

Percussive Notes

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Remembering Louie Bellson

**Interpreting the 'Finlandia' Timpani Part
Four-Mallet Exercises for the Front Ensemble
Pandeiro Master Marcos Suzano**

Extended Vibraphone Techniques in Deane's 'The Apocryphal Still Life'

By Joshua D. Smith

The Apocryphal Still Life" was commissioned by PAS to be used as a "test piece" performed by all the contestants involved in the 1996 PAS Vibraphone Competition. The work is a four-mallet vibraphone piece that requires a performer to execute multiple performance techniques such as one-handed rolls, dead strokes, and one-handed harmonics. Concerning the motivation behind this piece, Deane wanted to reflect the idea of "a still-life study in motion—which is a contradiction."¹

SPECIAL PREPARATIONS

Out of Deane's title of an apocryphal, or fictitious, still-life came the special vibraphone-bar preparations. Deane composed this piece so that two notes, *d'* and *e'*, would sustain throughout, regardless of the position of the damper bar, thus replicating the still-life. By exploiting these prepared notes, Deane composed a piece that successfully juxtaposes layers of varied rhythmic durations and densities with layers of notes that are sustained throughout the composition with effortless continuance, and by combining these different layers, Deane effectively portrays the contradiction of a still-life study in motion.

To enable the *d'* and *e'* to sustain throughout the composition, special modifications must be made to the suspension cord that supports these bars on the instrument's frame. Deane

encourages performers to "lift the cord that runs through the nodal points of the two pitches around the 'hook' support so that the cord is on top of the hook. Lifting the cord allows these two pitches to ring when struck regardless of the damper bar position."²

Since vibraphone bars in the same register are all supported by the same cord, it is possible for adjacent notes (in this case *c'* and *f'*) to be affected by such a cord preparation, in that they will not dampen fully when the damper bar is engaged in the "up" position. If adjacent notes are adversely affected, then a performer should fasten additional padding to the damper bar at the point where it comes in contact with the notes *c'* and *f'*. Deane states that "the proper effect of the piece relies on these bars (*d'* and *e'*) ringing fully."³ These prepared pitches are introduced in mm. 2–3, as illustrated in Example 1.

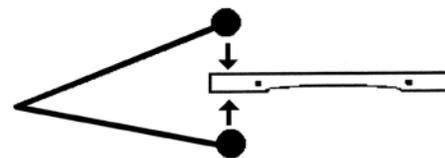
ONE-HANDED ROLL

Another method by which Deane merges rhythmically complex notes with notes of sustain is by requiring the performer to utilize a one-handed roll in which each of the two mallets respectively strikes the bar on opposite sides: the top side and bottom side. This technique is borrowed from marimba performance and referred to as a "mandolin roll" as it emulates the hand movement that is used to sustain a pitch on a mandolin string.

Deane states, "It has been a commonly held attitude that the mandolin roll is an antiquated technique, and was only used historically because the technique of one-handed rolls with both mallets on the top side of a bar had not been perfected. The mandolin roll is not the same as rolling on the top side of a bar. A mandolin roll can be more aggressive and immediate as compared to other forms of one handed rolls. It is a different technique and should not be discounted."⁴

To aid in the success of producing a one-handed roll, Deane suggests that "the roll be played by having the two mallet heads straddling the upper and lower faces of the *f'* bar."⁵ This technique is illustrated in Example 2.

Example 2



To ensure that the *f'* sustains with a consistently balanced sound, it is imperative that a performer roll on the extreme outside edge of the bar. By rolling on the edge of the *f'*, a performer can successfully avoid rolling

Example 1

close to the nodal point of the bar, which will produce an unbalanced roll sound. The first time Deane calls for this performance technique is in m. 8, as illustrated in Example 3.

Example 3

DEAD STROKES

Deane requires the performer to execute dead strokes and harmonics and notates these instances with a small circle (°) above or below noteheads for harmonics and a plus symbol (+) above or below noteheads for dead strokes. While the method of performing dead strokes is similar to the method used in other Deane pieces, vibraphonists must perform harmonics in “The Apocryphal Still Life” with only one hand. Deane introduces both of these techniques for the first time in m. 11, as illustrated in Example 4.

Example 4

Example 5

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ONE-HANDED HARMONICS

“The Apocryphal Still Life” is the first published piece that requires a performer to execute one-handed harmonics. Deane anticipated a lack of familiarity with such a technique from the percussion community and included extensive instructions in the performance notes. Harmonics are produced when a vibraphone bar is touched in the center with very light pressure and struck with another mallet or bowed with a bow. In “The Apocryphal Still Life” it is necessary to use one mallet while the other mallet in the same hand strikes the bar, and this is achieved by placing and resting the inside or outside mallet head directly in the center of the bar and striking the node of the same bar with the remaining mallet head.⁶ The decision of touching the bar

via the inside or the outside mallet head is left up to the performer.⁷

When deciding which mallet to use, one needs to take into account the particular four-mallet grip he or she is using, as both Burton grip and Musser (Stevens) grip produce varied degrees of ease and success for individual performers. Example 5 illustrates an occasion where Deane requires a performer to execute isolated dead strokes, a series of harmonics, and a one-handed roll in the same measure.

HARMONIC ARTICULATIONS

There are multiple instances throughout this piece where Deane includes harmonic articulation markings that combine circles, dashes, and the letter “N,” as also illustrated in Example 5. Concerning these markings, Deane states, “The note phrases that have circles below the noteheads that change to dash marks ending in an ‘N’ should be played by beginning the grouping with the harmonic being produced... At the point when the dash marks appear, the player should begin moving both mallets in the same direction, thus transforming the sound of the note from a pure harmonic to a normal (‘N’), pure bar tone.”⁸

When performed successfully, musical passages such as these produce an effect of a normal tone emerging from the harmonic. Observe that in m. 21 (Example 5), the harmonic passage is played on *d'* and produces a sound two octaves higher. This harmonic production begins after the D two octaves above (*d'''*) is struck in a normal fashion on beat one. By moving the mallets on the *d'* from the harmonic production to a normal production, a performer can effectively convey a sense of pitches effortlessly transforming to pitches two octaves lower. Moreover, Deane introduces musical figures beginning in m. 107 that begin on normal notes and progress to harmonics—a reverse order from prior passages.

It is also worth mentioning that Deane requires a performer to execute one-handed harmonics in an isolated fashion on different notes, which is illustrated in Example 6.

This “melody of harmonics” is in opposition to harmonics that are played in a repeated manner on the same note. Performance of one-handed harmonics on either isolated notes or with a continuous rhythm on the same note should prove unproblematic once a performer has mastered the appropriate performance techniques.

Example 6



GLISS

In m. 17, Deane introduces a musical example that requires the performer to play notes together in the manner of a glissando. As also illustrated in Example 6, Deane begins this musical gesture with the *f*[#] and *g*, and ends with the *a*[#] and *b*. The most effective method for executing this type of effect is to strike the mallets across the proper vibraphone bars in a sweeping movement that makes contact with only the notes encompassed chromatically

between the *f*[#] and the *b*. Essentially, through the performance of this sweeping movement, one of the mallets will contact only the “natural” notes while the other mallet will contact only the “accidental” notes. In various places throughout this piece, Deane requires a performer to execute this sweeping movement in all three octaves of the instrument. It is vital for a performer to position his or her body, arm, and mallets in a way that effectively allows for clear articulation of these musical passages.

CONCLUSION

Deane’s sophisticated treatment of the extended performance techniques found in “The Apocryphal Still Life” lends to its appeal. This piece will prove a worthy addition for vibraphonists looking for inventive solo concert literature to add to their repertoire.

“The Apocryphal Still Life” by Christopher Deane
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ENDNOTES

1. Scott H. Harris, “Christopher Deane,” *Percussive Notes* August 1997, 58.
2. Performance Notes, *The Apocryphal Still Life*, Christopher Deane, 1996.
3. Ibid.

4. Christopher Deane, interview by author, Denton, TX, April 22, 2008.
5. Performance Notes, *The Apocryphal Still Life*, Christopher Deane, 1996.
6. Ibid.
7. With the various four mallet grips, it is widely accepted to number mallets from left to right with the numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4. In this system, mallets 1 and 4 are the “outside” mallets while mallets 2 and 3 are the “inside” mallets.
8. Performance Notes, *The Apocryphal Still Life*, Christopher Deane, 1996.

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