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**THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE  
COMMISSIONING SERIES AND PERCUSSION PRESS, 1978-1999:  
AN EXAMINATION OF ITS HISTORY**

**A Document  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS**

**By  
LANCE M. DREGE  
Norman, Oklahoma  
2000**

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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE  
COMMISSIONING SERIES AND PERCUSSION PRESS, 1978-1999:  
AN EXAMINATION OF ITS HISTORY

A Document APPROVED FOR THE  
SCHOOL OF MUSIC

BY

Richard L. Grier

Eugene Snies

Annex Snies

William Wakefield

Robert D. J. J. J.

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## ABSTRACT

In 1978, Dr. Richard C. Gipson commissioned John Beck, percussionist, composer, and professor at the Eastman School of Music, to write a new work for percussion ensemble and solo drum set. This piece, entitled *Concerto for Drum Set and Percussion Ensemble*, initiated what is now known as the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series. Since its inception, seventeen works for percussion ensemble have been commissioned and premiered by this ensemble, most of which have been subsequently published. The University of Oklahoma Commissioning Series is at present the longest running and most prolific commissioning series of its kind for percussion music.

The OU Percussion Press has proven to be a vital link to the success and recognition of the OU Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series. The ability to publish commissioned works and make them available for performance by other universities and high school percussion ensembles has been crucial to the overall success of the individual commissioned works as well as future commission pieces. Without the ability to publish the commissioned works, it is conceivable that the success of the University of Oklahoma Commissioning Series would have been dramatically and adversely affected.

The purpose of this study was to trace the development and history of the University of Oklahoma Commissioning Series and the OU Percussion Press. Both organizations were founded by Richard Gipson with the stated mission of “stimulating the very finest compositions for the Percussion Ensemble medium” and the “dissemination of outstanding music for percussion ensemble.” In addition, the study documented all commissioned works from the series performed at the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions from 1978 through 1999. Through this study, a detailed list was created of the commissioned works including the commission, publication and premiere dates, performance time, total number of performers needed, and all required instrumentation.

The major historical source included interviews with Dr. Richard Gipson, founder and editor of the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series and the OU Percussion Press. Dr. Gipson is regarded as one of the leading proponents in the advancement and production of quality percussion ensemble literature. Through the interviews, information was gathered and documented concerning the history, contributions, significant developments and achievements, and the future of both organizations. Additionally, archival file material for the Commissioning Series and the OU Percussion Press was consulted and utilized.

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE  
COMMISSIONING SERIES AND PERCUSSION PRESS, 1978-1999:  
AN EXAMINATION OF ITS HISTORY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Compositions written exclusively for an ensemble of percussion instruments originate from the early 1900s. Many early works composed for this medium were attempts by leading composers to search for ways to create new and unique sounds through different combinations of instruments and ensembles. Although the relative importance of percussion writing within orchestral compositions greatly expanded during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the efforts of influential composers like Igor Stravinsky and Bela Bartok, compositions written solely for the percussion ensemble were considered by many composers to be novel and experimental. This perception began to change after the year 1950 with the implementation and general acceptance of percussion ensemble programs throughout universities and colleges.<sup>1</sup>

The beginning of what is now considered modern day percussion ensemble literature is often associated with *Ionization* (1931) by Edgar Varese. Even by today's musical standards, this work, scored for thirteen percussionists and forty-one instruments,

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon B. Peters, *The Drummer: Man* (Wilmette, Illinois: Kemper-Peters Publications, 1975) 211.

still is considered a masterpiece in the percussion ensemble literature.<sup>2</sup> Other important works soon followed for this new and exciting instrumental medium. Influential composers such as Carlos Chavez, Lou Harrison, Alan Hovhaness, Amadeo Roldan, and Henry Cowell each added their own unique style and influence in early works for the genre. The significance of these composers and their music on the early development of percussion ensemble literature is evident in the quantity of research studies and articles published documenting repertoire in this period.<sup>3</sup>

Coinciding with the early development of the percussion ensemble, the marimba ensemble experienced its own particular level of success. Between the years 1930 and 1950, marimba “bands” and “orchestras” became increasingly popular, especially the large marimba orchestras formed and conducted by Clair Omar Musser. Musser was instrumental in organizing marimba orchestras for prestigious music festivals and events throughout the country, including the Chicago World’s Fair in 1934. For this event, Musser assembled the world’s first 100-piece marimba orchestra, leading some music critics to boldly compare it to the “greatest symphony orchestras of all time.”<sup>4</sup> Ironically,

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<sup>2</sup> Larry Vanlandingham, “The Percussion Ensemble: 1930-1945,” Percussionist 9, no. 4 (Summer 1972): 109-118.

<sup>3</sup> Larry Vanlandingham, “The Percussion Ensemble;” Don Baker, “The Percussion Ensemble Music of Lou Harrison: 1939-1942;” Ronald Keezer, “A Study of Selected Percussion Ensemble Music of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century;” Michael Rosen, “A Survey of Compositions Written for the Percussion Ensemble.”

<sup>4</sup> David P. Eyler, “The ‘Century of Progress’ Marimba Orchestra,” Percussive Notes 29, no. 3 (February 1991): 57-58.

as successful and popular as these marimba orchestras became, their influence on the development of new percussion ensemble literature was minimal since most of the music performed consisted of orchestral arrangements rather than original compositions.

Coinciding with the implementation and development of collegiate percussion ensemble programs after 1950, the percussion ensemble medium experienced its largest period of growth.<sup>5</sup> Concurrent with this active growth was an unusual development in new literature for the ensemble. The desire to quickly establish a body of new literature combined with the likelihood of the works being readily performed and even published, created a strong incentive for many aspiring composers as well as percussionist-composers to write new works for the percussion ensemble. Unfortunately, a significant portion of these early works manifested what Gordon Peters described in his book as “poor craftsmanship, shallow in concept, and reflects a poor understanding of the medium of percussion instruments.”<sup>6</sup> Consequently, many works composed during this period had little positive influence on future percussion ensemble literature. This fact was noted in two separate studies conducted between 1972 and 1979, each finding that a majority of the top performed percussion ensemble works were composed prior to 1950.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Gordon B. Peters, “A Percussion Perspective,” Percussionist 8, no. 2 (December 1970): 36.

<sup>6</sup> Peters, The Drummer 265.

<sup>7</sup> David P. Eyler, “The Top 50 Percussion Solo and Ensemble Composition of Today,” Percussive Notes 18, no. 1 (Fall 1979): 38-39; Matt Ward, “Percussion’s ‘Top 75 Compositions,’” Percussive Notes 10, no. 3 (Spring 1972): 16-18.

Recent developments in percussion ensemble literature paralleled the establishment and development of an annual international percussion convention. In his research document, Scott Cameron concluded: "the Percussive Arts Society, through its annual convention, has had significant impact upon the development of new percussion ensemble literature."<sup>8</sup> The Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC) held its first annual meeting in 1976.<sup>9</sup> Currently, as a part of each year's convention program, two or three collegiate and high school percussion ensembles are selected and invited to perform through a blind "Call for Tapes" auditions procedure.<sup>10</sup> The selection to perform at a Percussive Arts Society International Convention is acknowledged throughout the percussion community as a significant ensemble accomplishment. The selection to perform and the subsequent choice of literature performed by each school ensemble is in itself significant due to the influence performances at this event have on those who attend. New works premiered and other works performed at Percussive Arts Society International Conventions have become standard performance options for percussion ensembles throughout the world.

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<sup>8</sup> James Scott Cameron, "Trends and Developments in Percussion Ensemble Literature, 1976-1992: An Examination of Selected Works Premiered at the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions," (D.M.A. document, University of Oklahoma, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas Wolf, "Percussion Ensemble Call for Tapes Replaces Percussion Ensemble Contest, Percussive Notes 28, no.1 (Fall 1990): 28-29.

In 1978, in an effort to enhance the repertoire for percussion ensemble, Professor Richard Gipson established the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series. In addition to standard campus performances and a subsequent publication venture, music from this Commissioning Series has been selected and performed by collegiate and high school percussion ensembles at Percussive Arts Society International Conventions more than any other single commissioning source. The development of this commissioning series and the distribution of its music through publications and recordings serve as the focus of this study.

### Statement of the Problem

By comparison to other musical genres, the percussion ensemble is considered a musical infant, still in its developmental and formative years. While other instrumental performance mediums choose from hundreds of years of past literature, the percussion ensemble is limited to works composed primarily within the last fifty years. The growth and development of this literature can be attributed in part to the solicitation of new literature for the ensemble that reflects a similar quality of musical writing found in other genres. However, the body of quality literature for the percussion ensemble remains woefully small.

Acknowledging this need for higher quality literature, in 1978, the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble began a commissioning series that has contributed a



significant number of works to the percussion ensemble repertoire. These works have resulted in the addition of a substantial quantity and quality of new works for the medium. One way these contributions can be measured and evaluated is through the identification of performances from the Commissioning Series at the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions. Thomas Gauger's *Portico for Percussion Orchestra*, commissioned in 1981, has been performed at four different PASIC conferences by four different collegiate and high school percussion ensembles (1983, 1984, 1987, and 1988). Raymond Helble's *Diabolic Variations*, commissioned in 1985, has received an unprecedented five PASIC performances (1985, 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1998) by four different universities. Several other commissioned works have also received PASIC performances, a number of which have been premieres. To date, no study has been conducted to outline and document the history of this important commissioning series.

#### Need for the study

In 1978, Dr. Richard C. Gipson commissioned John Beck, percussionist, composer, and professor at the Eastman School of Music, to write a new work for percussion ensemble and solo drum set. This piece, entitled *Concerto for Drum Set and Percussion Ensemble*, initiated what is now known as the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series. Since its inception, seventeen works for percussion ensemble have been commissioned and premiered by this ensemble, most of

which have been subsequently published. The University of Oklahoma Commissioning Series is at present the longest running and most prolific commissioning series of its kind.<sup>11</sup> This output represents a significant number of commissions for one genre by a single commissioning source.

Of equal significance to the number of works commissioned is the number of performances of these commissioned works at the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions by collegiate and high school percussion ensembles. Between 1978 and 1999, eleven University of Oklahoma commissioned works were performed twenty-one times at thirteen different Percussive Arts Society International Conventions by the finest academic percussion ensembles in the United States. Throughout the history of PASIC, many school percussion ensembles have performed or premiered commissioned works as a part of their program. However, no other commissioning source has been represented and performed on PASIC programs by collegiate and high school ensembles as often as has the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series.

A study documenting the historical development of this important commissioning series can serve as a useful model for music educators planning future commissioning projects. In addition, information gathered could benefit composers, percussionists, and percussion ensemble directors.

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<sup>11</sup> Cameron, 285.

The OU Percussion Press has proven to be a vital link to the success and recognition of the OU Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series. The ability to publish commissioned works and make them available for performance by other universities and high school percussion ensembles has been crucial to the overall success of the individual commissioned works as well as future commission pieces. Without the ability to publish the commissioned works, it is conceivable that the success of the University of Oklahoma Commissioning Series would have been dramatically and adversely affected. Although the focus of the OU Percussion Press has been placed on publishing works from the Commissioning Series, several other works for percussion ensemble also have been published. No source has documented the publications of the OU Percussion Press or examined its impact on the works of the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to trace the development and history of the University of Oklahoma Commissioning Series and the OU Percussion Press. Both organizations were founded by Richard Gipson with the stated mission of “stimulating the very finest compositions for the Percussion Ensemble medium” and the

“dissemination of outstanding music for percussion ensemble.”<sup>12</sup> In addition, this study documents all commissioned works from this commissioning series performed at the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions from 1978 through 1999. Through this study, a detailed list was created of the commissioned works including the commission, publication and premiere dates, performance time, total number of performers needed, and all required instrumentation.

### Limitations of the Study

The focus of this document was limited to the commissioned works of the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series and the publications of the OU Percussion Press. Commissioned works with single or multiple performances at the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions from 1978 through 1999 were emphasized based on documentation citing the conventions importance in promoting new music.<sup>13</sup>

This research study focused on academic commissioned works, and as such does not address commissioned works by professional percussion ensembles. Percussion groups such as Nexus, Repercussions, Percussion Group-Cincinnati, the Harry Partch

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<sup>12</sup> Richard C. Gipson, “Program Notes,” PASIC 1994 concert program.

<sup>13</sup> Cameron, 287.

Ensemble, Kroumata, and others, have greatly increased and expanded the public awareness and perception of percussion ensembles during the past thirty years. Each group has been instrumental in commissioning works or receiving new works dedicated to a specific ensemble or person. While these pieces are all notable additions to the percussion ensemble literature, many were written for an ensemble consisting usually of only four or five players, and consequently do not conform to the criteria of this study.

### Design of the Study

The major historical source included interviews with Dr. Richard Gipson, founder and editor of the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series and the OU Percussion Press. Dr. Gipson is regarded as one of the leading proponents in the advancement and production of quality percussion ensemble literature. His continued efforts in commissioning and publishing new works for this medium during the past 23 years is one reason the Commissioning Series and Percussion Press have received universal acclaim and success within the percussion community. In addition to these flourishing organizations, the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble, directed by Gipson, has distinguished itself among university percussion ensembles in premiering five commissioned works at three separate PASIC concerts (1985, 1990, and 1994). Through the interviews, information was gathered and documented concerning the history, contributions, significant developments and achievements, and the future of both

organizations. Additionally, archival file material for the Commissioning Series and the OU Percussion Press was consulted and utilized.

### Organization of the Study

Chapter one of the study consists of an introduction and overview of the percussion ensemble genre, the status of its repertoire, and recent developments in the establishment and generation of new repertoire. The Statement of the Problem, Need for the Study, Purpose of the Study, Limitations of the Study, Design of the Study, and the Organization of the Study are identified. Chapter two surveys related percussion ensemble literature and literature related to commissioning efforts in other genres. This chapter includes a brief survey of percussion ensemble commissioning projects with other universities, high schools, non-profit organizations, professional organizations, and professional percussion ensembles. Chapters three and four outline the history of the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series and the OU Percussion Press. Historical information was retrieved from archival files along with interviews with Dr. Richard Gipson. Chapter five provides a summary and conclusions as well as recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **SURVEY OF RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

During the past fifty years, numerous articles have been published listing, grading, and generally assisting the educator in providing basic knowledge of the literature available for the percussion ensemble. Relatively few research studies have undertaken a comprehensive overview of the history of the percussion ensemble and its related literature. More importantly, few research projects have investigated the commissioned compositions for this medium while also examining the contributions and influence these works have had in shaping the direction of percussion ensemble literature.

#### **Related Percussion Ensemble Literature**

The first published articles pertaining to percussion ensemble literature during the 1950s were directed towards the public school instrumental music educator and served to outline the importance and benefits of this new percussion ensemble genre for students

and the school's percussion program.<sup>14</sup> One of the earliest substantial writings on percussion ensemble literature was Michael Rosen's article "A Survey of Compositions Written for Percussion Ensemble." In this article, published in three parts in the Percussionist, Rosen outlined three "movements" in the percussion ensemble genre and identified various pieces and composers associated with each movement. The movements, or schools of thought, were the San Francisco movement, the University of Illinois movement, and the conservative symphonic movement.<sup>15</sup>

Two similar studies appeared around the same time in the early 1970s: "A Study of Selected Percussion Ensemble Music of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century" by Ronald Keezer, published in the Percussionist,<sup>16</sup> and "The Percussion Ensemble: 1930-1945," by Larry Vanlandingham, a Ph.D. dissertation and subsequent series of articles published in the Percussionist.<sup>17</sup> Both authors examined the early history and evolution of percussion ensemble literature through an analysis and study of selected works considered important to the genre's overall influence and development. The writers drew similar conclusions with regard to early percussion ensemble development in terms of its distinct

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<sup>14</sup> Peters, Drummer Man 211.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Rosen, "A Survey of Compositions Written for the Percussion Ensemble," Percussionist 4, ns. 2-4 (1967): 190-195.

<sup>16</sup> Ronald Keezer, "A Study of Selected Percussion Ensemble Music of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," Percussionist 8, ns. 1-5 (1970-71): 16-23.

<sup>17</sup> Vanlandingham, The Percussion Ensemble.



compositional styles and trends. In the first study, Keezer summarized the three styles as follows:

Varese and Cage/Harrison represent the left, or avant garde. The works of these men hold an intellectual appeal. Cowell and Hovhaness represent the right or ethnic approach. Russell and Childs act the role of an assimilator. Both Russell and 'left-learning' Childs have drawn from each of the other two categories, yet their work is original and their third category is meaningful.<sup>18</sup>

The conclusions cited by Vanlandingham after his analysis of works by six influential composers of early percussion ensemble music resulted in what he described as three stages of instrumentation development: the use of standard and indigenous percussion, a clear trend of moving away, followed by the return back to the standard.<sup>19</sup>

Numerous articles have been published through the years listing, rating, and in some cases grading percussion ensemble pieces. Two early examples include "Compilation of Published Percussion Ensemble Music" by Geary Larrick<sup>20</sup> and "Percussion Ensemble Literature" by F. Michael Combs. The intended purpose of the second article was to categorize selected percussion ensemble works composed for school ensembles. Between 1972 and 1979, three separate articles were published by

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<sup>18</sup> Ronald Keezer, 22.

<sup>19</sup> Vanlandingham, 123.

<sup>20</sup> Geary H. Larrick, "Compilation of published Percussion Ensembles and Percussion with other Instruments," National Association of College Wind and Percussion Instructors, (Winter 1968): 6.

different authors rating the most popular percussion ensemble pieces as evidenced by their total number of public performances. The calculations were determined either from returned surveys from university and college percussion instructors, or through compiling data from the “Programs” section of Percussive Notes. *Toccata for Percussion Instruments* by Carlos Chavez (1942) was the most performed percussion ensemble work in all three surveys.<sup>21</sup>

Don Baker performed an in-depth analysis of Lou Harrison’s *Labyrinth No. 3*, along with other works by Harrison for the percussion ensemble from this period in his document “The Percussion-Ensemble Music of Lou Harrison: 1939-1942.”<sup>22</sup> In “The History and Development of the Marimba Ensemble in the United States and Its Current Status in College and University Percussion Programs,” author David Eyler outlined the history of the marimba and the marimba ensemble. Eyler’s study began with the marimba’s earliest origins and continued through the popular period of the Clair Omar Musser marimba orchestras, before concluding with a discussion of recent developments in the collegiate setting. Included in his research was a questionnaire sent to more than 200 college percussion instructors. Among the results was one particular question

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<sup>21</sup> Merrill Brown, “Repertoire for Percussionist,” Instrumentalist, February 1977; Reprinted in Percussion Anthology (Evanston, Illinois: The Instrumentalist Company, 1980); David Eyler, “The Top 50 Percussion,” Percussive Notes; Matt Ward, “Percussion’s ‘Top 75 Compositions,’” Percussive Notes.

<sup>22</sup> Don Russell Baker, “The Percussion Ensemble Music of Lou Harrison: 1939-1942.” (D.M.A. document, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1985).

garnering a 98.13% favorable response indicating a “real need for new original literature for the marimba ensemble and mallet-keyboard ensemble.”<sup>23</sup>

James Scott Cameron analyzed percussion ensemble works premiered at the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions from 1976 through 1992 and identified trends within these works in his document entitled “Trends and Development in Percussion Ensemble Literature, 1976-1992: An Examination of Selected Works at the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions.”<sup>24</sup> A more recent research study with respect to the percussion ensemble has examined the musical and cultural elements that have contributed to the ensemble’s development through the influences of orchestral percussion, jazz, and new compositional techniques. Authored by Gregory Byrne, the document is entitled “Musical and Cultural Influences That Contributed Toward the Evolution of the Percussion Ensemble in Western Art Music.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> David Eyler, “The History and Development of the Marimba Ensemble in the United States and its Current Status in College and University Percussion Programs,” (D.M.A. document, Louisiana State University, 1985).

<sup>24</sup> Cameron, “Trends and Developments in Percussion Ensemble Literature,”

<sup>25</sup> Gregory Patrick Byrne, “Musical and Cultural Influences That Contributed Toward the Evolution of the Percussion Ensemble in Western Art Music,” (D.M.A. document, University of Alabama, 1999).

### Commissioning Efforts In Other Genres

Jeanne Marie Belfy's 1986 dissertation, "The Commissioning Project of the Louisville Orchestra 1948-1958: A Study of the History and Music," examined the history of this particular commissioning project. She documented the 132 musical compositions written between 1948 through 1958 for the Louisville Orchestra. Four of the pieces, selected because of their significance to the project, were examined in greater detail. The second part of the study focused on specific areas such as composer selection, styles of the orchestral music, and the impact of the commissioning series.<sup>26</sup>

A related dissertation on commissioning projects was completed in 1999 by Shelly Smithwick. Her dissertation, entitled "Familiarity of CBDNA Commissioning Projects Among College Band Directors in the United States," determined the familiarity among college band directors in the United States with band compositions generated through commissioning projects supported by the College Band Directors National Association. The respondents were asked to provide practical and artistic reasons for choosing to perform or to not perform these commissioned works.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Jeanne Marie Belfy, "The Commissioning Project of the Louisville Orchestra, 1948-1958: A Study of the History and Music," (Ph.D. document, University of Kentucky, 1986).

<sup>27</sup> Shelly Mae Smithwick, "Familiarity of CBDNA Commissioning Projects Among College Band Directors in the United States," (D.M.A. document, University of Oklahoma, 1999).

Numerous organizations throughout the United States and Europe are dedicated to furthering the development of music through various commissioning projects and special grants. These organizations are funded through several government agencies such as the *Meet the Composers* programs and the *National Endowment for the Arts*. Many privately funded organizations have also been instrumental and influential in fostering new music for orchestras, concert bands, and the numerous varieties of chamber ensembles. The American Composers Orchestra Commissioning Series, the Kappa Kappa Psi and Tau Beta Sigma Commissioning Works Program, and the Chamber Music America's Commissioning Programs are a few examples from this category.

#### University Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Projects

The period between 1950 and 1970 was a time of substantial growth for percussion ensembles and percussion literature.<sup>28</sup> Many percussion programs and ensembles became established in colleges and universities as credit-bearing course offerings within the music degree field.<sup>29</sup> This tremendous growth and development of the percussion ensemble paralleled the desire and need for new musical compositions to perform with the ensembles. Because of this need, early percussion programs like those

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<sup>28</sup> Gordon B. Peters, "A Percussion Perspective," *Percussionist* 8, no. 2 (December 1970): 36.

<sup>29</sup> Peters, *The Drummer: Man* 211.

at the Manhattan School of Music and the University of Illinois began to commission works for their percussion ensembles. In addition to commissioning new works, many percussion programs received numerous works that were either dedicated to or written for a particular group or person. The Eastman School of Music percussion department began a yearly composition contest with the purpose of promoting new works composed for the percussion and marimba ensemble. All of these early efforts increased the quantity of literature available to the percussion ensemble. However, the quality of many of these early works in terms of musical merit, substance, and depth could certainly be questioned by current standards of percussion ensemble literature and thought.

More recently, several collegiate and high school percussion ensembles have become involved with commissioning works for the medium. The University of Utah Percussion Ensemble, directed by Doug Wolf, commissioned two highly successful percussion ensemble works. *Past Midnight* by Thomas Gauger and *Stained Glass* by David Gillingham received premiere performances by the University of Utah Percussion Ensemble at the 1991 PASIC, while the University of North Carolina at Greensboro Percussion Ensemble, directed by Cort McClaren, have commissioned fourteen works for the percussion ensemble. At the 1994 PASIC conference, the UNCG Percussion Ensemble premiered two of these works. In 1993, a consortium of eight universities commissioned a new work from composer Daniel McCarthy for marimba solo and percussion ensemble entitled *Song of Middle Earth*. This piece was premiered by

**Michael Burrett and accompanied by the University of North Carolina Percussion**

**Ensemble at the 1994 PASIC. Participating universities included the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, the University of Oklahoma, the University of Utah, Arizona State University, the Eastman School of Music, James Madison University, Kent State University, and the University of Georgia. This collaborative commissioning model has become increasingly popular as the cost of commissions continues to increase.**

**Additionally, the consortium concept also has experienced recent success in both band and orchestra mediums.**

**Commissioned ensemble works by and for high school percussion programs began as early as 1970 with the commission of *Septet No. 2* by Dennis Griffin and the Logan High School Band in Logan, Utah. Other high schools contributing commissioned works for the percussion ensemble include the West Plains, Missouri High School Percussion Ensemble; the Lancaster, Ohio High School Percussion Ensemble; and the Clinton, Tennessee High School Band. *Clintonian Sketch* by Jared Spears was the first of three commissioned works for percussion ensemble by the Clinton High School Band.**

**In 1974, the Percussive Arts Society initiated an annual composition contest with the following stated purpose: “The Percussive Arts Society sponsors an annual competition to encourage and reward those who create music for percussion instruments**

and to increase the number of quality compositions written for percussion.”<sup>30</sup> Divisions of the contest when the category was percussion ensemble varied in the following years: 1974-large ensemble, 1978-solo percussion with ensemble, 1981-keyboard ensemble, 1986-solo percussion with ensemble, 1988-large percussion ensemble, 1992-large percussion ensemble, 1993-keyboard ensemble, and 1999-medium percussion ensemble. Percussive Arts Society state chapters have also been responsible for a number of commissioned works for percussion ensemble. State chapters in California, Indiana, and Texas each have commissioned one work, while the North Carolina PAS chapter has commissioned four compositions for percussion ensemble.

Other important groups contributing commissioned works for percussion ensemble include The National Association of College Wind and Percussion Instructors through their ongoing commissioning project established in 1950. This project produced two significant works for percussion ensemble, William Kraft’s *Momentum* (1966) and *Three Dance Sketches for Percussion* (1980) by Karel Husa. Professional orchestras and bands from across the United States, Canada, and Europe have also commissioned percussion ensemble literature. These works include pieces for percussion ensemble with and without a large accompaniment ensemble of other instruments. The American Wind Symphony, New York Philharmonic Orchestra, United States Air Force Band, and the

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<sup>30</sup> 2000 PAS Composition Contest, advertisement, Percussive Notes 37, no. 6 (December 1999): 66.



Toronto Symphony are just a few organizations that have added commissioned works to supplement the percussion ensemble repertoire.

A final group that has certainly impacted in a significant way the development and advancement of new commissioned works for percussion ensemble is the professional percussion ensemble. Organizations such as Nexus, Repercussions, Kroumata, and many others have commissioned numerous works specific to their ensemble.

**CHAPTER III**  
**HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE OU PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE**  
**COMMISSIONING SERIES**

The University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series began in 1978 with the commission of *Concerto for Drum Set and Percussion Ensemble* by John Beck, percussionist, composer, and professor at the Eastman School of Music. Subsequent commissions have continued almost annually since the first year, resulting in seventeen works to date. The stimulus, development, and continuation of this commissioning series have been accomplished through the direct efforts and vision of Richard C. Gipson, Chairman of the Percussion Department at the University of Oklahoma. The concept of generating new music for this relatively modern musical medium stemmed from Gipson's early collegiate days and has remained his long-term goal and dream. The names, composers, and years commissioned are illustrated in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1- OU Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series Titles, Composers, and  
Commissioned Dates**

<u>Title</u>	<u>Composer</u>	<u>Commissioned</u>
		<u>Date</u>
1. <i>Concerto for Drum Set and Percussion Ensemble</i>	John Beck	1977
2. <i>Dirge and Alleluia</i>	Jerry Neil Smith	1978
3. <i>Suite for Keyboard Percussion</i>	J. Westley Slater	1979
4. <i>Portico for Percussion Orchestra</i>	Thomas Gauger	1980
5. <i>Two Movements for Mallets II</i>	William J. Steinohrt	1981
6. <i>The Manes Scroll</i>	Christopher Deane	1983
7. <i>Canzona</i>	J. Westley Slater	1984
8. <i>Duo Chopinesque</i>	Michael Hennagin	1985
9. <i>Diabolic Variations</i>	Raymond Helble	1984
10. <i>Twilight Offering Music</i>	Blake Wilkins	1987
11. <i>Chameleon Music</i>	Dan Welcher	1987
12. <i>The Phantom Dances</i>	Michael Hennagin	1989
13. <i>Crown of Thorns</i>	David Maslanka	1982
14. <i>Percuss-Sonata</i>	David Ott	1991
15. <i>Compendium</i>	Blake Wilkins	1993
16. <i>Circadian Rhythms</i>	Carolyn Bremer	1996
17. <i>The Palace of Nine Perfections</i>	Eric Ewazen	1997

### Biographical Information

Richard Gipson was born in 1949 and spent his childhood years in Corpus Christi, Texas, where he attended Del Mar College from 1967-69, receiving both an Associates in Arts degree and a Performers Certificate. He continued his studies at the University of Texas under Professor of Percussion George Frock, receiving his Bachelor's degree in 1971 and Master's degree in 1973. During the 1973-74 and 1974-75 school years, Gipson was employed as the percussion instructor and assistant band director at Central

Missouri State University in Warrensburg, Missouri. He held similar positions at the Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pennsylvania and Susquehanna University in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania during the 1975-76 school year. In 1976, he was hired as the first full time tenure-track percussion professor at the University of Oklahoma and in 1978 was awarded the Doctor of Education in Music Education degree from the Pennsylvania State University. In 1979, Dr. Gipson served as the Assistant Director for the School of Music and from 1980-1981 as the School's Interim Director. He was awarded a Provost's Faculty Administrative Fellowship position in 1988 and, in addition to his percussion teaching and performing, continued serving in a variety of administrative positions until 1997. These administrative positions included the appointments of Executive Assistant to the President of the University, 1989-1991; Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, 1991-1992; and Director of the University of Oklahoma School of Music, 1992-97.

### **Philosophy and Early Development**

Upon his arrival at the University of Oklahoma, Dr. Gipson quickly established a nationally recognized percussion program through the performances of the OU Percussion Ensemble at state, regional, and national conventions. One of the first endeavors Gipson pursued was the establishment of an annual Oklahoma Percussion Festival, an event that continues to the present day. Dr. Gipson served as the festival host

and provided the festival site for the first three years. Each percussion festival included performances by nationally known guest artists within the percussion field, as well as performances by area and regional university percussion ensembles. Guest artists for the early festivals included Karen Ervin, Gordon Stout, Ed Shaughnessy, George Frock, and Nexus. During the second Oklahoma Percussion Festival in 1978, one of the guest artists invited to perform by Dr. Gipson was Ed Shaughnessy, former drummer with the “Tonight Show” band. Mr. Shaughnessy was scheduled to perform with the University of Oklahoma Jazz Band and the Percussion Ensemble. However, at that time no literature existed that combined a featured drumset solo with percussion ensemble.

For this reason, Dr. Gipson elected to commission a new work specifically for the 1978 Oklahoma Percussion Festival, featuring Ed Shaughnessy on drumset with the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble. Perhaps the most important step in this process was the selection of a composer. The commission for this new work was offered to Mr. John Beck, Professor of Percussion at the Eastman School of Music. Mr. Beck was well known in the percussion field as an educator and performer, as well as a composer of many fine works for solo percussion instruments and percussion ensemble. Dr. Gipson comments on his decision of selecting Mr. Beck for this commissioned work:

“I first thought of John Beck because he was writing some things at the time and I had a high opinion of his ability to write us a piece. So I called him and visited with him about his interest in writing us a piece. At first he said no,

but he called me back a little later and said that he had thought about it some more and said ‘Yes, I think I could do that’.”<sup>31</sup>

This first commissioned work, entitled *Concerto for Drum Set and Percussion Ensemble*, was premiered on February 10, 1978 during the second annual Oklahoma Percussion Festival hosted by the University of Oklahoma. Mr. Shaughnessy also performed with the University of Oklahoma Jazz Ensemble conducted by Jerry Neil Smith. The piece is scored for seven percussionists and drumset solo and is approximately twelve minutes in length.

Little documentation exists regarding the original contract for the commission or the exact commission and completion dates. Most of the negotiations with Mr. Beck were accomplished verbally and any original correspondence letters concerning specific details of the commission were not saved. The piece received a high level of national visibility and critical acceptance the very same year when it was performed at the 1978 Percussive Arts International Convention (PASIC) in Tempe, Arizona by the Arizona State University Percussion Ensemble, Mark Sunkett, conductor. *Concerto for Drum Set and Percussion Ensemble* was published by Kendor Music, Inc. in 1979.

The immediate success of this first commissioned piece soon led to a second commission subsequently followed by other commissions. The concept of a

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Gipson, interview by author, tape recording, Norman, Oklahoma, 18 February 2000.

commissioning series did not materialize until well after the first commissioned work. Richard Gipson stated that while he had long thought about the need for quality percussion ensemble literature originating through a commissioning effort, the idea of commissioning John Beck and a piece for drumset and percussion ensemble was mainly a “one-time shot” project.<sup>32</sup> This was the approach that he outlined and presented to his administration for the initial funding of the first commissioned piece. Fortunately, the School of Music Director, Dr. Jerry Neil Smith, understood and supported the need for this special type of composition and agreed to fund the commission fee. It was also beneficial that Dr. Smith was a composer himself and could identify with the commissioning process. In fact, Dr. Smith later became the second commissioned composer in the series. Funding continued for the second commission through the help of the School of Music and subsequently has continued to support many of the works within the commissioning series.

A critical aspect in establishing and continuing a successful commissioning series obviously involves the selection of the commissioned composers. This choice becomes even more critical in a genre such as the percussion ensemble, where the field of prospective composers is somewhat limited. Many commissioned composers in this series had little or no previous experience writing for percussion ensemble or any of the

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Gipson, interview by author, tape recording, Norman, Oklahoma, 8 March 2000.

standard solo percussion instruments such as marimba, vibraphone, timpani, or snare drum. Other commissioned composers had only previously composed solo literature for the marimba. In defining and establishing the criteria used in selecting potential composers for the commissioning series, Dr. Gipson commented on his personal philosophy regarding this subject:

It's undoubtedly a combination of factors. I can say that based on experiences I've had with this, the ideal work for us is likely to come from composers who manifest a number of things. One, they obviously have wonderful compositional talent. Two, they either know already how to write for percussion or they're curious enough about how to write for it that they'll figure it out and use the piece as a learning process. And three, probably this is very much a bias on my part, I prefer tonal music. I think personally that there is much left to be done in tonal music. My personal bias runs that way. The composers I contact tend to write tonal music; if they didn't, I probably wouldn't be drawn to their work anyway. It's a self-perpetuating cycle, which I'm not at all ashamed of.<sup>33</sup>

Although there has been a certain amount of freedom with each of the composers concerning the style of the commissioned work, one area of common emphasis with each of the composers has been the percussion ensemble's instrumentation. In all of the commissioned works beginning with *Portico for Percussion Orchestra* by Thomas Gauger, the following phrase has been included in each of the contracts, "being a work for principally mallet keyboard instruments." This again reflects a strong personal belief of Gipson's as to type and style of literature composed in this series:

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Gipson, interview by author, tape recording, Norman, Oklahoma, 18 February 2000.



The whole idea behind it stems from my philosophy of what a percussion ensemble is and what we're really trying to accomplish with the percussion ensemble. I believe very strongly that the percussion family, if written for correctly and played correctly, can be every bit as impressive and expressive a musical entity as any other. A composition doesn't have to rely on just one or two elements of its portfolio, namely the rhythmic element or the color element, to be musical. We can play beautifully tonal works and play them really, really well. The problem is we just didn't have very many of those pieces. We still don't have very many of those pieces. So finding composers who will explore that with us is what this has been all about. I haven't been disappointed. We've had within that range, a huge range of styles. The Hennagin work, like *Duo Chopinesque*, is obviously tonal but has the another side of it which isn't. So, we've been stretched in both directions. *The Manes Scroll* is completely serial. But there are other things. David Maslanka with his piece can't get any more tonal. Blake Wilkins' pieces, while they're tonal, are not neo-romantic. So it's been really neat going through all this. And the newest piece, which we have yet to play (Ewazen).... Well, it's just, it's wonderful... It's just a gorgeous piece. It's really, really, tonal. But there's so much potential in there for expression, making music within the tonal framework, ... I'm just really excited about that piece. I can't wait to play it, it's just terrific. But, at the heart of that, to get back to your question, is the fact that we rely primarily on keyboard instruments to get that done.<sup>34</sup>

Consequently, every commissioned work since *Portico* in 1980, has been typically scored for a keyboard family consisting of three to five marimbas, one or two vibraphones and xylophones, a set of bells and chimes, and often one or two sets of crotales. This nucleus of keyboard instruments has become a defining element in the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series and has contributed to an overall sound that has become quite identifiable with the series. Another aspect or

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Gipson, interview by author, tape recording, Norman, Oklahoma, 18 February 2000.

result of this type of instrumentation is reflected in the overall number of players required for each of the commissioned works. Between eight and twelve performers are typically utilized in the majority of the commissioned pieces. Consequently, each work falls into the “large percussion ensemble” category.

Not every commissioned composer, however, has had an immediate enthusiasm for the keyboard emphasis. Dan Welcher, composer of the very popular *Chameleon Music*, had this to say regarding his initial reaction to writing a piece for a principally mallet keyboard ensemble:

When Richard Gipson, Director of the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble, called me in 1987 to ask if I’d like to write a piece for ten mallet players, my first instinct was to pour myself a rum-and-coke. Ten Marimbas? Even by adding some other mallet instruments, I could only envision music for lounging on a beach – music with the same little paper umbrellas coming out of it that the drinks have. When he told me he supposed I could make two of the players non-mallet players, I capitulated. And, when I heard his compact disc *Laser Woodcuts*, I realized that my premonitions were wrong in the first place. There is quite a variety within the ‘Mostly Mallet’ type of percussion ensemble, I soon came to understand. Adding the two non-mallet players and separating the groups in specific patterns on stage to allow antiphonal effects was my first decision. But working with the different kinds of mallet instruments and different playing techniques soon followed.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Dan Welcher, Program notes, *Chameleon Music*. 1988. OU Percussion Press, 1988.

## The Commissioning Series

### *Concerto for Drum Set and Percussion Ensemble*

Commissioned in 1977 and premiered at the 1978 Oklahoma Percussion Festival, *Concerto for Drum Set and Percussion Ensemble* served to begin the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series. As mentioned above, the work was composed for the expressed purpose of providing a performance vehicle for Ed Shaughnessy and the OU Percussion Ensemble. Written by John Beck, Professor of Percussion at the Eastman School of Music, the following notes by the composer are included in the original score:

*Concerto for Drum Set and Percussion Ensemble* is written for seven percussionists and drum set soloist. It is written with the idea that the soloist functions as the dominant force in the composition, therein establishing its degree of success on any given performance. The solo part is written so that a professional or amateur drummer could successfully play it. Often the solo texture meshes with that of the ensembles', yet the listener is still aware of the solo line. The composition starts with a brief introduction for ensemble interspersed with drum set cadenzas. Following this, the soloist plays a rhythmic motive that introduces the first section. A metric modulation leads to a slow section which is climaxed by 30 seconds of improvisation for both soloist and ensemble. The timpani states the theme for the last section which includes an extended solo for the drum set. Upon completion of this solo, the soloist plays a pre-determined rhythmic motive and the entire ensemble comes to an exciting conclusion.

In writing a concerto which involves a solo instrument which is the same timbre as many of the instruments used in the accompaniment, the choice of instrumentation is critical. Mallet percussion is used for melody, conga and bongos for rhythm, timpani for bass, and a simulated drum set

(four toms and dance bass drum) for the connecting link between soloist and ensemble.<sup>36</sup>

### *Dirge and Alleluia*

*Dirge and Alleluia* by Jerry Neil Smith was commissioned during the spring of 1978 and completed in October of the same year. The University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble premiered the work on November 9, 1978 in Holmberg Hall Auditorium. It was later performed at the 1979 Music Educators National Conference Southwestern Division Convention, Colorado Springs, CO. *Dirge and Alleluia* is scored for eight performers and remains one of the few unpublished works from the commissioning series.

### *Suite for Keyboard Percussion*

*Suite for Keyboard Percussion* by Westley Slater was commissioned in 1979 and received its premiere at the 1980 Oklahoma Percussion Festival. When composed, Mr. Slater was a composition student at the University of Oklahoma. Scored for four marimba players, the work was published in 1983 as one of the original three publications by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Press.

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<sup>36</sup> John Beck, Program notes, *Concerto for Drum Set and Percussion Ensemble*, 1978. Kendor Music Inc., 1979.

*Portico for Percussion Orchestra*

Commissioned in 1980, *Portico for Percussion Orchestra*, was written by Thomas Gauger, percussionist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Dr. Gipson commented on the initial reaction to the commission by Mr. Gauger:

I called him up and told him what I wanted to do and he, if memory serves me, was very reluctant to accept a commission. He was very busy and didn't have time to do it. I recall that I just kept badgering him and suggesting that 'I don't care when you get it here or when you finish it, just write it whenever you can'. I told him I loved *Gainsborough* and what I was envisioning was a *Gainsborough* type piece for a large percussion orchestra, primarily keyboard. I knew by *Gainsborough* that he knew how to write for the ensemble. However, *Gainsborough* was a fairly thinly scored piece with a sparse keyboard texture. I wanted him to expand the keyboard texture part of that group and see what he could come up with.<sup>37</sup>

The OU Percussion Ensemble premiered *Portico for Percussion Orchestra* on November 3, 1981 in Holmberg Hall Auditorium. The piece is written for ten players performing primarily on keyboard instruments. The instrumentation consists of four marimbas, two vibraphones, bells, timpani, and two multi-percussionists. *Portico* was the first piece in the commissioning series that incorporated and emphasized the nucleus of keyboard instruments within the overall ensemble framework. The work is approximately twelve minutes in length and is published by Tom Gauger. During the

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Gipson, interview by author, tape recording, Norman, Oklahoma, 18 February 2000.

1980s *Portico for Percussion Orchestra* became one of the first internationally recognizable works from the commissioning series. It achieved this prominence through the number of performances received at the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions. The conventions and performing ensembles include: 1983 - Knoxville, Tennessee by West Virginia University, Phil Faini, conductor; 1984 - Ann Arbor, Michigan by Central Michigan University, Robert Hohner, conductor; 1987 - St. Louis, Missouri by the University of Utah, Doug Wolf, conductor; and the 1988 - San Antonio, Texas by Westfield High School, Lamar Burkhalter, conductor.

### *Two Movements for Mallets II*

*Two Movements for Mallets II* by William Steinohrt was commissioned in 1981 and completed in October of 1982. The OU Percussion Ensemble premiered the work on March 3, 1983. It is scored for eight keyboard players performing on four marimbas, two vibraphones, bells, and xylophone. The work was published in 1983 as one of the original three works of the OU Percussion Press. *Two Movements for Mallets II* was performed at the 1985 Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Los Angeles, California by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble, Richard Gipson, conductor.

### *The Manes Scroll*

*The Manes Scroll* by Christopher Deane was commissioned in August 1983 and completed in March 1984. The University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble premiered the piece the following month on April 18, 1984. The work is scored for ten players performing on bells, crotales, chimes, xylophones, vibraphones, and three marimbas. Composer Christopher Deane describes the title of the piece in his performance notes: "The title for this piece was taken from the ancient Roman/Latin term for the collective spirit of the dead. Inscriptions of the term *Dis Manibus sacrum* or D.M. (*Di Manes*) appear on Roman tomb stones throughout Italy."<sup>38</sup> The OU Percussion Press published *The Manes Scroll* piece in 1997 and it was performed at the 1998 Percussive Arts International Convention by the East Carolina University Percussion Ensemble, Mark Ford, conductor.

### *Canzona*

*Canzona* by J. Westley Slater was commissioned in 1984 and completed in 1985. The University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble premiered the work on April 23, 1985. It was written for eight performers with the following instrumentation: bells, xylophone, vibraphone, three marimbas, timpani, tam-tam, triangle, chimes, conga drums, temple

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<sup>38</sup> Christopher Deane, Program notes, *The Manes Scroll*. 1984, OU Percussion Press, 1997.

blocks, bass drum, crotales, suspended cymbal, and field drum. It is a large-scale work of approximately fourteen minutes. The OU Percussion Press published *Canzona* in 1986, and performed it at the 1985 Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Los Angeles, California by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble, Richard Gipson, conductor.

### *Duo Chopinesque*

*Duo Chopinesque* by Michael Hennagin was commissioned in 1984 and completed in 1985. It is the first of two commissions in the Commissioning Series by the late composer and former Professor of Composition at the University of Oklahoma. The OU Percussion Ensemble premiered the work on November 7, 1985. It was written for ten percussionists, running approximately ten minutes in length. The OU Percussion Press published the piece in 1986. *Duo Chopinesque* has been performed three times at the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions. These performances include: 1985 - Los Angeles, California by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble, Richard Gipson, conductor; 1995 - Phoenix, Arizona by Central Washington University Percussion Ensemble, Andrew Spencer, conductor; and the Union High School Percussion Ensemble, Chris Harris, conductor.



### *Diabolic Variations*

*Diabolic Variations op. 25* by Raymond Helble was commissioned in May 1984 and completed in April of 1985. The piece was premiered on November 7, 1985 and published in 1986 by the OU Percussion Press. It was written for ten percussionists performing on an assortment of keyboard instruments and timpani. Keyboard instrumentation includes four marimbas, crotales, bells, vibraphone, chimes, and xylophone. It runs approximately ten minutes in length. *Diabolic Variations* has received more performances at the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions than any piece in the Commissioning Series. The percussion convention performances along with the performing ensembles include the following: 1985 - Los Angeles, California by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble, Richard Gipson, conductor; 1990 - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble, Richard Gipson, conductor; 1991 - Anaheim, California by the University of Utah Percussion Ensemble, Douglas Wolf, conductor; 1992 - New Orleans, Louisiana by the Central Michigan University Percussion Ensemble, Robert Hohner, conductor; and 1998 - Orlando, Florida by Western Michigan University Percussion Ensemble, Judy Moonert conductor.

### *Chameleon Music*

*Chameleon Music* by Dan Welcher was commissioned on November 16, 1987 and completed on April 2, 1988. The University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble premiered the piece on November 8, 1988. Written for ten performers and running approximately ten minutes in length, instrumentation is primarily keyboard percussion instruments for eight players and two multi-percussion players. A large assortment of unique instruments and sounds are required from all of the performers, including cricket calls, glass, ceramic, and bamboo wind chimes, and an automobile spring coil. The piece was published by the OU Percussion Press in 1988. Performances of *Chameleon Music* at the Percussive Arts Society International Conventions include the 1990 convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and the 1994 convention in Atlanta, Georgia, both by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble, Richard Gipson, conductor. *Chameleon Music* has a somewhat unique feature of being the only completely programmatic composition within the commissioning series. Composer Dan Welcher depicts a vivid picture of the music behind a short story by Truman Capote:

More a vignette about a person and a place than a true story, the piece described a visit by Capote to Martinique and the home of a woman there. She lived on the edge of the jungle, and had on her terrace a concert grand piano that had been played by a number of famous visitors. The music she played for Capote was Mozart, and the result of the little recital was the inspiration for my piece. It seems that the little lizards living nearby had become accustomed to her playing, and had grown to be quite discerning in their taste. The composer they responded to most was Mozart – whenever she would play a sonata of his, the chameleons came out in droves from the

jungle. They would sneak tentatively forward at first, then (emboldened by Wolfgang?) come to lie right at her feet while she played. When she finished, she'd stamp her feet on the tiles, and the lizards would "scatter, like the shower of sparks from an exploding star."<sup>39</sup>

### *Twilight Offering Music*

*Twilight Offering Music* by Blake Wilkins is a large-scale single movement work of approximately twenty-seven minutes in length. The piece is written for twelve percussionists, including nine players on keyboard instruments and three players on timpani and percussion. *Twilight Offering Music* received its premiere performance on April 21, 1987 by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble and was published by the OU Percussion Press in 1991. The commission for this piece is somewhat complicated, in part, because the composer had already initiated working elements of the piece for some time and had numerous discussions with Richard Gipson regarding particular sections of the work. After a period of several years, Dr. Gipson recognized a great deal of potential within these individual sections and offered the commission to Mr. Wilkins as a stimulus to complete the entire piece in a timely fashion. Mr. Wilkins concurrently entered this work in the 1988 Percussive Arts Society Composition Competition and was the recipient of the 2<sup>nd</sup> place prize. The composer wrote the following notes about this work:

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<sup>39</sup> Dan Welcher, Program notes, *Chameleon Music*. 1988. OU Percussion Press, 1988.

*Twilight Offering Music* is an impression for percussion ensemble, an evocation that traverses some two million years into our past. It recalls that monumental epoch when humankind first emerged from the depths of the evolutionary chain and looked upon the earth and sky with a mind that for the first time was able to wonder. This music is at once poignant and forceful; at times, contemplative, and at others, ritualistic; constantly bordering between undulating calm and volatile spontaneity. It does not attempt to draw from and expound upon any documented fragment of primitive music. Instead, *Twilight Offering Music* strives to recreate the awe, confusion and wonder that these primordial ancestors must have experienced as they stood below the night sky and looked to the celestial bodies above. Out of fear, or perhaps, simply out of desperation, they would soon have begun to regard them as conscious and superior entities and would have ultimately surrendered to them sacrifices of appeasement – an event that would serve as the very dawn of the religious thought to permeate the ideologies of the human race for the entirety of its existence.<sup>40</sup>

### *The Phantom Dances*

*The Phantom Dances* by Michael Hennagin was commissioned in 1989 and completed in 1990. The piece received its premiere performance on November 1, 1990 by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble and was later performed that month at the 1990 Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Written for twelve performers, eleven primarily on the main keyboard instruments as well as miscellaneous percussion instruments, and one timpanist, the piece runs approximately eleven minutes in length and was published by the OU Percussion

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<sup>40</sup> Blake Wilkins, Program notes, *Twilight Offering Music*. 1987. OU Percussion Press, 1991.

Press in 1990. Michael Hennagin wrote the following notes in the score of *The Phantom*

*Dances:*

*The Phantom Dances* for Percussion Ensemble is based on a series of two phrase segments. The first ends with a 2+3 pattern, the second with a 2+2+3 beat pattern. Each segment is repeated a number of times. It is important to note that the phrase lengths are structured in number of beats, and do not necessarily represent melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic repetitions. As the piece progresses, the phrases become shorter in length, and the number of repetitions of the two phrase segments are lessened. However, the ending of the phrases remain the same – a kind of incessant ‘time-keeping.’ This entire formal design is superimposed ‘backwards’ simultaneously with the ‘forward’ version. It is placed in a 4/4 metrical setting only for convenience; thus, the accents clarify the formal rhythmic structures. Rehearsal marks indicate the sections of the ‘forward’ version. The effect should be that of a tightening and diminishing (not in volume of activity, but in length) aural experience, and emerging and increasing visual experience as the phantom ‘rises, and dances’ with the performer while the ‘play goes on’ – finally in silence.<sup>41</sup>

*Crown of Thorns*

*Crown of Thorns* by David Maslanka was commissioned in January 1982 and completed in 1991. The unusual time length between the commission and completion date reflects not only the composer’s busy schedule of writing other works but the commitment and understanding Dr. Gipson had in the entire commissioning process. As early as March 1983, David Maslanka wrote Richard Gipson asking that he pass the commission to someone else, as his time continued to be directed towards major works

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Hennagin, Program notes, *The Phantom Dances*. 1990. OU Percussion Press, 1990.

for band and orchestra. Correspondence between Gipson and Maslanka continued for the next five to six years, indicating there was optimism for a piece but no completion time projected. Dr. Gipson reflected on this process:

He was not inspired to complete the work as late as 1990. But he came to the PASIC in Philadelphia in 1990 and heard our concert. He came up after the concert and introduced himself and said, "After hearing your performance, I'm going to finish your piece." That's what ended up being the catalyst for getting him to finish. I think he had started a long, long time ago, in 1982 or whenever the commission was actually offered. He just got very busy. The commission fee was pitifully low so we increased it. I knew that if we ever got a piece out of him it would be worth it. So, what's the downside of just hanging on?<sup>42</sup>

The long-awaited premiere performance of *Crown of Thorns* came on November 14, 1991 by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble. The work was written for eight keyboard players performing on bells, vibraphones, and marimbas. It was published by the OU Percussion Press in 1991 and runs approximately fourteen minutes in length. *Crown of Thorns* has been performed twice at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention, the first performance in 1994 at the convention in Atlanta, Georgia by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble, Richard Gipson, conductor, and the second performance at the 1999 convention in Columbus, Ohio by Central Michigan University Percussion Ensemble, Robert Hohner, conductor. This work received immediate acceptance within the percussion ensemble community and has

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<sup>42</sup> Richard Gipson, interview by author, tape recording, Norman, Oklahoma, 18 February 2000.

been performed and recorded by numerous university, high school, and professional percussion ensembles throughout the country. David Maslanka wrote the following notes about his piece:

The title *Crown of Thorns* has been with me for many years, in fact since shortly after you asked me to write the piece and I began thinking on it. The idea came first from a flowing plant called "Crown of Thorns." It is a thorny desert plant that can grow long snaking branches. It has beautiful red flowers and dark green small leaves. I saw it first at the New York Botanical Gardens, and then we had a nice one at home. The way the branches spread and intertwined suggested a musical structure to me. The other obvious reference is to Christ, the mocking of the Crown of Thorns being a part of his absolute degradation before his death. Well, the music is neither mocking; nor does it share in the spirit of lament at the death of Christ. I have come to perceive Christ as a figure of life and continuous growth--the rampant and ever renewing life of the earth, and ongoing spiritual evolution. The crucifixion and the crown of thorns are symbols of the loving sacrifice and service that make new life possible. These are symbols of transition. In my own imaginings as I wrote this piece, I saw Christ removing the crown of thorns and flinging it like a frisbee! An act of great joy and liberation. Another complimentary element enters in with the vision description given in the score:

A darkening sky  
Seven stars are visible:  
The seven-starred halo  
The golden light  
The hands of blessing

This is an image that came to me as I sat in the Philadelphia Airport following the PASIC convention. The halo now seems to me an analogue for the Crown of Thorns = its spiritual equivalent. The golden light and the hands of blessing are symbols of the renewing power of life. The forgiving is

a rather terse condensation of thoughts and perceptions arising out of the very powerful symbols. This thinking is the spiritual backdrop of the music.<sup>43</sup>

### Percuss-Sonata

*Percuss-Sonata* by David Ott was commissioned in late 1991. The piece was completed in February 1992 and premiered on April 24, 1995 with the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble II, Blake Wilkins, conductor. The work is written for ten players, running approximately ten minutes in length. Standard instrumentation is utilized, with half of the ten players performing on keyboard instruments. Some singing is incorporated throughout the work. The publication of *Percuss-Sonata* is still pending.

### Compendium

Commissioned in 1993 and completed in September of 1994, *Compendium* by Blake Wilkins was premiered on November 18, 1994 during the Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Atlanta, Georgia by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble, Richard Gipson, conductor. The piece is written for eleven players and runs approximately twelve minutes in length. Instrumentation is quite extensive for each performer, with the keyboard instruments remaining a central component within each

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<sup>43</sup> David Maslanka, Program notes, *Crown of Thorns*. 1991. OU Percussion Press, 1991.



player's setup. *Compendium* was published by the OU Percussion Press in 1995. Blake Wilkins wrote the following program notes for the 1994 PASIC performance:

*Compendium*, written between June and September of 1994, is the result of a commission granted by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble. I began the project with a broad outline of the abstract principles I intended the work to embody, which were reflected by the original title, *17 Essays on Parametric Transmogrification Presented Coetaneously and in a Single Movement*. My central objective was to isolate the normally integrated parameters of music – rhythm, melody, harmony, texture, timbre and so forth – and submit them to various closed-ended transformational processes. The seventeen resulting processes, or 'essays,' would be of different lengths, starting and ending at different points in the music – some would last for less than a minute, others would extend through the entirety of the piece. They would overlap and intersect, yet always remain self-contained. It soon became apparent, however, that the scope of this work would be too ambitious given the time requirements stipulated in the commission. Consequently, I decided to craft the existing music into a separate concert piece. Thus, *Compendium* is exactly that – a summary of the principles designed for the *17 Essays*. *Compendium* focuses mostly on those processes dealing with rhythmic and melodic transformations.<sup>44</sup>

### *Circadian Rhythms*

Commissioned in June of 1996 and completed in November of the same year, *Circadian Rhythms* by Carolyn Bremer, Professor of Composition at the University of Oklahoma, received its premiere performance on March 28, 1998 during the Oklahoma Percussion Festival in Ponca City, Oklahoma. The work is scored for ten players, with

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<sup>44</sup> Blake Wilkins, Program notes, *Compendium*. 1994. OU Percussion Press, 1995.

seven keyboard performers and three percussionists. The OU Percussion Press published *Circadian Rhythms* in 1999.

***The Palace of Nine Perfections***

Commissioned in July of 1996, *the Palace of Nine Perfections* by Eric Ewazen was completed in stages between January and December of 1999. The University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble premiered the first movement on February 27 during the 1999 Oklahoma Percussion Festival, hosted by Richard Gipson and the University of Oklahoma School of Music. The ensemble premiered the entire work on April 11, 2000 during its spring percussion ensemble concert. The piece is another large-scale composition of three movements, running approximately twenty-eight minutes in length. It is scored for ten performers with an emphasis on the keyboard instruments, and will be published by the OU Percussion Press.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE OU PERCUSSION PRESS**

**The OU Percussion Press (OUPP) has established itself as a vital link in the success of the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series through its publication and distribution of works from the Series. Furthermore, the OU Percussion Press has become a major publishing resource not only for the works commissioned in the series, but also for works representing many other styles of percussion ensemble music, ranging from arrangements of Christmas and classical works to the ragtime novelty music of Harry Breuer. The OU Percussion Press represents a unique entity as a non-profit university publishing company established and funded through a seed money research grant from the OU Associates through the University of Oklahoma Research Council. Richard Gipson initiated the original grant proposal and has served as the Editor of the OU Percussion Press since its inception.**

**As early as the first commissioned work, Richard Gipson appreciated the critical need for distribution of the works generated through commissioning projects. One of the difficult problems he and other percussion professors encountered with other new music written for the percussion ensemble was its lack of availability. Many new works**

performed either at percussion conventions or listed in the program section of the major percussion journal were not published by major music publishers and were not otherwise readily available. Major percussion publishers were unlikely to publish a difficult work for large percussion ensemble when the potential purchasing pool was quite limited.

According to Richard Gipson:

In the late 70s and early 80s, there wasn't much music being published for percussion ensemble. It was very difficult to find quality works. Not only were quality works not being published at all, but there was little being published for large groups at any quality level. But that was somewhat understandable. The finances of the situation were such that why should a publisher publish a large percussion ensemble piece? It wasn't going to get played by that many people, so there were not any financial incentives for the publishers. Unfortunately, that's a vicious circle. Like it or not, some composers don't like to write pieces that won't get played or published. There is some motivation financially for writing certain kinds of pieces. We had this vicious circle of composers not writing for percussion ensemble, publisher's not publishing music for percussion ensemble, and therefore you couldn't find anything to play. It was a distressing situation all the way around. I was aware that we weren't the only ensemble in the country that was having pieces written. I knew that from hearing works at PASIC or getting a program or seeing copies of programs in journals, etc. But those pieces weren't getting published. Therefore finding them and getting access to them was next to impossible.<sup>45</sup>

A concept began to develop regarding the publishing of the commissioning series pieces. This concept stemmed from Gipson's early experiences performing music published by the University of Miami Music Press. This company published several

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<sup>45</sup> Richard Gipson, interview by author, tape recording, Norman, Oklahoma, 18 February 2000.

works for percussion ensemble during the early 1970s, most notably *Cataphonics* (1970) by Lawrence Weiner and *African Welcome Piece* (1971) by Michael Udow. This early encounter with a university press initiated a concept that would eventually lead to the establishment of the OU Percussion Press.

So what I had in the back of my mind was perhaps there was some way we could publish these commissioned works here at the University and use University resources to help support the publication of them so that we wouldn't be as worried about the bottom line as would a commercial publisher. The notion of a university music publication first came to my attention with the University of Miami Music Press. I didn't know what the University of Miami Music Press was, I just knew that I had played music that was published by them. It was quality music and I was glad that they did it. So I believed that if I could get some seed money to actually produce the pieces and help apprise the field of their availability, we could make enough money to keep ourselves in business. So, that was the genesis of the project and the substance of the proposal.<sup>46</sup>

### The Research Grant Proposal

In the spring of 1983, Richard Gipson submitted an application/proposal to the OU Research Council to fund a Percussion Ensemble Publishing Project with special funding from the OU Associates. The proposal was first submitted to Dr. Allan Ross, Director of the School of Music. It was then forwarded from the School of Music to Dr. Nat Eek, Dean of the College of Fine Arts. The responsibility of the Dean was to gather the proposals submitted from the various schools within the college (Music, Art, Drama,

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Gipson, interview by author, tape recording, Norman, Oklahoma, 18 February 2000.

and Dance) and rank the proposals in order of merit. A short letter written in support of the top ranking proposal was to be included along with his ranking. Fortunately, the proposal submitted by Dr. Gipson was ranked as the top proposal that year for the College of Fine Arts and received a strong endorsement from both the School of Music Director, Allan Ross, and the Dean of the College of Fine Arts, Nat Eek.

On July 6, 1983, Richard Gipson received a letter from Kenneth Hoving, Vice Provost for Research Administration, indicating that the faculty subcommittee of the Research Council had completed its initial review of all the proposals submitted for funding from the Associates Research/Creative Activity Funds. Final approval for the proposal came in a letter to Richard Gipson dated September 1, 1983 from William S. Banowsky, President of the University of Oklahoma. Banowsky stated in his letter that \$200,000 in Associates Funds had been set aside to support the research efforts of the University of Oklahoma Faculty. He was pleased to approve the request from Richard Gipson in the amount of \$10,680 to support the publishing of three works commissioned by the OU Percussion Ensemble. The funded amount was then transferred into an account with Ron Burton, Executive Director of the University of Oklahoma Foundation, to be made available as needed to cover the expenses generated from publishing the three commissioned works outlined within the proposal.

The proposal submitted by Richard Gipson contained a short project statement, a two-page narrative, and a single-page budget outlining the projected expenses of

**publishing three works with a production run of 400 copies each. In his project statement, Dr. Gipson outlined the importance of not only the creation of art, but also the subsequent performance of that art to a significant body of people, for it to have the appropriate impact for which it was created. The narrative portion of the proposal contained a short synopsis of the commissioning series and listed the six works that had been commissioned to date, including the recent 1982 commission awarded to David Maslanka. Also addressed in the narrative was the difficulty of having publishers publish works written for a medium such as the percussion ensemble, where the market is small and not profit driven. The final portion of the narrative consisted of outlining the various benefits that would be derived from publishing the works of the Commissioning Series. These benefits included: 1) the ability to stimulate and attract a wider selection of composers if they know there was an established publishing series attached to the commissioning project; 2) the desirability of having these works made available to percussionists and ensembles across the country; and 3) the prestige the publishing series combined with the commissioning series would bring to the School of Music along with the University of Oklahoma.**

**A brief description of the Percussion Ensemble Publishing Project as submitted by Richard Gipson to the OU Associates is included below:**

**For the past five years, one of the University's fine musical organizations, the OU Percussion Ensemble, has benefited from a commissioning series funded by the School of Music. By commissioning**

selected composers to write for the Ensemble, the University of Oklahoma has contributed significantly to the literature for this unique performing ensemble. Through Associate's funds, the OU Percussion Press will be established to publish the works commissioned by the Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series. In this way the creative results of the commissioning series may be disseminated throughout the country, enabling other percussion ensembles and musicians to perform and appreciate these outstanding works. Through this project, a completion will be brought to the process of musical composition which will further enhance the prestige and position of the University of Oklahoma in the field of Percussion.<sup>47</sup>

### The Proposal Budget

The original budget of the proposal outlined the cost of having three commissioned works published with 400 printed copies each work. The pieces listed in the proposal were: *Suite for Keyboard Percussion* by Westley Slater; *Portico for Percussion Orchestra* by Thomas Gauger; and *Two Movements for Mallets II* by William Steinohrt. The budget was divided into two categories: production costs of \$9,180 and marketing costs of \$1,500, for a total of \$10,680. The area of production costs was further divided into four sub-categories: engraving at \$2,580; camera and paste at \$600; printing at \$4,500; and cover and binding at \$1,500. Projected sales and royalty costs were also included in the overall budget, indicating the potential revenue generated from sales of the three published works minus the costs of royalty payments and production.

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<sup>47</sup> Richard Gipson, Research Grant Proposal to OU Associates, Norman, Oklahoma, July 1983.



Richard Gipson had estimated the proposal budget for the engraving of three works at \$2,580. In identifying various companies to perform such work, he received a recommendation from a colleague, Dr. Eugene Enrico, concerning the Seoul Music Company in Seoul, South Korea. Dr. Gipson made an initial contact in July of 1983, with the actual order for the work processed on September 12, 1983. The three compositions included *Two Movements for Mallets II*, *Suite for Keyboard Percussion*, and *Dyptich No. 2*, by Gordon Stout.

Between the time the grant proposal was submitted (early 1983) and the time it was officially approved (Sept. 1983), Thomas Gauger opted to publish *Portico for Percussion Orchestra* through his own company. This decision presented the opportunity for another commissioned piece to be published as part of the initial run, but unfortunately, the David Maslanka commission from 1982 had yet to be completed. However, another option for publication presented itself in the form of *Dyptich No. 2* for solo marimba and percussion ensemble composed by Gordon Stout in 1979. Mr. Stout performed this unpublished work with the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble during the 1981 Oklahoma Percussion Festival. When the publishing of *Portico* fell through, Dr. Gipson approached Gordon Stout about including this relatively new and quality piece as part of the percussion ensemble series published through the OU Percussion Press. This arrangement was agreeable with both parties and *Dyptich No. 2* was then included among the original three works.

The actual cost of engraving the three pieces indicated by the invoice dated December 16, 1983 came to \$1,680. This amount was \$900 less than that projected in the preliminary budget. Based on this analysis, Dr. Gipson decided to include three more works as part of the original publication of the Percussion Press. An additional letter was sent to Seoul Music Company on February 25, 1984 requesting an order for three additional pieces. The pieces included *Lasciatemi Morire* by Claudio Monteverdi, *Adagio* from Symphony No. 3 by Camille Saint-Saens, both arranged by Richard Gipson, and *Vocalise* for Flute and Marimba by Wilbur Chenowith, arranged by Christine Smith and Richard Gipson. According to the invoice statement from Seoul Music Company dated April 6, 1984, the additional engraving cost for these three works was \$298.00. Dr. Gipson commented on the original six works:

When I received the grant and contacted Gauger, he had just decided to publish his own piece. When I got to the actual point of finding out exactly what things cost rather than speculative budgeting of them, I discovered that I could afford to publish six pieces, set up the press, do the printing, get the graphics together, develop a logo, buy mailing lists, prepare advertisements, and other things like that. I could actually do all of that and publish six pieces at the same time. So, we ended up publishing the Steinhart, the Slater, Stout, then two of my arrangements (the Monteverdi and the Saint-Saens), and the flute/marimba piece. Those last three were all simple little pieces, but I was already starting to think at that point about generating some cash. That's why those were in there. Those are pieces I feel very strongly about that could and would get published by another publisher. But at the time, there were only two or three places that would look at a piece for eight marimba players. I felt however, that there was a niche and a need for it, and the fact that we could put it in our catalogue and I do the work, would just be flat-out a moneymaker for us and help keep the

whole operation afloat. That's why we went ahead and got those pieces done as well.<sup>48</sup>

The actual printing cost of \$5,000 for 1,500 pieces through the University Printing Services was slightly higher than projected on the proposal budget of \$4,500. This would have been the result of extra copies needed for the three additional pieces, which had now been included with the OU Percussion Press series.

The first three published works were completed in late March of 1984. Letters announcing the completion of these works were sent by Dr. Gipson during the first week of April to the respective composers, various music distributors, and other key university personnel associated with the Percussion Press project. The other three works were completed during the summer of 1984.

### The OU Percussion Press Since 1985

Following the publication of the first six works for the Percussion Press, the subsequent pieces of the Percussion Press have all been published internally by Richard Gipson through the advent of desktop publishing technology. After the initial buying cycle of the first six works, the potential buyers of those pieces had been saturated to the point that the amount of income generated by future sales would not support the cost of

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<sup>48</sup> Richard Gipson, interview by author, tape recording, Norman, Oklahoma, 18 February 2000.

the next publication run. Dr. Gipson was looking at alternative printing methods as the cost of professionally engraved music was continually increasing. During this same period of time, the Macintosh personal computer emerged along with the introduction of the Apple LaserWriter printer. With these two components in place together with professional quality music typesetting software, it was now possible to produce a low cost, high quality desktop publishing document. Richard Gipson realized this potential and its application to the OU Percussion Press publications and quickly submitted a second research grant proposal to purchase an Apple LaserWriter printer. This second proposal was submitted to Kenneth Hoving in the amount of \$5,000. Richard Gipson recalls this proposal:

I made a proposal to Ken Hoving, who at that time was the Vice-Provost for Research, to buy a LaserWriter for the percussion press. The cost was \$5000. The proposal was short and sweet. It said that the press had been doing fine but while founded with Associate's startup funds, we wanted very much to keep it going, but were really not generating enough money to keep it going with conventional printing, engraving, and off-set printing costs. I had determined that I could do the engraving on the computer and with the LaserWriter, could produce camera-ready copy, thereby eliminating the cost of engraving. So, he agreed and funded the purchase of the LaserWriter. The next seven pieces were done on the LaserWriter with *Professional Composer* software.<sup>49</sup>

The next series of pieces published in this format included three new commissioning series works: *Canzona*, *Diabolic Variations*, and *Duo Chopinesque*, along

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<sup>49</sup> Richard Gipson, interview by author, tape recording, Norman, Oklahoma, 18 February 2000.

with four rags by Harry Breuer arranged by Richard Gipson: *Back Talk*, *Blue Tid Bit*, *Four Stick Joe*, and *Minor Moment*. All of these works were produced on a Macintosh computer using *Professional Composer* software and printed on the original Apple LaserWriter printer. The printing of the photo-ready score and parts was completed by a local print shop. As technology has improved, along with the introduction of music software programs such as *Finale* and the music font *Sonata*, the process of producing professional quality music has become very cost efficient. Consequently, all the pieces in the Percussion Press catalog are now produced in this manner.

### The OU Percussion Press and Plymouth Music

In October of 1990, the OU Percussion Press entered an agreement with Plymouth Music Co., Inc., with the intent of Plymouth acting as the sole and exclusive selling agent and distributor for the OU Percussion Press catalog. Prior to this agreement, Dr. Gipson was largely responsible for every aspect of the press, including the entire level of the post-creative process. In addition to commissioning and premiering the works, this post-creative process included all publishing production work on each piece as well as all marketing, selling, inventory, and distributing aspects. As the catalog size increased in terms of both the commissioned and non-commissioned works, this entirely internal process was quickly outpacing the limited personnel resources. For this reason, Dr. Gipson initiated contacts with Bernie Fisher and Plymouth Music, a music company that

specialized in the selling and distribution of music for percussion publications.

Companies already in association with Plymouth Music included Music for Percussion, Lang Percussion, University of Miami Publications, and Meredith Music Publications.

On October 1, 1990, Plymouth Music and the OU Percussion Press signed a contract establishing a partnership that would last for approximately five years. During this period, the OU Percussion Press would continue with the production and development aspect of new works and Plymouth Music would market, sell, and distribute all the music. In 1995, after a period of mixed results with this collaboration, Dr. Gipson let the original agreement terminate and returned the marketing and distributing process back to the University of Oklahoma.

In addition to publishing the commissioning series works, the OU Percussion Press also has published several non-commissioned pieces and other music related offerings. As previously stated, three non-commissioned works were included in the original six published pieces in 1984. Subsequent works added to the catalog and arranged by Dr. Gipson include four xylophone solos by Harry Breuer with marimba band accompaniment, and *Field of the Dead* by Serge Prokofiev and *Melisande's Death* by Jean Sibelius, both marimba orchestra arrangements. Other recent additions to the Percussion Press catalog include MIDI-sequenced piano accompaniments and a complete Christmas percussion ensemble series consisting of thirteen special arrangements for the high school and collegiate ensemble.

The OU Percussion Press also serves as the distributor of three recordings generated by the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble. These recordings include: *Laser Woodcuts*, released in 1986 by Second Hearing, LTD. Of New York; *Christmas Bells, Mallets and Drums*, released in 1991 by Integra Music of Nashville; and *Twilight Offering Music*, released in 1995 by Albany Records of Albany, New York. *Laser Woodcuts* and *Twilight Offering Music* both contain selections from the Commissioning Series. The production and availability of these selected works in a recorded format is substantial and beneficial to the commissioned composers, future commissioned composers, and the medium itself.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The percussion ensemble genre has progressed into the twenty-first century as one of only a handful of the new performance mediums established within the past fifty years. The increased quality of its new literature, advanced performance techniques, improved instruments and instrumentation, and the increasing number of collegiate, high school, and professional musicians now participating in percussion ensembles all have contributed to its overall rapid growth. The quality of new literature solicited expressly for this genre during the last twenty years has proven to be a driving force behind the percussion ensemble's increased popularity. While the status and importance of the ensemble has changed dramatically throughout the past fifty years, of equal significance has been the developmental and transformation of the music composed for this medium during the past twenty years. The level of music and musicianship now required for performance of many newer works compares favorably with that of many other chamber ensembles, as well as large ensembles. A significant contributor to this type of high quality literature for percussion ensemble has been the establishment of the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series.



The University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble Commissioning Series and the OU Percussion Press both have served to foster the development and advancement of percussion ensemble literature through the commissioning and publishing of new percussion ensemble works. The commissioning series began with a single commissioned work from John Beck in 1978, specifically commissioned for the 1978 Oklahoma Percussion Festival featuring Ed Shaughnessy with the University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble. Premiered in February 1978 at the Oklahoma Percussion Festival, the success of *Concerto for Drum Set and Percussion Ensemble*, coupled with a vision and dream that Richard Gipson had in fostering substantial literature for this genre, proved a catalyst for a second commission the following year from Dr. Jerry Neil Smith. Subsequent commissions awarded to successful composers have transpired almost annually, with each work contributing to the overall development of the commissioning series, as well as the overall substance and quality of repertoire for this genre. To date, seventeen works have been commissioned and premiered, each uniquely individual and each offering an extensive potential for musical expression.

One emphasis area common to all the commissioned works in the series is the importance placed on the keyboard instruments of the percussion ensemble. This is a direct reflection of the concept and philosophy that Richard Gipson has always held regarding the musical integrity and possibilities of this medium through the use of keyboard instruments.

The OU Percussion Press, established in 1984, functions principally as a vehicle to disseminate the music of the commissioning series. The OU Percussion Press was established and funded through a grant from the University of Oklahoma Associates through the University of Oklahoma Research Council. Richard Gipson wrote and submitted the grant proposal in the spring of 1983, with approval and subsequent funding for this proposal the following summer. The proposal outlined the importance of the already established current commissioning series and the future benefits obtained through the publication of these works. The proposal requested start-up funds of \$10,680 to cover the production and marketing costs of three commissioned works.

The first three published works of the OU Percussion Press included *Suite for Keyboard Percussion* by J. Westley Slater, *Two Movements for Mallets II* by William Steinhart, and *Dyptich No. 2* by Gordon Stout. Additional pieces published with this initial grant money included *Lasciatemi Morire*, *Adagio* from Symphony No. 3, and *Vocalise* for Flute and Marimba. The OU Percussion Press currently publishes fourteen commissioned works along with five marimba orchestra arrangements, four Harry Breuer xylophone solos with marimba band arrangements, thirteen arrangements of traditional and favorite Christmas tunes, and nine MIDI-sequenced piano accompaniments of the most significant works within the percussion repertoire.

The Percussive Arts Society International Conventions (PASIC), held annually in various venues across the United States, have significantly impacted the development of

new percussion ensemble literature. Through the process of selecting outstanding high school and collegiate percussion ensembles each year to perform at the convention, many invited schools choose to commission or premiere new works during their performances. Many of these new commissioned and/or premiered works performed at PASIC have become standard performance pieces in the repertoire. OU Commissioning Series works have received multiple performances at PASIC. Between 1978 and 1999, eleven University of Oklahoma commissioned works were performed a total of twenty-one times at thirteen different Percussive Arts Society International Conventions. Several pieces have been performed four or more times, including *Portico for Percussion Orchestra* by Thomas Gauger. Commissioned in 1981, *Portico* has received four PASIC performances by collegiate and high school ensembles. *Diabolic Variations* by Raymond Helble has been performed an unprecedented five times at PASIC conventions, and while these performances suggest a significant amount of critical acclaim, they also serve to inspire, educate, promote, and in general, stimulate the further development of new quality works.

It is impossible to objectively measure or gauge the impact of the Commissioning Series or the OU Percussion Press on the development of the percussion ensemble genre. However, by virtue of its unique position in the field, its substantial contributions over a twenty-plus year period, and its service to the field, it can be persuasively argued that no other single entity has made as significant an impact on the development of the

percussion ensemble repertoire. Great credit for these developments and advancements is due to Richard Gipson and the University of Oklahoma. Through the initial vision, efforts, and sustained leadership of Richard Gipson, and the financial support and resources from the University of Oklahoma, the field of quality percussion ensemble literature has grown significantly, as has its perceptions and parameters.

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## APPENDIX 1

Dr. Richard Gipson, Interview

February 18, 2000

Drege: What was your first initial process in deciding to commission a piece for percussion ensemble?

Gipson: The first piece was the John Beck work for drum set. The reason for that is we were having Ed Shaugnessy here for the percussion festival in 1978. There was no music for Ed to play with our percussion ensemble. So, that's when I first thought about John Beck because he was writing some things at the time and I had a high opinion of his other work. So I called and visited with him about his interest in writing us a piece. At first he said no but he called me back a little later and said that he had thought about it some more and agreed to write it.

Drege: Did the fact that Ed Shaugnessy would be the one to premiere it have any impact on the commission?

Gipson: It sure did, because I told him that's why I wanted it because I wanted a really nice piece for solo drumset and percussion ensemble that Ed could play when he got here.

Drege: Of course John Beck was well aware of Ed's abilities at that time and knew what he could do. Did he know anything about the ensemble here as to what level it should be and did you give him any kind of direction on that?

Gipson: Not that I recall. I mean I told him to write a piece that he would be happy to play at Eastman. So there weren't any restrictions. I'm sure that when I talked with John we discussed the fact that it should be probably ten players or eight players or however many are in that piece, and generally what the instrumentation was to be. It really wasn't until 1981 that we got any instruments here to speak of. That's one of the reasons that some of the earlier pieces were not very rich instrumentally. It is also one of the pieces that got me to thinking that as we developed this commissioning series and got into the more serious repertoire, that I really wanted to publish the piece because I knew it would make money and perhaps provide the cash flow for keeping the more serious works going; but we lost that one to Kendor. But that was so early that the idea really hadn't begun to gel that much anyway.

Drege: In some of your judgmental factors in selecting the other composers, what do you feel has been the most important thing in your mind that you used as criteria for those potential composers?

Gipson: It's undoubtedly a combination of factors. I can say that based on experiences I've had with this, the ideal work for us is likely to come from composers who manifest a number of things. One, they obviously have wonderful compositional talent. Two, they either know already how to write for percussion or they're curious enough about how to write for it that they'll figure it out and use the piece as a learning process. And three, probably this is very much a bias on my part, I prefer tonal music. I think personally that there is much left to be done in tonal music. My personal bias runs that way. The composers I contact tend to write tonal music; if they didn't, I probably wouldn't be drawn to their work anyway. It's a self-perpetuating cycle, which I'm not at all ashamed of. Occasionally I get surprised with like Chris Deane. I had no indication whatsoever that *The Manes Scroll* would be a serial work. It wasn't in my mindset, but I don't prescribe when I talk to a composer anything about style or any kind of prohibition against atonality or anything like that.

Drege: You do in most of your letters actually say something to the effect that the commission needs to be a mainly mallet piece.

Gipson: Yes, the whole idea behind it stems from my philosophy of what a percussion ensemble is and what we're really trying to accomplish with the percussion ensemble. I believe very strongly that the percussion family, if written for correctly and played correctly, can be every bit as impressive and expressive a musical entity as any other. A composition doesn't have to rely on just one or two elements of its portfolio, namely the rhythmic element or the color element, to be musical. We can play beautifully tonal works and play them really, really well. The problem is we just didn't have very many of those pieces. We still don't have very many of those pieces. So finding composers who will explore that with us is what this has been all about. I haven't been disappointed. We've had within that range, a huge range of styles. The Hennagin work, like *Duo Chopinesque* is obviously tonal but has the another side of it which isn't. So, we've been stretched in both directions. *The Manes Scroll* is completely serial. But there are other things. David Maslanka with his piece can't get any more tonal. Blake Wilkins' pieces, while they're tonal, are not neo-romantic. So it's been really neat going through all this. And the newest piece, which we have yet to play.... have you heard any of that?

Drege: Just the first movement.

Gipson: Well, it's just... it's wonderful.

Drege: It looks like an orchestra piece. A complete symphony almost.

Gipson: It's just a gorgeous piece. It's really, really tonal. But there's so much potential in there for expression, making music within the tonal framework, ... I'm just really excited about that piece. I can't wait to play it, it's just terrific. But, at the heart of that, to get back to your question, is the fact that we rely primarily on keyboard instruments to get that done.

Drege: How many of the composers that you've asked have you sent either recordings or previous commissioned works to give them an idea of what you had previously done?

Gipson: I started doing that really with Dan Welcher, and most since. He was probably the first one because it would've been after we recorded the first CD. So, it would've been '86. I finally had something to send out. I don't recall sending out anything earlier. Helble certainly didn't get anything, Steinhilber didn't, and Slater didn't need anything. So it was Dan Welcher. And everybody subsequent to that I've sent things to. I'm sure you will have the Dan Welcher quote in your paper. That kind of says it all right there. That's a great quote.

Drege: Do you think that it has been helpful for them to have and hear or look at some scores?

Gipson: Yes, I do. I think there are recognizable parts in chameleon music to my ear that were obviously suggested by *Duo Chopinesque* so, Welcher obviously listened and studied the scores. You know I've a tremendous amount of respect for Dan Welcher because he really worked at getting sounds out of and learning to write for that particular ensemble. While I'm sure he knew how to write for percussion before that, he really learned how to write for percussion ensemble in writing that piece. It has helped, and in some cases you would have to ask the composers if they listened to them.

Drege: Could you provide some of your thoughts on your commission with Tom Gauger. How did that come about?

Gipson: I called him up and told him what I wanted to do and he, if memory serves me, was very reluctant to accept a commission. He was very busy and didn't have time to do it. I recall that I just kept badgering him and suggested that 'I don't care when you get it

here or when you finish it, just write it whenever you can'. I told him I loved *Gainsborough* and what I was envisioning was a *Gainsborough* type piece for a large percussion orchestra, primarily keyboard. I knew by *Gainsborough* that he knew how to write for the ensemble. However, *Gainsborough* was a fairly thinly scored piece with a sparse keyboard texture. I wanted him to expand the keyboard texture part of that group and see what he could come up with.

Drege: At the time that *Portico* came out was there anything else out in the percussion ensemble literature like it?

Gipson: Not that I know of. We didn't really have very much. We had maybe four pieces for mostly mallet ensembles and that's a guess. One was the Ronald Lopresti work, *Prelude and Dance*, then there was the Kenneth Snoeck piece. You might check the dates on those. And then the *Two Movements for Mallets I* by Steinhilber. Those were about the only mallet ensemble pieces that there were, which was again what I was trying to focus on. So, to my knowledge there wasn't anything by *Portico* at all. Again, I couldn't be happier with a piece than I was with that one when it came in. I knew we had a real winner on our hands with that piece.

Drege: When the pieces have come in, have you felt compelled at all to talk with the composers about any kind of editing you might do or re-writing or giving them back saying could you re-work this section?

Gipson: Well, I've never sent anything back and said will you re-work it, but with a number of the pieces, as we developed them for performance, a number of things became clear that could be done differently or more expediently or more idiomatically for the instruments. I've always suggested those to the composers and none of them have ever hesitated to incorporate those changes. Techniques they might've written in the original often were changed, like Michael Hennagin wrote a technique in *Duo Chopinesque* which if I remember right, called for whistling at some point. He changed that after our discussion.

Drege: I'd like to move on to the Percussion Press. If you could tell me how that became established and the proposal you wrote for that.

Gipson: Conceptually, it's very simple. In the late 70s and early 80s, there wasn't much music being published for percussion ensemble. It was very difficult to find quality works. Not only were quality works not being published at all, but there was little being published for large groups at any quality level. But that was somewhat understandable.

The finances of the situation were such that why should a publisher publish a large percussion ensemble piece? It wasn't going to get played by that many people, so there were not any financial incentives for the publishers. Unfortunately, that's a vicious circle. Like it or not, some composers don't like to write pieces that won't get played or published. There is some motivation financially for writing certain kinds of pieces. We had this vicious circle of composers not writing for percussion ensemble, publisher's not publishing music for percussion ensemble, and therefore you couldn't find anything to play. It was a distressing situation all the way around. I was aware that we weren't the only ensemble in the country that was having pieces written. I knew that from hearing works at PASIC or getting a program or seeing copies of programs in journals, etc. But those pieces weren't getting published. Therefore finding them and getting access to them was next to impossible. So what I had in the back of my mind was perhaps there was some way we could publish these commissioned works here at the University and use University resources to help support the publication of them so that we wouldn't be as worried about the bottom line as would a commercial publisher. The notion of a university music publication first came to my attention with the University of Miami Music Press. I didn't know what the University of Miami Music Press was, I just knew that I had played music that was published by them. It was quality music and I was glad that they did it. So I believed that if I could get some seed money to actually produce the pieces and help apprise the field of their availability, we could make enough money to keep ourselves in business. So, that was the genesis of the project and the substance of the proposal. Tangentially, it was great because a composer's is more likely to write for you if he knows you are going to publish. He knows that if you sell some pieces, he's going to get some royalties.

Drege: That was a question I was going to ask you. Have you had composers turn you down prior to the percussion press that may have not or has that been certainly part of the enticement to current composers is that the pieces very may likely be published with the percussion press?

Gipson: Well, it's hard to say. I can honestly say that we've never had anybody turn us down. But I have to believe that it is an enticement, especially now that the Percussion Press has grown and it has become more established. People are aware that it is an entity that can place music in people's hands. We also pay twice the going rate for royalties. So one of our composer's makes 20% of the retail selling cost of the work. So, I think the fact that they know it's going to be published, it's going to be disseminated, it's going to get played, and it may even get recorded. I'm sure it doesn't hurt. We had success before all those things happened as well, so it's just more of an incentive I think.

Drege: So, the original grant that came through, which was around \$10,000 or maybe even \$10,600 covered the publications of three pieces?

Gipson: Well, it actually ended up publishing six pieces. You have the grant there, but I think the original intent was to publish three pieces. When I received the grant and contacted Gauger, he had just decided to publish his own piece. When I got to the actual point of finding out exactly what things cost rather than speculative budgeting of them, I discovered that I could afford to publish six pieces, set up the press, do the printing, get the graphics together, develop a logo, buy mailing lists, prepare advertisements, and other things like that. I could actually do all of that and publish six pieces at the same time. So, we ended up publishing the Steinhilber, the Slater, Stout, then two of my arrangements, the Monteverdi and the Saint-Saens, and the flute/marimba piece. Those last three were all simple little pieces, but I was already starting to think at that point about generating some cash. That's why those were in there. Those are pieces I feel very strongly about that could and would get published by another publisher. But at the time, there were only two or three places that would look at a piece for eight marimba players. I felt however, that there was a niche and a need for it, and the fact that we could put it in our catalogue and I do the work, would just be flat-out a moneymaker for us and help keep the whole operation afloat. That's why we went ahead and got those pieces done as well. As it's turned out, I don't know if you have any data we could crunch on this or not, we might can get the database to crunch some numbers and see what kind of sales we've had on all these pieces.

Drege: Do you have any idea on the top of your head what some of the sales would be on any of the pieces? Could you just give me a guess?

Gipson: I have no idea. I haven't even looked at it. I could tell you what it was like last year. But anyway those pieces, you know, have made us a lot of money. So as the catalog has developed it's basically developed as primarily a vehicle for publishing commissions, and secondarily, publishing other works that I think are appropriate and fall within the perspective of the Percussion Press, but they're in there primarily to make money and support the publication of newer commissioned works. The commissioned works just by their very nature have a very limited audience. I mean you take a piece like *Compendium*, for 12 players, extremely difficult; there aren't going to be in terms of performance ensembles but 10 to 20 groups in the whole world that would try to play that piece. Once that piece is placed in those 20 performance libraries and then in another probably 25 or 30 music libraries, it's done, it's saturated. We aren't going to sell any more of them.

Drege: The original six pieces that you had published were all I believe sent out and engraved overseas, is that correct?

Gipson: Correct.

Drege: How has the ability to now publish internally change and when did it come about?

Gipson: Okay, the press was in business, I guess we had got our initial printing finished I would say '84 sometime. Then we started selling music in '84 and then for maybe two, three or four years after. It soon became pretty obvious that we had saturated the market on the big pieces, that everybody that was going to buy a *Diptych* had bought it and the libraries had bought it although we would still occasionally sell some Slaters and some of the arrangements. I was starting to get concerned that we weren't generating enough cash and therefore salting away enough money for the next publication run, whatever that might be, because the initial expense of this, the primary expense was engraving in publication and printing, which was pretty costly. At that time you had to have all of your music engraved. We had it engraved in Korea because that's where you could get it done cheaply and professionally. But it was still costly. It was priced by the page; you paid by the page. Then we had it offset print, which was a high-quality printing, but it was also costly. It had full four-color covers, it was important to me that we have a high quality visual product as well as a musical one. But nevertheless, we weren't making enough money to continue along that same line. Fortunately, concurrent with that period, was the emergence of the personal computer. I got a Macintosh computer and started getting into music processing with *Professional Composer* software, not with an idea of doing the Percussion Press that way, but just for my own teaching and studio-related work, musical examples, arrangements and things like that. At that time, the only way you could print anything was with a dot-matrix printer. That was miserable, so there was never any thought of that. But, then Apple invented the LaserWriter printer and that's what made the big difference. I remember as soon as I read about the LaserWriter and saw some examples of what it could do, I immediately began thinking about switching the Percussion Press to desktop publishing. Well, I made a proposal to Ken Hoving, who at that time was the Vice-Provost for Research, to buy a LaserWriter for the percussion press. The cost was \$5000. The proposal was short and sweet. It said that the press had been doing fine but while founded with Associate's startup funds, we wanted very much to keep it going, but were really not generating enough money to keep it going with conventional printing, engraving, and off-set printing costs. I had determined that I could do the engraving on the computer and with the LaserWriter, could produce camera-ready copy, thereby eliminating the cost of engraving. So, he agreed and funded the purchase



of the LaserWriter. The next seven pieces were done on the LaserWriter with *Professional Composer* software.

Drege: Do you recall what those pieces were?

Gipson: Yes. *Canzona*, *Diabolic Variations*, and *Duo Chopinesque*, and the four rags. So we published three commissioned works and then four rags, which were, quite frankly, moneymakers, big time moneymakers. But they were all done on *Professional Composer* with a LaserWriter producing a camera-ready copy. What's really interesting is that they were all done in before *Sonata* font. So they really didn't look very good. You could tell that they were computer generated. That really does date them.

Drege: But the cost of those four rags and three commissioned works, seven pieces, were considerably less than the original six pieces.

Gipson: Yes, it was the cost of the LaserWriter and the cost of the paper.

Drege: Other than the cost of your time. Your role as the editor took on a different meaning.

Gipson: Yes, I became the engraver as well as the editor. However, even though I produced the camera-ready copy on the Macintosh with the LaserWriter, I also had to have the pieces printed off-campus. I didn't print it on-campus where I printed the first run. I went off campus to a local printer. My recollection is that he was probably half the cost of printing it on campus. It was a huge order for him.

Drege: So the total of money received in grants for the Percussion Press has been \$15,800.

Gipson: Yes.

Drege: So, everything after that has been run simply by the money generated on sales.

Gipson: Right, although there has been a certain amount of subvention by the School of Music, like about half the time the computer upgrades would be purchased by the School. The Percussion Press has probably purchased half the computers, so the School of Music has helped in that respect. They've supported us with some printing and xeroxing and things like that. An interesting sidelight to this, I don't know if you want to put this in the paper or not, the Percussion Press' LaserWriter was either the first or one of the first

LaserWriter's on campus. It may have been the first one because nobody else was using Mac's at all, and it was definitely the first LaserWriter in the School of Music. Once I got the machine and started experimenting with its capabilities, I made a suggestion to the director of the School of Music that we stop having our programs printed off campus and that we do them internally on the LaserWriter because we could produce camera-ready copy. It was easily as good as the typeset stuff they were doing off campus. We could start producing our own programs and just xeroxing them onto program stock. Allan Ross agreed with me, and we saved a lot of money doing that. But for about two years someone from the music office used to come over and typeset programs on the Percussion Press computer everyday.

Drege: What other role as editor would you like to mention that has been an important aspect of the Percussion Press?

Gipson: Well, I consider the role of editor as being both creative and functional. The functional part is obviously making sure that the product that goes out is accurate. So I assume final responsibility for making sure that what we send out the doors is accurate and well done. My role in the actual engraving process has diminished as the years have gone by and graduate students have picked up a lot of that responsibility. The creative side of it I still take very seriously in that because of the fact that most of our publications are commissioned works that when they come in and we work on them and we premiere them, I make suggestions for changes and re-writing.

Drege: What would you believe has been the influence on the Percussion Press or Percussion Ensemble Series from the CD's you have recorded?

Gipson: I think it has probably been quite significant. We have talked before about what can entice a composer to write for you, and certainly publication and recording of their works is substantial. So I have to believe that having made those recordings has made the process work better. Who knows whether Eric Ewazen would have ever agreed to write for us if we hadn't had a publication and recording history. You could ask him that, but it certainly hasn't hurt. It undoubtedly has helped. The thing that I think is important about those recordings is, especially the last recording, it's a recording of fine, fine music that happens to be written for the Percussion Ensemble. It's not a percussion ensemble recording. Granted that's semantics, but I feel very strongly that that's the case. Albany Records published or agreed to produce that recording because it was fine, fine music. They really had no interest in promoting the Percussion Ensemble or making sure that the University of Oklahoma had some kind of visibility. It's not that at all. These are just

fine, fine pieces of music. So that's where it's always been heading, and I think we got there with that last CD.

Drege: Did the first CD recording project in '85 come with any grant money or was there any kind of funding established through the University at all?

Gipson: We got some seed money support from the OU Foundation to help pay for the actual physical recording of the CD itself. The Foundation has helped in that respect on each of them.

Drege: On each of the recordings they have?

Gipson: Yes. We were committed to producing a high-quality digital recording of that '85 PASIC repertoire anyway. We were going to invest in that and make an archival recording. The fact that Second Hearing became interested in producing and releasing it on their label was just gravy. So, that helped a great deal.

Drege: You've mentioned the word marimba ensemble numerous times. Do you see these pieces fitting more into the marimba ensemble literature, or more of a percussion orchestra literature?

Gipson: It obviously depends on the specific instrumentation of the pieces. But, my personal feeling is that the marimba has the potential to be the most musically functioning instrument of the family. In other words, you can do it all musically on a marimba, and a whole bunch of marimbas can do it all musically. I would think that the marimba is like the string family in an orchestra. It can do musically everything that the string instruments can do. Now, is a string orchestra as satisfying as a full symphony orchestra? Probably not. On some pieces it may be. On some pieces it's just great by itself. Marimba is the same way. Like an orchestra that uses brass and percussion and woodwinds to expand the tonal pallet, I think the percussion orchestra uses vibraphones and bells and chimes and timpani and percussion to expand its pallet as well. But the marimba, in my opinion, remains the cornerstone of that percussion orchestra sound. I don't think of the series as being a mallet ensemble series. If there is a segment of the population that thinks of percussion ensemble pieces as being different than the kinds of things that we do, I think it's because unfortunately they've never had an experience playing our kind of repertoire. If you don't play pieces like *Crown of Thorns* and *Compendium* and *Duo Chopinesque* and other of those kinds of pieces you don't have a concept of what a percussion ensemble can be. If all you play is drum pieces or all you play is sound sculpture pieces or esoteric, weird things, and if that's what your concept of

what a percussion ensemble is, and that's all it can be, then sure you're going to put a different label on the kind of stuff that we do. It might even be considered as being mallet ensembles from that stand point. But I don't think that's the case.

Drege: How much do you think the commissioning series at this point and the Percussion Press through the recordings that the Percussion Ensemble has done; how much has that changed the perception out there in the last 25 years?

Gipson: I think it has changed. However, I think it changes really slowly.

Drege: I noticed that next year's Michael Hennagin contest will feature works for Percussion Ensemble with a \$5000 cash prize and that the Percussion Press has the option of publishing the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place pieces as well.

Gipson: Yes, that's a windfall for us. It's totally due to the successes of the commissioning series and the publication and the recording of Michael Hennagin's first two works for percussion ensemble. The individuals who run this composition contest in his name, together with the School of Music, decided to place the prize this year in the Percussion Ensemble medium, which is great for us. I immediately offered to publish the winning piece and consider publication of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place winning pieces because if it all works out the way we hope it will we will have just a whole bunch of really great pieces. So, that should be a real boon to the profession.

Drege: You mentioned that the turnabout, or the educating of people has been longer than you thought, that the process has been longer than you thought in terms of capabilities of the Percussion Ensemble. What is the next step in really making that or turning the corner for that or are we there already?

Gipson: I don't think we are where we want to be. I think we're getting there. It's just a slow process. It's kind of osmotic in its development. I think you have to generate a concept, so many people don't have the concept that we talked about, which is what the Percussion Ensemble can be. Until they have that concept there's no way they can act upon it or actualize it. So I think what we have seen is a very gradual change in perception of what the Percussion Ensemble can do musically and that change is a result of all these things, the publications, the performances, the recordings, the populating of the field with people from our program and similar programs who understand this and can go out and do it. But that's a really slow process. It doesn't happen overnight. I guess that....well, I'm not frustrated by that. It's just kind of sobering because it takes a long time for that to happen. But it is happening and it will continue to happen. The

great thing about the pieces that we have developed and published is by helping to create them and publishing them and recording them, they don't go away. That's what's neat. The fact is that *Portico* and *Diabolic Variations* and other pieces are still out there being played regularly. What's really fun is that you're starting to see more and more high schools play them. Back when we did it that was unheard of. For the first ten years that was unheard of, but now we have high schools that are playing them all the time.

Drege: As well as other pieces.

Gipson: Yes.

Drege: It's amazing what some of the high schools are playing.

Gipson: Fifteen years ago they wouldn't even play, or couldn't even consider playing a piece like *Portico*, much less a piece like *Diabolic Variations*.

Drege: As well as *Crown of Thorns*, a number of high schools play that and *Duo Chopinesque*.

Gipson: Yes, so it's happening and you know that kind of spreading of what we're talking about here, it's happening. It just takes awhile.

## APPENDIX 2

Dr. Richard Gipson, Interview

March 8, 2000

Drege: After your commission with John Beck, which was the first piece, when did you start thinking about this process becoming an actual annual commissioning series? Had you envisioned this before you actually commissioned the first piece? Or did you conceive it as a one time commissioned work for the specific purpose of that festival?

Gipson: The idea of it being a series had not necessarily formed in my mind. I can honestly say that I had always felt we didn't have enough literature. Even back in the time when I was a student I had always entertained the idea of wouldn't it be neat if we could actually generate more repertoire through commissioning. But the commissioning of the John Beck piece was fairly pragmatic. It was to get a piece to play with Ed Shaughnessy. And because of the success of that work and the relative ease in which it developed and the positive feedback that I got from it, it became very easy to take the next step, which was to commission another piece. Once we'd done a couple of them, the idea of a series started to establish.

Drege: The first commission was funded by the School of Music administration. How did you achieve the funding for that, and how did you approach the administration? Did you approach it with them as it being a one-time shot, or did you at the very onset tell them that this could turn into a commissioning series and would there be funding available for future commissioning works?

Gipson: No it was a one-shot funding. And the fact that our director at that time was a composer made that easier.

Drege: Well, that goes to my third question which is about the second piece. Did the fact that the next commissioned work and the fact the composer was the Director of the School of Music have any influence on him being chosen as the second commissioned composer?

Gipson: Yes, for sure. However, he was a composer I respected. He had expressed an interest in writing for us.

**Drege:** Had Dr. Smith written anything specifically for percussion prior to that commission?

**Gipson:** No.

**Drege:** So it really was the first time shot for him basically.

**Gipson:** Yes.

**Drege:** I've read in some of the notes that the piece was actually written for the Southwestern MENC Convention in Colorado Springs. Is that indeed the case?

**Gipson:** Yes.

**Drege:** So that was really the impetus, the convention?

**Gipson:** Right, well I can't say that performing on that convention precipitated the piece. I think we were going to get the piece anyway. But the timing of it and the performance of it at that conference did dovetail.

**Drege:** Was that the first major conference/convention that the ensemble here had performed at?

**Gipson:** Yes. We may have played at an OMEA right at the same time, but I can't remember. It would have been close.

**Drege:** If you take that that piece was performed at that conference, it may not have been premiered there. I think it may have been premiered here prior to that as have many of the pieces. But there certainly could be a case made that the conventions that the ensemble has been invited to and performed at, PASIC Conventions, MENC Conventions, the one in Indianapolis, have all been catalysts in having new pieces written for the specific events. Is that the case?

**Gipson:** Correct. Every time we perform at a major conference I like to premiere a piece. If not possible to actually premiere a new work, at least we try to play a large forum like that the most recent new works we have premiered.

**Drege:** A couple of questions about the Slater pieces. Was Westley Slater at the time he wrote *Suite for Keyboard Percussion* a student here?

**Gipson:** Yes, he was a composition major here.

**Drege:** Had he studied with you at all in terms of composition?

**Gipson:** Not composition.

**Drege:** Just percussion?

**Gipson:** Yes, that was his principal instrument, percussion.

**Drege:** Had he written anything prior to that then for you to say, I want him to write a piece for the ensemble commissioning series or how did all that come about with him being a student? What had he done to really showcase his talents prior to that?

**Gipson:** Boy that's a hard one. I can't remember specifically. More than him just being a talented student and a talented composer, he understood how to write for the instruments and had been through this process of premiering new works by other composers. So, I thought it was worth a shot.

**Drege:** So, did you then actually commission him for the second piece before he left or was it after he left?

**Gipson:** It was after he left. He moved to New York and went to graduate school I believe at the Manhattan school and studied composing at the graduate level, so I kept in touch and asked him to write us another piece.

**Drege:** The second piece of course is quite a bit different then the first piece...on a much larger scale. You can tell he had developed as a composer.

**Gipson:** Yes, I think his concept had developed significantly by that time. Perhaps because he had been through the process of the early evolution of the commissioning series plus as a player playing, not only our commissioned works but also the other things that we had played at the time, he had grown in his perception of what a percussion ensemble could be at the same time.



Drege: Having been here at the time that piece was performed and premiered, it always stuck with me as being one of the more enjoyable pieces to work on. But it seems that it hasn't caught on with the general public like some of the other big pieces have, like *Chameleon Music*, *Crown of Thorns*, and so forth. Any reason you can think of for that?

Gipson: Not really. It doesn't play itself off the page like some of the other pieces do, if that makes any sense. Unlike *Chameleon Music* and *Crown of Thorns* and those kind of pieces, it's a little harder piece to get into.

Drege: Although once you do, I think the musical experience is very satisfying.

Gipson: Yes, I agree. It takes a little longer to get there. But you're right. It hasn't been played nearly as much as some of the other later pieces have been.

Drege: Do you know if he has written anything since that second piece for percussion? I haven't seen anything.

Gipson: To my knowledge he hasn't written anything again for percussion. I'm not sure how much writing he is doing if any.

Drege: Concerning the two Hennagin pieces, I have the premiere dates for both works. The premiere of *Duo Chopinesque* was November 7, 1985. I do not have in his file the paperwork for any of the actual commissioned date and/or the possible completion date of that piece. Do you recall just general time periods for that piece?

Gipson: That was a very rapid commission.

Drege: Did that happen after you found out about being invited to PASIC?

Gipson: Yes, it was subsequent to the invitation to play at the PASIC convention in Los Angeles, so it would've probably been March or April.

Drege: March or April of '85.

Gipson: Yes, March or April of '85. We had the piece by the beginning of school in August of '85.

Drege: Probably one of the quicker turn arounds.

Gipson: Well his pieces were like that. He was always on time and his compositional approach and his organization were immaculate. I remember on the second piece that he slotted his time to write it precisely. He was going to write that piece in the summer during the month of July, and he did.

Drege: So, probably the same process was set for the *Phantom Dances* which was premiered on November 1 of 1990, was the commission then given to him after you again found out that you would be performing at the PASIC Convention of 1990?

Gipson: I think we talked about that one a year in advance. It wasn't necessarily for PASIC. It turned out to be timely in that respect, but he and I had been talking about writing another piece ever since *Duo Chopinesque*.

Drege: I don't have a contract for those pieces.

Gipson: Okay. Well, it's likely that we didn't execute one. My recollection is that he was writing that piece for us anyway. It just happened to hit at a time in which it was fresh with PASIC.

Drege: So, the commission date might have been as early as '89?

Gipson: I believe it was over a year.

Drege: So, it was definitely completed by the summer of '90.

Gipson: Yes. We had it again by the start of school in '90. I never had to wait on anything for either of the pieces with him.

Drege: How long was it after the second one was completed did he pass away?

Gipson: 1993 is when he died. That really was sad and obviously devastating. We had already begun talking about another piece.

Drege: So there was strong potential for a third commissioned work?

Gipson: Yes, he would've written another piece for us probably in 1995. We were kind of on a 5-year cycle.

Drege: Prior to *Duo Chopinesque* in '85, was there much percussion writing of his beforehand other than his choral works, or anything written for actual solo or ensemble percussion works?

Gipson: No, to my knowledge he had never written any percussion solo or percussion ensembles prior to *Duo Chopinesque*. He had written lots of percussion in chamber music, and that's where I really became aware of his music. I became aware of him as a composer through a multimedia chamber work in 1976 which I played in the premiere of the first month I was here. It was a fascinating piece, a terrific work. I knew right then and there that this was a guy who should write a piece for percussion at some point.

Drege: Do you recall what that piece was?

Gipson: Yes, it was called *So the World Went Small*. It was for chorus, two pianos, six percussion and tape. Terrific, terrific work.

Drege: I don't have the contract for *Portico*. I just know that it was premiered, on the program here, on November 3, 1981. Do you recall when the actual commission was given to Thomas Gauger and when the completion time frame was on that?

Gipson: We got that piece in spring, the semester before.

Drege: So, Spring of 1981.

Gipson: Yes. I believe it took a couple of years. That was a pretty fast turn around. Once I was able to talk him into writing the piece it went pretty fast. It was a manuscript score and manuscript parts that were created by xeroxing score lines, cutting and pasting. It was a mess to read.

Drege: I understand that some works were not always received in a timely fashion. For example, David Maslanka's piece.

Gipson: David Maslanka, yes. I think he ended up taking eight years?

Drege: It was eight or nine.

Gipson: I commissioned him in 1982 I believe.

Drege: Reading through his correspondence, it sounded like he actually wanted to drop it.

Gipson: Oh, several times.

Drege: He wrote you several times that said "Thank you for the commission, but I really just don't have the time." But you always said that it was an open-ended commission and anytime you have the chance or if you get inspired.

Gipson: Well, but you know how he got inspired? I probably told you this story. He was not inspired to complete the work as late as 1990. But he came to the PASIC in Philadelphia in 1990 and heard our concert. He came up after the concert and introduced himself and said, "After hearing your performance, I'm going to finish your piece." That's what ended up being the catalyst for getting him to finish.

Drege: Had he actually started it before then?

Gipson: I think he had started a long, long time ago, in 1982 or whenever the commission was actually offered. He just got very busy. The commission was pitifully low so we increased it. I knew that if we ever got a piece out of him it would be worth it. So, what's the downside of just hanging on?

Drege: Another piece that I don't have a lot of information on as far as the commission date or completion date is *Compendium*. I just know it was premiered in November of 1994, prior to the PASIC convention of that year.

Gipson: Well, that is a piece that actually I commissioned Blake to write piece when he was in Los Angeles working on his master's degree. So that would have probably been in '93 or so.

Drege: Again, prior to you knowing you had been invited to perform at PASIC?

Gipson: Yes. The actual completion of it was stimulated more by the PASIC conference than anything I did to get him to finish it. In fact he would tell you now that he really didn't finish the piece. He just found a way to stop writing it.

Drege: Otherwise, it could've been another couple of years like he did with *Twilight Offering Music*.

Gipson: Exactly. It could have been very lengthy and even more complex than it turned out being. Interestingly enough, that was the same way it was with his paper. Do you see a pattern emerging here?

Drege: One question about *Twilight Offering Music*. Was it actually generated by a commission or by Blake just writing something?

Gipson: That piece was an interesting amalgam of approach. It started out just as his meanderings I think. He kind of knew he was writing a piece. We talked about that piece for many years. He would bring in snippets of it, particular sections of it that he was writing and we would talk about them and play them. My recollection of it, as to what stimulated his completing the piece was that I had figured out by the time he had been doing it for several years, that it was going to be a pretty good piece and that he should actually get it done. So I offered him the commission for him to get it finished. I knew it was going to be a good piece. So the commission in that case ended up being a stimulus for him to get it finished. He would've written it without the commission; there's no question. But when he would've gotten it finished and whether we would have been able to play it in a timely fashion, I don't know.

Drege: In regards to future commissioned composers, there is a commission to Raymond Helble from 1994. You are projecting that to come in the near future?

Gipson: Hopefully this calendar year.

Drege: Do you have a list of composers who would be the next people that you would approach?

Gipson: Not really. If I had a list, I probably wouldn't tell you what it is anyway because if you have such a list and it gets printed up somewhere, and I decide not to go with somebody, then they wonder why you didn't go with them. The thing that's kind of fun about this process is that you don't work real hard to come up with an advanced list of people. We talked before that we're kind of at that point in our commissioning series where I think it's really hard because it's evolved this into a fairly sophisticated body of repertoire. But by doing so we have gotten to the point where it's getting a little pricey. There's no way we can pay \$25,000 or \$30,000 for a piece of music. It just isn't possible. So that cuts out a tier of composers that would be great. So I have to keep looking for that level of composer that maybe hasn't hit that expense level yet but is still interested in writing for us and can still create a wonderful piece but doesn't cost an arm

and a leg. So, I always keep my ear open for new works and my eyes opened for new things. The next composer we commission I may not have even heard of yet.

Drege: Have you thought about adding as a component of this commission series some consortium commissions?

Gipson: I've thought about it. I've purposely kind of stayed away from that and there are several reasons for it. The idea of a consortium I can't argue with. I do feel, however, that the consortium notion is kind of an easy way out, and it can have a negative effect. It's not that hard for an entity like us or anybody else to go out and commission a new composer. We don't have to have a consortium to do it. Now we might have to have a consortium to do one of those that cost \$25,000 or \$30,000. But I guess another way of saying it is that philosophically, I would rather six percussion ensembles to go out and commission six pieces than get together and commission one piece. I think they may be undershooting. If you think it's going to cost \$2000 to commission a piece of music, it would be very easy for us to go around and get five schools to give \$400 to do that. I think those five schools could all do \$2000 commissions and get five pieces. The other reason for not getting into the consortiums too heavily is just because of the nature of our history and the relationship with the percussion press. We have an identity established now of a commissioning series that we've done on our own, we've grown it on our own and we've published these pieces on our own and I think maintaining the focus of that identity and the uniqueness of it is a positive thing. So I don't envision us abandoning that leadership position in favor of a consortium, even though it would probably allow us to get into those high dollar composers. I would rather hold out for a big grant or something and hit one of those composers and have it be part of our commissioning series. I think the consortium idea is a mixed blessing.

Drege: Have you thought of doing a future piece with while not a consortium, a large grant with a composition that for percussion ensemble and some other type of wind ensemble or orchestra or other type of instrumentalist involved?

Gipson: Sure. Yes. I think there are all kinds of possibilities. I've often wanted to do more ballet. I think we have a couple of pieces in our commissioning series that would work as a ballet right now. I've toyed with the idea of trying to mount something like that, but I think that would be a really interesting grant possibility; to commission a major composer to write a work that would be choreographed for ballet performance.

Drege: An original work.

Gipson: Yes.

Drege: A few follow-up questions concerning the Percussion Press. Do you recall how and why you engaged Plymouth Music as the sole distributor and selling agent of the percussion press? How and why the agreement ended?

Gipson: Yes. When I started the Percussion Press I did it all myself, meaning post-creative level stuff. In other words, not only did we commission the work and premiere the work but we also did the production work to publish the piece, we did our own marketing, we did our own selling, inventory and everything. There came a point when I didn't have the time to continue to do all of that and we didn't have enough personnel to continue to do all that. Plymouth Music had a history of acting as a sole selling agent for several percussion publications, meaning that they were the marketing and sales arm for several publications like *Music for Percussion*, *Meredith Music*, and others. They had a pretty high profile in the business at that time.

Drege: Do you recall the time frame of this or when this started?

Gipson: Seems to me that it was late '80's. Maybe from 1991-1995 or something like that. The idea was that we would continue in the production of new works, the development and production of new works, but they would take care of the actual marketing of the pieces and filling the orders. So, we would become a wholesaler and they would become a retailer. We tried that for several years with mixed results. I pulled out of it because I didn't feel like they were marketing our materials very well. So, we just let the agreement lapse, and we took over our materials again ourselves.

Drege: So since that time it's been all left back on to you?

Gipson: Right. I don't know if we're doing it any better than we used to or any better than Plymouth did it.

Drege: Well that in itself becomes a very time consuming process.

Gipson: Well it can, and probably should. There's no question that we could spend more money and time in marketing the pieces. But when you get right down to it, we're still a pretty small niche company. We're selling primarily percussion ensemble music to advanced public school and college percussion programs. There's not a big market out there and while we could probably be more aggressive in our marketing and in our public

relations, we're operating on a very small margin in terms of our finances. So, if we spent lots and lots of money in trying to market ourselves just to sell a few more copies of our pieces, it really wouldn't make sense. Steve Weiss has really become a *de facto* marketer for us anyway, because his catalog is universally distributed and the majority of our orders are sold through Steve Weiss.

Drege: The OU Percussion Press has a very distinctive logo design that was created by Sherry Enrico. How much of that though was input from you and how much of it was left up to her expertise in that area?

Gipson: It was 90% Sherry and 10% me. The 10% me was me probably me saying, "It needs to say OU Percussion Press."

Drege: I actually have the file and it is interesting to see the germ idea and the various drawings and the different variations of that and then to finally see what came of it. I didn't know though how much of that was her just doodling and drawing or how much of it was her getting into contact with you saying what do you think of this.

Gipson: Well that did go on. I expect it was a classic process, where she drew up a bunch of designs and showed them to me. I gave her feedback and told her which ones I liked and which ones I didn't like. We talked about it and she went back and did some more and brought some more back. I do remember that as a process. It's all gotten very fuzzy over the years. She's responsible exclusively for the creative development of the logo and the picture of what we were doing.

Drege: How did those Christmas arrangements get generated?

Gipson: Well, the Percussion Ensemble was asked to accompany the Canterbury Choral Society on their Christmas concert in 1989. They originally envisioned their Christmas concert being accompanied by the Oklahoma Symphony, which was on strike at the time. So Dennis Shrock, their conductor asked us accompany them. After agreeing to do that, I had to arrange all that music for percussion because there were obviously no pieces for a choir and percussion ensemble.

Drege: So these were pieces that they were going to perform with the symphony or did they reprogram their whole entire program with the symphony?

Gipson: Part of it was, I think, you have to ask Dennis this, but I think he completely rethought his program when he knew he couldn't get the orchestra, and so he went with a



selection of works that chiefly had piano accompaniment. Although some of them had orchestral arrangements, I don't know whether he was going to do those with the orchestra or not. I'm not sure. But what I had to work with was a combination of pieces that were originally envisioned with orchestra and then reduced for piano or originally written with piano accompaniment. So I arranged all of those for the choir and in the process of doing so, he had given us a slot on the program that was just percussion ensemble. I did some arrangements just for the ensemble for that and that in turn developed into the notion of the arrangements for the Percussion Press catalog and eventually the *Christmas Bells, Mallets and Drums* CD.

## APPENDIX 3

### OU PERCUSSION PRESS GRANT PROPOSAL



*The*  
**University of Oklahoma**

SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
555 Parkington Oval, Room 108A  
Norman, Oklahoma 73019  
(405) 325-3081

**Description: PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE PUBLISHING PROJECT**

**Richard C. Gipson, School of Music**

For the past five years, one of the University's fine musical organizations, the OU Percussion Ensemble, has benefited from a commissioning series funded by the School of Music. By commissioning selected composers to write for the Ensemble, the University of Oklahoma has contributed significantly to the literature for this unique performing ensemble.

Through Associate's funds, the OU Percussion Press will be established to publish the works commissioned by the Percussion Ensemble. In this way the creative results of the commissioning series may be disseminated throughout the country, enabling other percussion ensembles and musicians to perform and appreciate these outstanding works. Through this project a completion will be brought to the process of musical composition which will further enhance the prestige and position of the University of Oklahoma in the field of percussion.

APPLICATION  
FOR  
OU ASSOCIATES' RESEARCH/CREATIVE ACTIVITY FUNDS

Applicant(s): Dr. Richard Gipson

Project Title: Percussion Ensemble Recording Project

General Academic Area (Circle One): Physical Sciences, Engineering, Arts,  
Life Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, Business, Education,  
Other (Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Academic Department(s): Music

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Please include the following information:

**1. NARRATIVE:**

(Not to exceed three double-spaced typewritten pages.) This section should be devoted to providing support and justification for the request. It should include a summary of your current and proposed research/creative activity and demonstrate how, if funded, your scholarly activities will be enhanced. The significance of the proposed scholarly activity should be discussed. If venturing into a new area, indicate your background in the area. If a collaborative effort is involved, a synopsis of the collaboration should be included.

**2. REQUEST BUDGET:**

This section must contain a complete description of the request including a detailed breakdown of projected expenditures. If requesting matching funds, indicate source and amount of other funds.

**3. VITAE OF THOSE INVOLVED:**

Each vita must include, but not be limited to, evidence of recent scholarly activities, such as publications and exhibitions, and a list of efforts to obtain external funds. Each item of this list should contain the funding agency, the proposal title, the date submitted, and, if funded, the granting period and the funded amount.

**4. DEPARTMENT LETTER OF EVALUATION:**

Each proposal must have a department letter of evaluation attached to it when it is submitted to the Budget Dean. Each department should prioritize its requests and provide a rationale for the priority ranking.

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Completed proposals must be forwarded to the Budget Dean no later than March 25, 1983. Budget Deans are urged to review and comment on the proposals prior to April 8, 1983, when they are to be forwarded to the Vice Provost for Research Administration.

Eight copies of complete proposals with all attachments must be submitted to the Vice Provost for Research Administration.

### PROJECT STATEMENT

In much the same way that original scholarly research seeks to bring to light new information and new interpretations of existing knowledge, the commissioning of new music from composers for ensembles and media for which there exists no significant commercial market, seeks to provide new resources and to stimulate other composers to emulation in the creative community. The actual creation of a work of art is only an initial step in this process. An art work must be performed before a sufficient audience to have the impact for which it was created. This proposal seeks support for the continuation of a creative activity project for the creation and advancement of new music of artistic significance for percussion ensemble.

### NARRATIVE

Since 1977 the University of Oklahoma School of Music has been leading the effort to stimulate composition of music for percussion ensemble by composers of recognized artistic merit. Exceptionally creative composers with the knowledge to compose for this unique and distinctively modern ensemble were commissioned to create works of outstanding artistic quality. Since 1977 five works have been commissioned:

- 1977 - Concerto for Drum Set - John Beck
- 1978 - Dirge and Alleluia - Jerry Neil Smith
- 1979 - Suite for Keyboard Percussion - J. Wesley Slater
- 1980 - Portico - Thomas Gauger
- 1981 - Two Movements for Mallets II - William Steinohrt

These dates represent the issuance of the commission. The finished work is received within the year. The 1982 commission was awarded to David Maslanka, one of the most highly respected composers in this idiom.

The commissions in this series are designed to free the composer from the constraints imposed upon his creativity by the restrictions of the marketplace. The work is to be written without regard for its commercial potential, creativity and inspiration are to be unfettered. Such concerns as writing only for the instruments commonly found in high school ensembles, writing with a distinctly popular flavor, and composing for very limited numbers of performers are all set aside. Although the market value of artistic creations is always a constraining

factor in the arts, it is considerably more confining in exotic media such as percussion ensemble music. The market is small and publishers will only consider material which shows the promise of attracting the largest feasible share of the market. Artistic integrity must be sacrificed to commercial interests. The standard is the lowest common denominator. In contrast to works of this type the O.U. commissions have produced outstanding compositions which have been well received by local, regional and national audiences.

An underlying imperative of the percussion commissions is that the sponsored works will stimulate composers of distinction to write for the ensemble and to encourage percussionists to perform and support music of this high quality. To fulfill the promise evident in this series, it is necessary that these works be made available to percussionists across the country. As composers, performers and audiences alike become acquainted with the potential for music of serious artistic merit for percussion ensemble excellence will be stimulated.

This proposal seeks funding to extend the effectiveness of the School of Music commissioning program by publishing the outstanding works which have been produced by the commissions. The University of Oklahoma Percussion Ensemble would contract the composers for publication of their works. Financially, this would be a non-profit venture. After the seed money has been used to publish several compositions, it is hoped that sales would enable the publication of further commissions (see budget).

At present, plans call for the publication of three works: Suite for Keyboard Percussion, Portico, and Two Movements for Mallets II. The Percussion Ensemble and School of Music have already paid \$1,400.00 for the commissions on these three compositions. They are outstanding works, well worth publishing and distributing, although perhaps not from a commercial standpoint due to their somewhat esoteric instrumentation and difficulty. The population to which sales of these works would be aimed include all major college/university percussion programs and music libraries.

Benefits from this project would accrue to not only the researcher but to the School of Music and University in general. The commissioning of new works is in itself a major creative activity, but the dissemination of these new works through publication is perhaps more important to the creative effort of the composer, commissioner, and performer. Through such activity, future commissions would be aided. Composers, seeing an established publishing series connected

with the commissioning project would be encouraged to accept commissions. Performers would have another outlet for performances of music for percussion ensemble. A history of significant publications by any publisher, whether commercial or non-commercial, is an assurance of continued sales and respect.

To the researcher's knowledge, no University Percussion program in the country maintains an active, ongoing commissioning project such as this. We feel fortunate to have the series but feel a strong desire to add closure to the creative act through the addition of publication to the established areas of commissioning and performance. The prestige and creative potential of the University of Oklahoma School of Music and Percussion program would be greatly enhanced through this effort.

**BUDGET - Three works for Percussion Ensemble (400 copies each)**

Production:	Engraving	\$ 2,580.00
	Camera, paste	600.00
	Printing	4,500.00
	Cover, bind	1,500.00
Marketing:		1,500.00

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TOTAL COSTS:	\$10,680.00	Requested from Associates Funds
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Projected Sales and Royalties:	400 copies @ \$20.00 x 3	24,000.00
	Composers Royalties	- 4,800.00
	Production Costs (above)	<u>-10,680.00</u>
	Balance	\$ 8,520.00

Therefore production could begin on publication number 4 (once \$3,560.00 is cleared).<sub>3</sub>