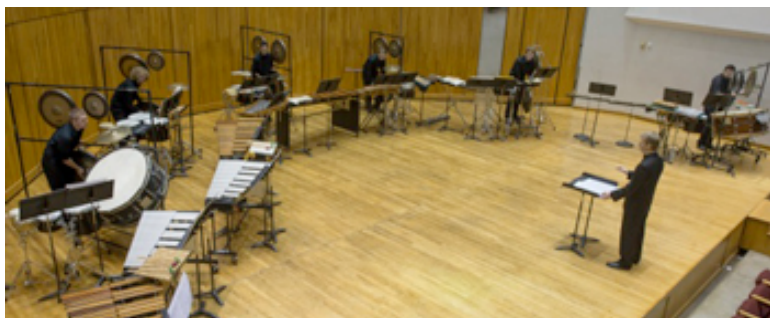


Preview

“Clocks in Motion” percussion ensemble to play at Baldwin Wallace and Cleveland State Universities

by Mike Telin



If you have never had the opportunity to hear the magic that a percussion ensemble can bring to a stage, here is your chance. On Sunday, March 24th in Gamble Auditorium at Baldwin Wallace University and Monday, March 25th in Waetjen Auditorium at Cleveland State University, *Clocks in Motion* presents con-

certs featuring the works of Reich, Cage, Xenakis and Brün. The program also features violinist Evan Kleve as soloist in Lou Harrison's *Concerto for Violin with Percussion Orchestra*.

Formed in 2011, *Clocks in Motion* is a contemporary percussion ensemble dedicated to performing modern chamber music and commissioning new repertoire. The group were the featured performers at the Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery 2012 Science Fair and the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMOCA) Gallery Night for the opening of a new exhibit by painter Robert Lostutter. In addition, the group served in residency at Rhapsody Arts Center (Verona, WI) in January of 2013 to teach students in grades K-12 about contemporary music and percussion and will be the ensemble in residence at the *Interlochen Arts Academy* in May 2013.

Clocks in Motion began as an extension of the University of Wisconsin at Madison's Graduate Percussion Group, and now serves as the ensemble in residence for the institution's percussion studio.

We spoke with percussionist David Alcorn by telephone.

Mike Telin: Thanks for talking. Tell me about this very interesting program.

Dave Alcorn: This is all repertoire that we've been playing for the past couple of years that we know doesn't get played all that often. We are trying to expose people to this music who otherwise might never get a chance to hear it.

For example, Herbert Brün's [*At Loose Ends*](#). As far as we are aware, our performance of it [in February] was only the third time it had ever been performed. It was written for

Black Earth Percussion in the 70's and I don't know how many times they performed it, but they did record it. And when the group disbanded Brün actually stated that the piece most likely would never be played again.

I don't think it was — until a couple of years ago at the University of Illinois, where he taught composition for many years, and the University percussion ensemble performed it as part of a celebration of his music. Beyond that, I think our group is the only one who ever played it. At least I cannot find any record of it being performed.

MT: Interesting, and why do you think that is?

DA: The piece uses a lot of equipment, most notably something called a corimba, which is not a typical western instrument. It's like a marimba. It's a keyboard instrument made from rosewood, and it looks exactly like a marimba, but the bars are tuned a quarter tone flat. You stack it with a regular marimba, and by that I mean the corimba sits in front of the marimba, so you have four levels and one person plays both instruments, which creates a twenty-four tone scale instead of the normal western twelve-tone scale.

MT: How did you become interested in the music of Brün?

DA: I've been a fan of his music for a while. He wrote three works for percussion that I have played. I also wrote a paper on him last year that focused on those works. As I was writing the paper I was also looking at his other music for percussion and I discovered the piece, and it turns out that the U of Wisconsin at Madison had it. I saw it was on a CD of his music so I got that as well. The piece is so interesting that I knew we had to play it.

MT: How many players are needed to perform it?

DA: Five people — four percussionists and one pianist who also plays celesta and chimes.

MT: The Xenakis "[Pleiades](#)" is one of my favorite works of all time for any ensemble. And speaking of odd instruments: the [sixxen](#). I understand a couple of people in the group built them?

DA: They were built before we were officially Clocks in Motion, but Bret Walter and Sean Kleve did built them over a summer. There are some plans in the Percussive Arts Society magazine. They also found some people who had built them, so they got in touch with them as well.

They modified them a little bit because they would work better for the group. The original sixxens are quite large and these are easier to travel with. You need six sets and even with the smaller size they are still extremely heavy.

MT: In what order are you going to perform the movements?

DA: We'll start with *Claviers* and end with *Mélanges*. It's all about how you want the sixxens to be introduced to the audience. I love the way Métaux begins with the unison d, then things begin to slowly expand.

MT: I do know the Reich, [Music for pieces of wood](#). But I don't know Harrison's [Concerto for Violin with Percussion Orchestra](#).

DA: Both Harrison's violin concerto and *Music for pieces of wood* have been performed more often but they are amazing pieces in the literature that many people probably have never heard. The Harrison is difficult because you have five percussionists with loud instruments against the solo violin, so you need to take all of the fortissimo markings with a grain of salt.

MT: When the group is rehearsing, is it a democratic process?

DA: It is somewhat democratic in that we all have input. Everybody does speak their minds, and we do get into friendly arguments. If five out of six people are in agreement then that one person graciously agrees. Many times we don't even talk about it — one person kind of takes charge. But things are very organized. Sometimes when someone is not playing they will listen and give comments.

MT: Do you all contribute to programming decisions?

DA: Sean kind of figures out which pieces go on which concert and what the order should be. And while he does take care of that, if someone thinks we should do a piece, nearly 100% of the time it does get programmed.

MT: And then there is the job of finding all the instruments you need for a performance, and that is not an easy task.

DA: That's for sure. For this tour we e-mailed percussion teachers told them what we were thinking of and if they expressed interest we asked them what instruments they would have available to borrow.

We do have contingency plans if some instruments are not available, although we do bring quite a bit of our own gear. As a percussion ensemble you do have to be able to adapt to the situation and if you can't, you ultimately will not be performing at a lot of venues. And when you're performing pieces like these, that require so many instruments, you kind of have to expect that a lot of venues are not going to have exactly everything that you need.

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