

Percussion Mallet Instruments in Concert Band Literature: The Fourth Dimension

Mark Ford

The Midwest Clinic

December 17, 2005

A New Approach

Composers are utilizing keyboard percussion instruments as a new voice for Wind Ensemble and Concert Band Literature. Contemporary composers such as Joseph Schwanter, Michael Daugherty and Jack Stamp are adding new possibilities to wind ensemble literature by creating a fourth dimension (or voice) with keyboard percussion instruments, piano and celeste.

In the past, percussion in the concert band implied all percussion instruments. Today's leading composers are splitting the percussion area into two sections: the battery (snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, etc.) and an expanded keyboard section often including piano (and sometimes harp and celeste). Composers are treating this expanded keyboard section as an individual voice in combination with the brass, woodwinds and battery percussion. This new approach has created new opportunities for musical dialogue through a variety of sonic possibilities. As the keyboard percussion parts have increased in exposure and difficulty, the percussionist's accountability for performance skill and organization has also increased.

Traditional Use of Percussion Keyboards in Band Literature

Harmonic and melodic reinforcement: Bells and xylophone doubling woodwinds/brass

Color – Highlighting shape of melodic line and creating atmosphere with ostinatos

Solos – Brief interludes and transitions

See Page 5 – *Symphonic Dance No. 3, Fiesta* by Clifton Williams

Examples of the expanded keyboard percussion section or “Fourth Dimension”

See Page 6 – *Recoil* by Joseph Schwanter

Solo Keyboard Performance

The development of solo marimba literature has influenced composers.

An example of contemporary solo marimba performance:

Kingdom Lore Fanfare (2005) by Mark Ford, Innovative Percussion Publications

