chunks I had defined specifically for the audio recording scenario. This practice strategy helped me to be efficient with the recording time by knowing

exactly where to stop and start each section, while still being able to continue the energy and musical ideas of the previous section.

Number	Musical Section	Measure Numbers
1	Misterioso to A Tempo	1-10
2	A Tempo to Dolce espressivo	10-50
3	Dolce espressivo to Rubato	50-65
4	Rubato to 1 after Con energia	65-96
5	1 after Con energia to 9 after Con energia	96-104
6	9 after Con energia to 30 after Con energia	104-126
7	30 After Con energia to 2 before Grazioso	126-149
8	2 before Grazioso to 1 before Espressivo	149-155
9	1 before Espressivo to pickup to 17 before Più Mosso Con energia	155-173
10	Pickup to 17 before Più mosso Con energia to Più mosso Con energia	173-190
11	Più mosso Con energia to the end	190-208

Figure 2. Checklist of Chunks for *Marimba d'Amore* Recording Session.

Once in the recording session, the two biggest challenges were making quick judgment calls in real time on the quality and accuracy of each take and maintaining the energy and emotion necessary to convey my musical ideas after moving the marimba, setting up gear, and replaying takes several times in a row. Each piece required two sessions of around four hours each, for a total of 24 hours spent recording. Surprisingly, each piece seemed to follow the same path despite how different they were. The first session was generally more task-based, during which we captured nearly all the material by starting with a full run-through and then recording takes of individual chunks. The second session for each

piece was freer and more experimental, starting by recording any missing chunks, cleaning details of previous takes, and recording alternate takes with slightly different musical ideas, techniques, and styles. It took around eight hours per piece to choose the best takes and edit them together. I was directly involved in the editing process for the Kotcheff and Abe, while Seare did the editing for his piece on his own. The next step is to clean each edited version and make changes for desired overall sound quality of the recording when necessary. Lastly, each recording will be mastered by Celia to create uniformity across all three works when presented together.

Video:

The video portion of my project took place in two stages: developing creative ideas and preparing to execute these ideas. The idea development stage involved journaling, brainstorming, and identifying sources of inspiration, while the preparation stage involved researching tangible resources, gear, and video techniques. Like the audio recording process, this first stage in the video process required the formation of a timeline and meetings with mentors, experts, and collaborators. Often, these two parts of “developing the idea” and “planning the execution” overlapped and informed each other; as I learned more from my research, my ideas developed and changed.

After initial ideation, I curated a collection of inspiration sources, like a vision board. I made a category for each piece and included musical artists, films, textures, colors, and character words for each one to create a more vivid mental representation of what these videos might look like. For instance, my video inspiration sources for Kotcheff’s work included Celine Dion, Whitney Houston, Barbra Streisand, pink and gold shimmering tones, and smooth textures like desert sand and water. I began watching a lot of music videos, such as Whitney Houston’s “The Greatest Love of All” and Celine Dion’s “The Power of

Love,” and eventually my sources of inspiration turned into more defined concepts, stemming from my musical interpretations of each piece. I then shifted to the preparation stage and created checklists including all the footage needed for each video, materials necessary for each shot, including props, wardrobe, makeup, and technical gear, and character terms that reflected the mood or emotion that each video would convey to an audience. At present, I have captured some footage for each video, and I will continue recording and editing throughout the next month.

One of the most significant portions of the preparation process involved researching cameras and gear. Initially, I wanted to record only small portions of each video on my own and collaborate with a videographer on the majority of the video work. I found many video recording resources on ASU’s campus that were no or low cost to students including the use of studio spaces and editing bays, as well as camera, tripod, and lighting kit rentals. After researching these resources, I concluded that I wanted to experiment with a higher quality camera than what was available on campus, which included the Canon Rebel T6 and T7 DSLRs. More importantly, I realized that the root of my interest in making these videos was not necessarily to have three expertly crafted music videos. Instead, I wanted to mobilize the video making portion of the project as a creative outlet and representation of my voice as an artist, while simultaneously developing my knowledge and technical skills of videomaking through practical experience. To determine which camera would suit my needs, I watched many videos and spoke in-person with several professional videographers and photographers to understand the importance of different features, the benefits and drawbacks of certain models, the different types of lenses, and a variety of lighting techniques. This was the most intimidating part of the process, as I was completely out of my comfort zone having no experience with this gear and no knowledge of these skills.

After learning from these helpful resources, I decided to purchase a camera that would provide me with the features I needed to explore my idea, but without all the advanced features of a more expensive model, as I am still very new to this art form and unsure of where this experiment will take me when the project comes to fruition. I decided to purchase the Nikon Z-30, a mirrorless camera geared toward content creation with 4K capabilities, with a 16-50mm kit lens. Additionally, I decided to begin learning about video editing using Premiere Pro, as this software was available to me at no cost through ASU.

CHAPTER 3

CREATION AND PRODUCTION OF THREE CHILDREN'S SONGS FOR SINGING PERCUSSIONIST BY SEARE FARHAT

Three Children's Songs for Singing Percussionist is a solo multi percussion work that makes use of forgotten instruments that were collected by composer Seare Farhat and I, including a hammered dulcimer, autoharp, two small children's harps, and a guitar (Figure 3). The work is in three movements: "Hums and Tunes," "Presence," and "Twisted Reminisces." The idea of sustainability through reusing these instruments, rather than creating a piece that would require new materials, inspired us to look back at our twenty years of friendship that we have sustained through childhood into adulthood. Over this time, we have created nearly fifty voicemail messages that include comedic bits, invented characters, and ordinary everyday musings. The materials from these voicemails are woven into the piece, sometimes as a single thread and at other times as the heart of the work. In addition to the voicemails, we incorporated a significant vocal component inspired by our time in an indie folk band as teenagers. The following quote¹ by Seare provides the composer's perspective of the piece's origins and background:

It is hard to pin down a start date of this creative collaboration. The music and concept for performance began in Summer 2022 during a residency at Avaloch Farm, but the material that inspired this work has been in the making from as early as 2015. In that way, this collaboration is not defined by any particular versions of myself or Morgan as artists, but rather how we have grown together, in parallel, in our pursuits from then until now. The tradition of leaving each other long voicemails grew out of a mutual urge to keep our friendship active, though we lived apart. The voicemails were never one in the same -- sometimes vulnerable, sometimes goofy, other times even innovatively musical. The piece we created reflects on friendship in the 21st century, closeness in the technological medium, and the multiplicity of a relationship as it grows through time. From the outset, this piece was a multi-media endeavor: analyzing voicemails, their transcriptions, recycled string instruments, and our own practices beyond these things. It followed naturally that the final form

¹ Seare Farhat, Email to author, March 2, 2024.

would also be equally multi-media as a recording with music video. Perhaps, though, this project may never end – this may just be the landmark in the ongoing development of our now artistic-collaborative relationship in tandem with our friendship.



Figure 3. First Draft of the Setup at Avaloch Farm

The first song, “Hums and Tunes,” uses the voice without words through hummed pitches that gradually fade into laughter. The main features of this song are a melody created with a small child’s harp prepared with screws, the strum of an additional child’s harp that is slightly out of tune and plucked strings on the dulcimer. A guitar pick is scraped on the low strings of the autoharp as a transitional gesture, countering the soft, delicate melodic sounds with this crunchy, dry effect. This gesture returns in each movement of the work, as well as the use of ebows to sustain one or two pitches at a time. The voice often interacts with the ebows by matching the pitch and then gradually sliding down a half step, sometimes in one breath over the course of several bars. The first song ends with a hummed quote of the main melody in the second song, “Presence.”

The original idea for the second song was to be a complete indie-folk song based on our previous experience in a band together playing songs by groups such as Fleet Foxes, Bon Iver, and Sea Wolf. This idea combined with the use of gestural percussion sounds made with the string instruments (such as plucked strings, dramatic chromatic autoharp gestures, and melodies made by guitar harmonics) formed this piece into a multi percussion folk song. The text for this movement primarily comes from one voicemail explaining a mundane, busy day and my indecision on whether to drive back to our hometown that night or the next morning during a university break in 2016. The text “What if we never live near each other again?” articulates the notion of hometown, childhood friendships and the comfort of living near friends and family and having the option to visit them at a moment’s notice, as well as the realization that these relationships are often taken for granted until you move away from home or transition into adulthood.

The third song, “Twisted Reminisces,” is a theatrical percussion movement that includes primarily spoken text, based on our tradition of performing comedic bits in our voicemails. Throughout the movement, these bits are twisted into incomprehensible vocal effects accompanied by instrumental sounds that highlight each character, sometimes in a “Mickey Mousing” style. These bits include a rhythmic rap using the sounds of cheese names, the story of a distraught man whose neighbor’s lawn gnome wakes up in the night to raid his garden, and a sales call from a representative of the fictional non-profit organization Gourd International. These bits are accompanied by a variety of implements and materials used on the string instrument setup, including a dangled screw, crumpled paper, wire brushes, and bass bows. This movement ends with a coda, including a prominent vocal line, accompanied by ebows and brushes on the dulcimer.

Process:

The creation of this piece began in the Fall of 2021. We first decided on instrumentation and text, which we drew from the string instruments we had acquired over time and our collection of voicemails. We came up with the initial concept for the piece when applying for a residency at Avaloch Farm Music Institute², a residency program for chamber ensembles and composer/performer collaboration, in the winter of 2022. This part of the process included learning about our instruments and studying our voicemail material, as well as a weekly meeting during the two months leading up to the Avaloch application deadline. During these meetings, one person would describe their ideas while the other dictated them. This allowed for a fluid exploration of our conceptual ideas in a natural conversation style, making us feel less committed to any idea we had and more open to exploring all the possibilities than we were when we expressed them through writing. We were able to use our notes to create visual through-lines and see which ideas kept returning, helping us refine our concept and making it easier to articulate in writing for our grant proposal. The concept that kept returning in our brainstorming sessions was the idea of uninhibited childhood imagination and nostalgia for moments spent passing the time in simple ways, inspired by our time spent making skits and playing music together for leisure as children and into our teenage years.

Our residency at Avaloch Farm took place in May of 2022. Leading up to this, we made a list of tasks to complete before the residency, as well as tasks that could only be completed once we were there and able to work in the same space with the instrument setup. Before we arrived, it was necessary to decide on a notation style, as the instrumentation is nontraditional and there were many extended techniques involved. Seare

² Avaloch Farm Music Institute, Avaloch Farm Music Institute, 2020, <https://www.avalochfarmmusic.org/>.

made several sketches, using graphic notation to convey specific musical gestures. Figure 4 shows the vertical lines used to represent the low string scraping gesture that became a prominent transitional gesture throughout the work.

The image shows three systems of handwritten musical notation. The first system is titled "Lyrical, freely ♩ = 100" and includes staves for Vox, Dulc., and AH. The second system includes lyrics: "it's been a day man a long day". The third system includes lyrics: "what if we never love each other a-". The AH staff in the third system features a dense graphic notation of vertical lines representing a "scrape bass strings w/ nails" gesture. A dynamic curve at the bottom transitions from "pp" to "f Chromatic" and "ff l.v.".

Figure 4. A Sketch of *Three Children's Songs* with Seare's Handwritten Notation

We also arranged logistics of instrument transport and planned how we would structure our rehearsal time to ensure we were prepared to present our work at the end of the residency. During the first two days of the residency, I tuned all the strings and experimented with using different techniques and implements on the instruments in our setup. Seare used many of these sounds, as well as the sounds he discovered, to inform the composition of the piece, similar to the way we let the instruments inform the concept of the piece. Over the next three days, Seare wrote the piece, and I learned the material as he

handed off the music to me one page at a time. After I was ready to play each page, he would listen, and we would make edits together, including cutting or adding sections based on how they worked musically and changing minor technical components to make them more realistic for live performance. I performed our first draft of the second movement of the piece at the end of the residency in May 2022.

We revisited the piece in the summer of 2023 to discuss the next steps, reflecting on our time at Avaloch. We noted that we were significantly more productive and efficient when working in the same space on only one piece for a week than we were in scheduled meetings periodically over a longer time span during which we had several priorities. We also noted that we were more inspired when collaborating in the same space together than working on the project across long distances. After coming to these conclusions, we scheduled a week to work on the piece together at Cornell University where we planned to finish the piece and record the audio. We scheduled several meetings leading up to this to discuss the logistics of transporting instruments and booking recording spaces, as well as brainstorm the first and third movements of the piece. As the performer, I prepared for this session by taking vocal lessons, reviewing the existing material, and familiarizing myself with the updated notation style after notation software was used (see Figure 5).

SONG II | | ♩ = 72, intimate, lyrical 5

The musical score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 1-6) is for Dulc. (plucked) with dynamics *pp* *l.v. sempre*, *p*, and *ppp*. The second system (measures 7-13) is for Dulc. (*f > p*) and AH. (plucked) with dynamic *p*. The third system (measures 14-19) is for Vox, Dulc. (*ppp* scraped, with pick), and AH. (*sfp* and *f*).

Figure 5. Final Version of “Presence” from Seare Farhat’s *Three Children’s Songs for Singing Percussionist*

Audio:

The audio recording process for this piece was unique from the other two pieces in the project in that the composer was acting as audio engineer and producer, and the music was more experimental and flexible during the recording process. We started our week at Cornell together by going over an updated draft of the piece, including a fully notated second movement and a sketch of the theatrical third movement. It had been nearly two years since our residency at Avaloch, and the second movement changed significantly, mirroring our development as musicians during this time. Some ideas were cut to give others room to develop further, and we adjusted some vocal lines based on my recent experience

taking voice lessons. I spent the first couple of days learning the music so we could workshop it further, and we also negotiated cuts and edits from the previous draft. For example, the coda of the piece in the final version was originally the climax of the second movement, and the melodic prepared harp section of the first movement was originally the ending of the second movement. These ideas were shifted primarily so there would be more room for them to develop and form as distinct musical gestures, helping to characterize the feel of each movement. The coda was added to connect the musical ideas of all three movements into one final statement, creating a sense of closure after the wild theatrical movement. In addition to workshopping and editing the notated first and second song, we reviewed all voicemail material, taking notes and selecting which comedic bits and characters to include in the theatrical third song. After this, we decided to record an improvised third movement with a written script to guide the structure of the song (Figure 6).

<p><i>(whispered)</i> Munsssster Havarti Cheddar Dill Havarti ... Sharp Cheddar Brie ... Cheddar Dill Havardi ... Cheddar ... Sriracha Gouda : Gouda gouda gouda : Gouda Munster Brie Feta Cheddar : Cheddar cheddar cheddar : : Cheddar Brie : : Munster : <i>(trail off)</i></p> <p><i>(CLEAR THROAT) [GNOME MAN]</i> Hi. <i>(clear throat)</i> Hi...ms sutherland... I'm callin about youuuur Lawwwwwn gnome</p> <p>[LAUGH] <i>[straight faced]</i> The message that I'm leaving is that I have a message</p> <p><i>[GNOME MAN]</i> It's wakin up in the night...eatin MY carrots. And I can't have than any more. I can't have NONE of your lawn gnomes in MY lawn no more!</p>	<p><i>(dangling object on e-bow), slightly louder than whispers... whispers come to the fore</i></p> <p>This is rhythmic, use nail on the prepared harp and play the two toy harps</p> <p>STOP EVERYTHING TAKE OFF E BOW</p> <p>Go crazy with brushes on all instruments Let resonance die down before next line</p> <p>GO CRAZY WITH BRUSHES</p> <p>Rustle paper on the dulcimer</p> <p>Pick up toy harp and play the back wood with knuckles</p>
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Figure 6. First Draft of the Script for the Third Movement of *Three Children's Songs*

We spent eight hours in our first recording session, during which we made several small edits based on the playbacks. In this case, Seare produced the session so I could focus on playing without making judgment calls. At the end of this session, we spent time recording an improvisatory version of the third movement. While this version was comedic, it was less refined, and we were generally dissatisfied with its lack of musical structure. Additionally, I found it difficult as the performer to decide in real time what material to use while simultaneously trying to commit theatrically to each character without questioning the creative decisions involved. Before the next session, we discussed a more prescriptive approach to the third movement in which Seare used a collage structure to connect and blend between each character in the piece. This version also provided more rigid guidance for me as the performer, allowing me to connect to the material in a more objective way, making the performance more convincing. We used an additional three-hour session to record the revised third movement.

In addition to producer and composer, Seare served as the audio engineer for this piece. As a doctoral student at Cornell, he was able to use the equipment and facilities at the university to record this project. Here are his notes³ on the microphone setup he chose (Figure 7):

The recording set-up for the project included a combination of four microphones on the percussion table and voice. Two omnidirectional small diaphragm microphones (RODE NT5) were used as a wide stereo pair on the table. One large diaphragm hyper-cardioid condenser microphone (Lewitt LCT440) was used in front of the table to have a proximity recording of the autoharp and dulcimer on the table. One DPA 4060 omni-directional microphone was clipped on to the performer to “close-mic” the voice. The result of this array of microphones results in a close recording sound with a wide frequency response.

The recording set-up as described is ideal as an in-between from live “classical music” recording practice and studio practices more oriented towards popular musics. The close-mic’d, yet not independent (as in bleed through other

³ Seare Farhat, Email to author, March 2, 2024.

microphones), is a characteristic of new music recordings. The non-isolated recording practice gives a sense of liveness to the recording which is suited for the project. This project was recorded and mixed through Abelton.



Figure 7. Microphone Placement for *Three Children's Songs*

Video:

The video concept for this piece is “the passage of time.” The list of necessary footage includes a candle melting slowly over time, a slow sunset with a scenic view of winter, a performance video in a studio, a performance video in a forest, and prerecorded home video footage, including skits and comedic bits we made when we were teenagers. I wanted to include Seare and I in the winter scene, so I recorded this footage on a dock at Cayuga Lake in Ithaca, New York while I was visiting for our work on the project (Figure 8). As of the time of writing, we are in the process of transporting the instruments back to Arizona, after which I will record the remainder of the required footage.



Figure 8. Still Video Footage from Cayuga Lake

CHAPTER 4

RECORDING AUDIO AND VIDEO FOR THOMAS KOTCHEFF'S OBBLIGATO SNARE DRUM MUSIC NO. 1: THE POWER OF LOVE

Audio:

Obbligato Snare Drum Music No. 1: The Power of Love is a solo snare drum piece with an electronic backing track based on Celine Dion's "The Power of Love." The snare drum part is written with the idea of "air drumming" in mind, as an accompaniment to the vocal track, which becomes progressively more altered, through extreme changes in pitch and speed, throughout the work to show a musical progression in which the altered material takes over and destroys the material of the original track. Unlike the Abe which I have performed live several times, my practice strategy for the Kotcheff was centered around the recording preparation from the beginning of the note learning process, as my first live performance will occur six weeks from the time of writing. The process for recording this piece was also different from standard snare drum recordings in that we had to account for the weight of the two junk metal pieces dampening the snare drum head. Generally, this is not ideal for a concert setting because it prevents the drum from resonating. However, the dryness of the sound was ideal for creating a clean studio recording, and reverb was added later in post-production, creating a resonant drum sound. We recorded this piece in the electronic music studio at ASU, where acoustical dryness was a feature of the space. Additionally, this piece uses a click track and an electronic track, making it much easier to record chunks and "punch ins" at any point in the piece, unlike the marimba recording. Like the other two pieces, we recorded most of the audio in the first session, doing a run-through followed by predetermined chunks. The second session was used to improve details and

record alternate takes with slightly different styles and musical goals. Here is Celia's explanation⁴ of microphone selection and placement (Figure 9):

For this microphone set up, we used a combination of condenser and dynamic microphones close to the drum for a clear sound. The dynamic microphone was an SM 58 with its cone taken off, causing it to function as an SM 57, placed 1-3 inches above the rim of the top snare drum head. The large diaphragm condenser mics included an AKG 414 cardioid mic placed above the top snare drum head and an AKG 414 large diaphragm super cardioid placed below the bottom snare drum head. The small diaphragm condenser microphones included a DPA4099 super cardioid and a Sennheiser e614 super cardioid, both on the top snare drum head. The microphones were aimed towards desired sound sources, and away from unwanted sound sources. Additionally, placing a dynamic microphone close to the sound source allowed for extra bass response, known as the proximity effect.



Figure 9. Microphone Placement for *Obbligato Snare Drum Music No. 1*

⁴ Celia Yang, Email to author, March 12, 2024.

We spent two sessions of around four hours each selecting and editing takes. As of the time of writing, our next steps are to detail the sound quality in post-production and balance the recorded snare drum track with the electronic track.

Video:

One of the most important aspects of the video preparation process was meeting with composer Thomas Kotcheff to ask questions about his piece. This allowed me to understand the structure of the piece more deeply and ensure that my ideas for the video were in line with the composer's musical goals for the piece. My video concept is contrasting soft textures, informed by the musical ideas in the electronic track which includes an unaltered version of Celine Dion's "The Power of Love," as well a version that is altered through changing the speed and pitch of the track. Dry soft textures with warm tones will be used to represent the unaltered track, and wet soft textures with cool tones will represent the altered track. Scenes of the former will include close shots of pink silky fabric and the smooth red rocks of Sedona, while the latter will include close shots of still water and wet dark colored fabric. Two different performance videos will be created to represent these contrasting soft textures, including one styled around glamorous gold and pink tones and the other around mysterious cool tones in which the player stands partially submerged in water. As the piece progresses and the altered track becomes more prominent, the wet soft texture shots will take over, representing how the unaltered track unravels over the course of the piece. Additionally, Celia had the idea to make the overall snare drum sound quality soft to mirror this idea in the audio portion of the music video. The video process for this piece will continue after the time of writing.

CHAPTER 5

RECORDING AUDIO AND VIDEO FOR KEIKO ABE'S MARIMBA D'AMORE

Audio:

Marimba d'Amore (2001) is a solo marimba work by Keiko Abe, a virtuoso performer, composer, and teacher of solo marimba repertoire. This work is based on Martini's 1784 love song "Plaisir d'amour." Variations of this melody can be heard throughout this twelve-minute work, and the performance challenge lies in creating various contrasting musical characters and changing between them quickly. I began the process of preparing this piece in the Summer of 2023 and studied it with many internationally renowned teachers who had personally worked with Keiko Abe at the International Katarzyna Mycka Marimba Academy in Gdansk, Poland. The recording process for this piece included two four-hour sessions in Katzin Recital Hall at ASU, with Celia Yang as the audio engineer and producer. Here, we aimed to capture an intimate sound, while avoiding percussive contact sound, highlighting the resonance of a small recital hall. Celia used small diaphragm cardioid microphones (AKG451 B) for close mic'ing and large diaphragm cardioid microphones (AKG C414 XLS) for room mic'ing in a figure 8 formation (Figure 10). Below are Celia's recommendations⁵ for microphone placement:

Recording a marimba with a stereo pair allows you to achieve a stereo image. Space a pair of microphones at either end of the instrument, 4-8 feet away depending on how much room sound is desired. The microphones can be lower to capture more sound from the resonators and higher to capture a more percussive attack. In this case, a higher placement was preferable, as the additional resonance effect was not desired. Condenser microphones capture large frequencies and have a great transient response. They are also very sensitive to output and tend to be louder, especially when using softer mallets. High-quality condenser microphones are best because they capture the entire marimba, as well as the space around the instrument. They will not only capture the sound, but they will capture the overtones and natural reverb that is bouncing around the room.

⁵ Celia Yang, Email to author, March 12, 2024.

Additionally, Celia recommended placing the large-diaphragm condenser in front and above the marimba to capture the best overall mix of the mallets striking the bars and the deep, warm amplification of the sound through the resonators. The microphones can be placed closer to the instrument for a more intimate sound and farther away for more room sound. Starting close and working backwards is a good starting point for gauging this balance.



Figure 10. Microphone Placement for *Marimba d'Amore*

Large musical chunks with natural phrase endings were ideal for recording this piece, as the overtones of the marimba often ring into the next section after several seconds. Because of this, if a new take begins in the middle of a dense section, it sounds dead when attached to the previous resonant section during postproduction. The alternative to defining the chunks based on natural pauses in the music is to include several seconds of material

starting before each chunk, creating resonance that makes each take sound full. However, this can be difficult to match to previous sections in terms of volume, energy, and tempo. At this stage, we have completed most of the editing process for this piece, with two four-hour sessions in which we chose the best takes and pieced them together. The final edits will be complete over the next two weeks.

Video:

The video concept for this piece is palm trees with high color contrast. This idea came from listening to Keiko Abe's body of repertoire, which includes many pieces inspired by the natural scenes around her. As I am from the East Coast, I still find wonder in the natural scenes of Arizona daily, and I was interested in incorporating these scenes into the video to represent my short time living in this desert environment. My mental visualization of this piece has always included bold colors, particularly bold reds, to represent the emotion of this passionate work. I connected this idea of color contrast to the palm tree outside my living room window, as I watched the palm fronds slowly fade to black each day during the sunset. While palm trees have many meanings, I am mostly interested in using them to highlight strong color contrasts, with zoomed in video footage that removes scale and context and makes the palm frond not easily identifiable. At this stage in the process, I have planned all necessary shots, including a palm frond floating in a pool, a performance video recorded outdoors with palm trees as the backdrop, and palm trees blowing in the wind as the sun sets, creating a strong color contrast as the palm fronds appear to be black against the sky's bright backdrop (Figure 11). I have also researched lighting techniques and editing techniques that will highlight subjects in red while darkening shadows with high contrast. I have captured some of the palm frond footage, and I will continue editing and recording footage over the next month.



Figure 11. Still Video Footage of Palm Fronds

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTIONS ON COLLABORATION AND NEXT STEPS

Before this project, I had never made an edited solo audio recording or created a structured music video. While these parts are still in progress, I now have nearly 40 minutes of recorded music and I have laid the groundwork for each video. I have started the long process of developing skills working with collaborators, planning projects, and video production. Moreover, this project gave me the space to experiment with making something in addition to interpreting the work of others, through which I discovered my interest in exploring close shots in video, as well as my interest in highlighting contrast across similar objects. Lastly, through the essential contributions of Seare Farhat and Celia Yang, I learned the value of artistic collaboration that creates the opportunity for refinement and amplification of vulnerable creative ideas. The next steps for this project include finishing the final audio editing, recording additional video footage, and editing the videos, which will be complete in the next month and presented in a multimodal format in early May.

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