

THE PERCUSSION MUSIC OF MARC MELLITS: 1994-2016

by

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An essay submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts
degree in Music in the
Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2019

Essay Supervisor: Professor Daniel Moore

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Graduate College
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Iowa City, Iowa

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DMA ESSAY

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To Marc Mellits

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are several people I would like to thank for helping me reach this stage of my life. First and foremost, I would like to thank my essay supervisor and committee chair, Daniel Moore. Your support and guidance over the years has allowed me to achieve my current success and has prepared me for a career in music. Thank you for allowing me to learn from you and for not giving up on me when things looked bleak.

I also thank my committee members, Richard Mark Heidel, Kevin Kastens, David Gompper, and David Puderbaugh, for your time, support, and guidance through this process. I have learned a great deal from you, and your passion and excellence in music is acknowledged.

I would also like to thank my percussion teachers, who have inspired me to strive for my best: my high school band director, Rhett Cox, for allowing me to grow under his tutelage and realize that I wanted to spend a life in music, and my percussion professors, Jeff Moore and Chalon Ragsdale, who have helped shape me into the musician and person I am today. Your never-ending wisdom and guidance have never let me down and are always greatly appreciated.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to Marc Mellits for allowing me to write about him and his music. He has been more than supportive throughout the entire process, and I am honored that I am able to share my research about him.

I would like to thank my family, my parents and my sister, who have encouraged and supported me my whole life. Thank you for all the rides to and from band practice, all the late nights, and for letting me pursue my dream in music, even if it was across the country. Thanks for putting up with me all these years and helping me see things through.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Rebecca. You have been with me every step of this journey and I could not have done it without your love and support. Four states, seven houses, and three dogs later, you have been by my side. You have made me a better person, and I look forward to the next chapter of our lives once this degree is complete.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Marc Mellits (b. 1966) is considered a member from the post-minimalist generation of composers, who took a fresh approach to the sounds of the 1960s minimalists. Mellits developed a style that merged his love for classical music and rock music. His output of compositions is generous, and performances of his music are steadily gaining prominence in the music community. His chamber works that include percussion and his stand-alone percussion works are being programmed regularly at both professional and educational levels. Despite these frequent performances, I have found that there is a lack of scholarly research about him and his music, especially his music for percussion. This document provides an overview of Mellits's background and compositional style with a detailed view of the following works for percussion: *Red* (2008), *Stick* (2010), *Gravity* (2013), and *Zodiac* (2016). General background information, music analysis, and performance suggestions are provided for each of the compositions. The purpose of this document is to serve as a reference for those seeking more information about Marc Mellits and his works for percussion.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Marc Mellits is a prolific composer who has developed a reputation among chamber ensembles and up-and-coming artists and has composed several works that utilize percussion. His music has been called “post-minimalist;” this genre has developed throughout the last thirty years, beginning in the early 1980s, and comprises a generation of composers with a “long list of relatively unknown names.”¹ He has studied composition with some of the most notable names in twentieth-century music at the Eastman School of Music, Yale University, Cornell University, and the Tanglewood Music Center. His music receives over 700 performances yearly, and over fifty of his recorded works can be found on the following record labels: Black Box, Endeavour Classics, Cantaloupe, CRI/Emergency Music, Santa Fe Music, Innova, and Dacia Music. Performing groups and artists such as the Bang on a Can All-Stars, Kronos Quartet, Eighth Blackbird, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, New Music Detroit, NEXUS Percussion, Third Coast Percussion, Percussions Claviers de Lyon, Clocks in Motion, and Talujon have helped Mellits to launch his career, and to grow his reputation in the music community through their commissions and performances.²

Mellits first utilized percussion in his Piano Concerto from 1984, and since then he has written fifty-eight works that involve percussion.³ His chamber works that include percussion and his works for solo percussion and percussion ensemble are programmed

¹ Jason Stanton, *Thirty Years of Postminimalism: Elements and Growth*, Master’s thesis, California State University Long Beach, 2010.

² See Appendix A for a complete list of works.

³ See Appendix B for a complete list of works utilizing percussion. This list is separated by chamber works and large ensemble works.

regularly at both professional and educational venues, such as music festivals and conferences, community arts centers, and college campuses across the world. His mallet ensemble piece *Gravity* (2013) has been performed by several professional groups and collegiate ensembles; it was also selected for the New Literature Session at the 2014 Percussive Arts Society International Convention.

This research topic was formed based on a first-hand experience with the composer's work which cultivated my desire to learn more about Mellits and his music. I was first exposed to the music of Marc Mellits at the University of Iowa when I performed his duet for marimba, *Red* (2008), for a graduate recital. This research topic also emerged based on my opportunity to commission Mellits and become a consortium member for two of his works for percussion. My desire to commission works and develop a specialized performance repertoire has become a prominent goal for my professional career. Since then, I have performed the percussion works of Marc Mellits on numerous occasions.

The impetus for this study originates from my perception that there is a lack of research concerning Mellits and his music. Despite his prolific composing and frequent performances of his music, minimal scholarly literature is available about him to date. Currently, only seven existing dissertations mention the name Marc Mellits. Francisco Perez's dissertation on Steve Reich's *Mallet Quartet* highlights several pieces using the same instrumentation, including Mellits's work called *Gravity*.⁴ Three other dissertations

⁴Francisco Perez, *An Analysis and Performance Guide of Steve Reich's Mallet Quartet*, DMA Project, University of Kentucky, 2018.

briefly mention Mellits.⁵ However, three recent dissertations from 2018, 2016, and 2014 provide cursory background information regarding Mellits and analyze respective pieces from their research concerning reed quintets, twentieth-century chamber literature involving the collaborative pianist, and commissioned solo violin miniatures.⁶ Aside from these dissertations, only a few resources focus directly on Marc Mellits. These include interview articles and video documentaries about him, but no resources address his percussion works or writing. Most writings about him are biographical sketches or reviews of his music for upcoming or recent concerts.

The purpose of my research is to introduce a new body of information concerning Mellits and provide an overview of his background and compositional style, regarding his percussion writing. In the initial stages of writing this document, I considered applying a broader scope to Mellits's use of percussion in his music. However, the number of compositions was too immense to be encompassed in a single document that analyzes all fifty-eight pieces in detail. While all of Mellits's works that use percussion merit examination, this document focuses on the solo and chamber works composed solely for

⁵ Patrick Nickleson listed him in the acknowledgements for his dissertation titled *The Names of Minimalism: Authorship and the Historiography of Dispute in New York Minimalism, 1960-1982* (2017). Mellits is credited for transcribing Reich's work *Music for 18 Musicians* in *Elements of Ewe Music in the Music of Steve Reich* (2007) by Daniel Tones. However, Mellits named is spelled incorrectly as Mark Mellits. Matthew Miracle mentions the title of Mellits's duet for bass clarinets, *Black*, in his dissertation *Three Newly Commissioned Works for Bass Clarinet: A Recording and Performance Practice Guide* (2012).

⁶ Piotr Szewczyk's dissertation *Solo Violin Miniatures in the 21st Century: Analysis of Commissioned Works from the Violin Futura Project* (2014) discusses and analyzes thirty-four works including Mellits's piece entitled *Żubrówka* (2006). Natalie Szabo's dissertation *An Annotated Bibliography of Original Reed Quintet Repertoire* (2016) discusses Mellits's 2014 work *Splinter*. Milena Gligic gives a biography of Mellits and an analysis of his work *Platter of Discontent* (2004) in her dissertation titled *Unusual Soundscapes: Chamber Ensembles of the Twentieth Century and Beyond Involving the Collaborative Pianist* (2018).

percussion.⁷ This study discusses *Red* (2008) for marimba duet, *Stick* (2010) for solo snare drum, *Gravity* (2013) for mallet ensemble, and *Zodiac* (2016) for solo marimba. Each of these pieces are analyzed in terms of their overall features regarding form, rhythm, texture, harmony, and thematic material. These various musical elements highlight Mellits's compositional approach and how he crafts his music to create a unique style. Additionally, this document addresses issues of logistical concerns pertaining to each piece and offers performance suggestions that may be beneficial to the performer.

Limited material is applicable to the scope and study of this document due to the recent composition dates involved in this research. To acquire more insights into the composer and his works, I interviewed Mellits as a primary source of information. I also communicated with the individuals who commissioned and collaborated on the percussion works used in this study, including the following: Thad Anderson, Rob Bridge, Gilles Dumoulin, Tim Feerst, Peter Ferry, Adam Groh, Sean Kleve, Rob Sanderl, and Tom Sherwood. Additionally, I have programmed and performed the selected works in various performances, allowing for a more detailed analysis of the pieces and significant insight into performance practices such as mallet choice, stickings, and setup.

The examination of important composers and their works for percussion is becoming more common, as increasingly more articles and dissertations are analyzing their works. Composers such as Paul Lansky, Keiko Abe, Steve Reich, Christopher Rouse, David Lang, and Robert Moran have been studied and written about within the

⁷ This list does not include arrangements of his works for percussion: *Black* (2016) for two marimbas, originally written for two bass clarinets, and *This Side of Twilight* (2010) for a mallet quartet of two marimbas and two vibraphones, originally written for an auchincloss piano.

past ten years. However, no such scholarly research has discussed the composer Marc Mellits and his percussion music. This document is intended to fill that gap.

CHAPTER 2: Biography

Beginnings

Born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1966, Marc Mellits developed an interest in music at a young age. He lived his formative years in Randallstown, a suburb of Baltimore, and was the youngest of three sons in a family that was not particularly musical. His father was a medical researcher for Johns Hopkins University, and his mother was an assistant director at the Beth Tfiloh Day Camp.⁸ His two older brothers became involved with science and medicine. The oldest is now an internist doctor, or general practitioner, in Atlanta, Georgia, and the other is a biologist in England. His grandmother, Bess Mellits, once played piano accompaniments for silent films, and he followed in her footsteps at a young age by cultivating his musical interest on the piano.

The family did not own a piano, but from the age of two, Mellits would cross the street to his neighbor's house to "bang on the piano."⁹ By age five, he had created simple melodies. With the piano in one room and the television in an adjacent room, Mellits would view the TV diagonally from the piano and would compose a sound track for the flickering images on the television set with the volume turned off. Mellits described his early composing experiences: "Sometimes, ships are coming in, and I'm doing this [bangs out rhythm on table] and I'm just writing out little melodies. I was always writing out a film score."¹⁰

⁸ The Beth Tfiloh Camp is a Jewish summer day camp located on 70-park-like acres in Reisterstown, Maryland. The camps are staffed by teachers, young adults, and high school upperclassmen. They offer a range of programs and activities for campers from ages 2 to 15.

⁹ Marc Mellits, interview with Oliver Molina, Syracuse, NY, July 13, 2016.

¹⁰ Ibid.

At age six, Mellits initiated his formal musical training and began to take piano lessons to learn how to transcribe the music he was playing. He states that “it was more about how to write music than actually how to play the instrument.”¹¹ Mellits studied piano and theory with the same piano teacher until he was eleven, when he was encouraged to enroll in the Peabody Preparatory Program to further advance his studies.

Peabody Preparatory

Founded in 1894, the Peabody Preparatory is Baltimore’s premier community school for the performing arts. Mellits enrolled at age twelve and continued in the program throughout the remainder of his secondary school education. This preparatory school supplemented his public education; he attended lessons and classes all day on Saturdays and once or twice during the week after school. Mellits studied piano with Enrique Graf and Peabody graduate student Jeffrey Chappell.

In addition to playing the piano, Mellits took up other musical instruments. He played trombone in the orchestra for both Peabody Preparatory and Randallstown Senior High School. Although he was not trained as a percussionist, Mellits gained experience playing percussion during his developing years. While at Peabody, he often waited for his percussionist friend Jeff Kahan, who played in the percussion ensemble.¹² One day, the percussion instructor, Mark Goldstein, asked Mellits to fill a part in the percussion ensemble; since he read bass clef, Mellits was selected to cover the timpani part. From that day, Mellits was a member of the percussion ensemble until he graduated high school.

¹¹ Ibid.

Mellits primarily studied piano during his time at Peabody, but he did not enroll in composition lessons until his senior year. He grew up with the impression that all musicians compose music in addition to playing it.¹³ Mellits was completely self-taught in composition, and he believed that the notion of teaching someone to write music was inconceivable.¹⁴ Because of this belief, one of his Peabody piano teachers, Jeffrey Chappell, advised him to register for composition lessons. Chappell also explained to Mellits that one can major in composition in college and helped him enroll in composition lessons for his senior year. Mellits studied composition with Pamela Layman Quist.

In these lessons, Mellits brought in several pieces he had previously written but also composed new works for piano solo, brass quintet, and jazz combos. However, most of the time in the lessons was devoted to helping him compose a piano concerto and learn how to develop a score and parts. The piano concerto was Mellits's first legitimate composition, and it premiered in 1984 with the Randallstown Senior High School Orchestra, with Mellits himself as the soloist.¹⁵ Since Mellits had been composing music long before receiving composition lessons, he had such an abundance of pieces in his portfolio that he graduated with a composition diploma from the Peabody Preparatory after only year of study.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The concerto was composed in memory of his grandfather, who had recently passed away.

College

Mellits initiated his college career at the Eastman School of Music in 1984. In his first through fourth years, he studied with Warren Benson, Joseph Schwantner, Robert Morris, and Samuel Adler, respectively. Benson and Adler were two of his most influential composition teachers during his career. Mellits recalled some important lessons learned from these teachers:

Benson would put my music upside down and put another clef in front of it as “more source material.” He got me to look at music from all facets instead of just looking at it from the surface. By the time I got to Sam Adler, I really got to understand form and trust my ear instead of my brain, which is a leap for composers to do; to let go and let your ear guide you sometimes.¹⁶

Early during his college years, Mellits earned extra income as a copyist. Copyists create final versions of musical works from original manuscripts. This process requires an extremely precise eye for detail and a comprehensive knowledge of music theory and notation. Mellits’s composition teachers were impressed by his computer-generated musical works he would bring to his lessons that they requested copying work for their own music. The first copyist work he completed while at Eastman involved a program on the Macintosh computer called Professional Composer; this music notation program was one of the first to become commercially available.

After graduating from Eastman, Mellits attended Boston University and studied with Bernard Rands and Sam Hendrick. He only attended Boston University for one school year, from 1988 to 1989, due to the departure of his teacher Bernard Rands. Upon Rands’s advice, Mellits applied and enrolled in Yale University the following year in

¹⁶ Mellits, interview, 2016.

1989. His composition teachers at Yale included Martin Bresnick, Jacob Druckman, and Poul Rudders.

In 1991, Mellits continued his studies at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York to earn a Doctor of Philosophy degree in composition. At Cornell, he studied with Karel Husa, Steven Stucky, and Roberto Sierra. Husa retired in 1992, and Mellits was his last composition student. Mellits completed his coursework in 1996 and then moved to Boston, where he lived for one year while working as a copyist. Mellits's last composition teacher was Christopher Rouse at Tanglewood in 1997. Rouse told him, "You don't need a composition teacher anymore. You don't need me anymore. You don't need anyone anymore. You're a composer. Now go!"¹⁷

Mellits graduated from Cornell with his PhD in 2009. He completed his dissertation by transcribing Steve Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*. This seminal work was first presented to Mellits in 1990 after Jacob Druckman encouraged him to do copying work for several composers, including Steve Reich. Druckman's publisher, Boosey and Hawkes, required a composer who knew and understood the process sufficiently to be able to listen to it and transcribe it from scratch.¹⁸ The project required two years to complete, and since the work had not been previously printed or available, it brought the piece new life and made more performances possible. To that point, it had been only performed by Steve Reich and his ensemble. The piece has now been published in two versions, including a transcribed realized version and a modular version.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Mellits Consort

While at Cornell, Mellits traveled back and forth from Ithaca to New York City; on one of these trips in 1995, composer Steve Reich rode with him. During their four-and-half-hour drive, they discussed life after college, and Reich encouraged Mellits to not accept a teaching job immediately but instead assemble a group that would play Mellits's music. Reich felt that it is important for the audience to see the composer onstage performing their own music. He took Reich's advice and formed the Mellits Consort in the late 1990s. Their first concert was in 1998, and the group continues to perform to this day.

Upon the genesis of the group, the personnel and instrumentation were fluid: "We had oboes and lots of different instruments. From that, I took what I thought worked the best, and it became the actual Mellits Consort."¹⁹ In 2001, the group was trimmed to its current instrumentation. The ensemble members included himself on keyboards, his wife Cristina Buciu on violin, Lizzy Simpkin on cello, Danny Tunick on marimba, and Kevin Gallagher on guitar.²⁰ The group released its first album in 2007, titled *Paranoid Cheese*; it was a collection of eleven of his pieces. The consort tours every two to three years and continues to exclusively perform his music. Their repertoire is primarily derived from the record *Paranoid Cheese*, but throughout the years, Mellits has composed additional music for the group to perform.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The first guitarist was Dominic Frasca, who began to develop hand problems in 2004, making it difficult for him to continue to perform. Upon Dominic's recommendation, Gallagher joined the ensemble in 2005.

Big break in the Big Apple

In 1997, Mellits relocated to New York City to advance his career in music and live and work in the epicenter of the arts. Mellits recalls two specific commissions that helped him to promote his music and generate more commissions and performances. The first was from a Brazilian guitar duo called the Assad Brothers, or Duo Assad. Composed in 1999, the piece *8 Etudes for 2 Guitars* gained popularity as the duo performed internationally; this disseminated Mellits's music to a wider audience.

The second commission, which Mellits refers to as his "big break," occurred in 2000 and was from Michael Gordon and Bang on a Can. Mellits mailed in cassettes of his music for several years, hoping that it would be selected to be included in the Bang on a Can Marathon. He was sometimes told that his music did not properly fit the programming or was not appropriate, and at other times, he did not hear back at all. Mellits became discouraged and stopped sending in tapes for several years, until he received a phone call. Mellits recalls Gordon saying, "We really like your music. We were just waiting for the right opportunity to do something, and we wanted to do something big. And this was something bigger than just putting you on the marathon. This is what we were waiting for."²¹

Mellits was one of the winners of the People's Commissioning Fund that year. Created by Bang on a Can in 1997, the fund assembles artists and audiences to commission works from innovative composers. The program collects hundreds of individual contributions of all sizes and selects three or more new composers to write

²¹ Ibid.

pieces for the Bang on a Can All-Stars.²² Mellits was commissioned to write his piece, *5 Machines* (2000), for amplified bass clarinet and soprano sax, electric guitar, amplified cello, amplified bass, amplified marimba, and amplified piano. With the help of Bang on a Can, Mellits's music was then performed in larger venues and heard by even larger audiences of several thousands, both nationally and internationally: "That was the break that changed my life. That was the seed that blew everything out; it changed my career; it changed my trajectory; it changed everything. If that hadn't happened, we probably wouldn't be having this conversation right now. It changed my life."²³

Syracuse

In 2000, Mellits moved to Syracuse, New York, where his wife played violin with the Syracuse Symphony. He routinely commuted between Syracuse and New York City for several years; he began to settle down in Syracuse in 2004 upon finding work as a freelance composer and an adjunct professor at Le Moyne College. His friend and fellow pianist, Andrew Russo, asked him to help develop the music program for the small local university. Mellits taught a range of courses concerning topics such as music appreciation, composition, and counterpoint. He thereby accumulated experience teaching at the collegiate level, but he continued to rely heavily upon his income from composing.

In 2009, as with other orchestras around the country, the Syracuse Symphony was financially struggling. To support their family in case the orchestra suffered bankruptcy,

²² People's Commissioning Fund – Bang on a Can. Accessed December 17, 2017. http://bangonacan.org/peoples_commissioning_fund.

²³ Mellits, interview, 2016.

Mellits began to apply for full-time college teaching jobs. He was simply seeking to acquire experience to become comfortable with the interview process. During his process of applying for positions, the Syracuse Symphony filed for bankruptcy in 2011. The prospect of becoming a full-time college professor became a necessity rather than merely a possibility. Mellits was invited for two interviews and received two offers, including one from Utah Valley University in Orem, Utah, and one from the University of Illinois at Chicago; eventually accepting the position in Chicago.

Current day in Chicago

In 2011, Mellits moved to Chicago, Illinois with his wife Cristina and his two daughters Mara and Nina. At the University of Illinois at Chicago, Mellits teaches courses in composition, music theory, counterpoint, and music notation. In addition to full-time teaching, Mellits maintains an active commissioning schedule and completes three to six pieces per year. In 2018, he recently completed two commissions: *Titan* for bass clarinet, two violins, viola, and cello, and *Dark Matter* for either bassoon, cello, bass clarinet, or saxophone through an electric guitar effects pedal. His current commissions include works for varied instrumentation, such as saxophone with an electronic looper pedal, a wind quintet, marimba with a string quartet, drum set solo, and a bassoon concerto.²⁴

Mellits frequently travels to various conferences, festivals, and other venues where his music is performed. In June of 2017, he was the composer-in-residence for the Sixth International Conference on Music and Minimalism at the Nief-Norf Summer Festival

²⁴Marc Mellits, phone interview with Oliver Molina, November 1, 2018.

in Knoxville, Tennessee and at the Charlotte New Music Festival in Charlotte, North Carolina.

While in Charlotte for the festival, Mellits was hospitalized and diagnosed with a rare auto-immune disease called Vogt-Koyanagi-Harada (VKH) disease,²⁵ which affects the pigmented tissue in the eyes, ears, nervous system, and skin. The exact cause of VKH disease is unknown, but it is more common in people with darker skin.

The disease appeared suddenly when both of Mellits's retinas become detached and he temporarily lost his vision for ten days. Mellits also suffered from severe headaches, vertigo, tinnitus, and sensitivity to sound. He was placed under treatment immediately and given heavy doses of the steroid Prednisone. The steroids healed his eyesight, but his quality of life suffered; he ultimately described the entire ordeal as a "year in hell."²⁶ He managed his condition through the medication and focused exclusively on teaching, placing a hold on his composing projects. Ten months after being diagnosed, Mellits was finally off of the steroids. With the disease in remission, Mellits still consumes medicine regularly to manage his condition. By April of 2018, Mellits had indicated that he had returned to his normal self and had discovered a new zest for life and composition.

In the summer of 2018, Mellits was granted tenure and promoted to Associate Professor of Music at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Every summer, he continues to travel to Syracuse and Europe, particularly his wife's home country of Romania.

²⁵Vogt-Koyanagi-Harada disease – Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center. Accessed on October 2, 2018. <https://rarediseases.info.nih.gov/diseases/7862/vogt-koyanagi-harada-disease>

²⁶ Marc Mellits, interview, 2018.

CHAPTER 3: Compositional style

Labels

Marc Mellits has often been labeled a “post-minimalist” by music critics and reviewers.²⁷ This style, according to author Kyle Gann, emerged in the 1980s as a series of individual responses to the minimalism of the 60s and 70s.²⁸ The minimalist composers worked with drastically reduced means, limiting themselves to an intentionally reduced rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic vocabulary. Post-minimalist music was built upon the foundation established by minimalism's first practitioners: Steve Reich, Philip Glass, Terry Riley, and LaMonte Young.

The post-minimalist style is characterized by applying a steady pulse throughout an entire movement or work, relying on diatonic tonality while avoiding traditional functional tonality, an evenness of dynamics, and balanced formal structures. These works tend to be shorter than their minimalist counterparts, and the pieces showcase more frequent textural variety, often in a mixed chamber-ensemble setting.²⁹

The minimalist movement flourished in environments that rejected modernist tendencies in areas such as San Francisco and New York City. Unlike minimalism, post-minimalism has not been perceived as a movement, as it never formed a “scene” centered anywhere.³⁰ Post-minimalist composers, such as William Duckworth, Janice Giteck,

²⁷ Barbara Jepson, "Music That Lives Beyond Its Premiere," *The New York Times*, February 03, 2006, accessed March 1, 2018, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/03/arts/music/music-that-lives-beyond-its-premiere.html>.

²⁸ Kyle Gann on November 1, 2001, "Minimal Music, Maximal Impact," *NewMusicBox*, November 01, 2001, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/minimal-music-maximal-impact/6/>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Daniel Lentz, Ingram Marshall, and Jonathan Kramer, come from a range of locations: from Maine to Mexico and Florida to Hawaii. Gann stated that their “impression of a unified style is remarkably vivid, especially considering that these people had never heard each other’s work.”³¹ The new post-minimalist music was open to more influences, including rock, jazz, world music, folk, sound art, and noise, ranging from Stravinsky to Balinese music to the Ramones.³²

Other descriptions of Mellits and his music include the terms “indie-classical” and “avant-pop.” Within these genres, indie-rock musicians experimented with classical composition, and classically trained musicians were inspired by the indie underground.³³ Author David Horn described avant-pop as identifying idiosyncratic artists working in “a liminal space between contemporary classical music and the many popular music genres that developed in the second half of the twentieth century.”³⁴ Indie-classical was coined and brought into widespread media circulation in a 2007 press release from New York-based New Amsterdam Records announcing its mission to “foster a sense of connection among musicians and fans in this ‘indie-classical’ scene.”³⁵ Composers and musicians categorized under these genres include Jacob ter Veldhuis, Nils Frahm, Nico Muhly,

³¹ Ibid.

³² “Post-Minimalism Music Genre Overview,” AllMusic, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.allmusic.com/subgenre/post-minimalism-ma0000012358>.

³³ Daniel Ross, “10 great indie-classical artists to discover,” Classic FM, August 28, 2014, accessed March 1, 2018, <http://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/latest/best-indie-classical/>.

³⁴ David Horn, Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Volume 11: Genres: Europe, Volumes 8-14. Bloomsbury Publishing. p. 36. Retrieved 21 December 2017.

³⁵ William Robin, University, N. C. C. H. G. S., Katz, M., Bohlman, A., Carter, T., Piekut, B., Bonds, M. E., ... Robin, W. (n.d.). *A Scene Without A Name: Indie Classical and American New Music in the Twenty-First Century*.

Peter Broderick, Judd Greenstein, Missy Mazzoli, and Olafur Arnalds.³⁶ These styles draw from the classical and popular genres to create accessibility for the listener.

Despite all the labels that have been assigned to Mellits's music, he is not fond of being pigeon-holed to fit a certain mold that needs to sound a certain way. He dislikes being categorized, as he wants to avoid being influenced by expectations or preconceived notions of what his music should sound like. He prefers to refer to his music as simply being "Mellits"—his music as his music and nothing more.³⁷

Influences

Mellits's music has been said to have the traces of melodic suggestion of Phillip Glass and the rhythmic complexity of Steve Reich.³⁸ However, his style of repetitive and cyclical music did not stem from hearing the music of Reich and Glass. Instead, it developed when Mellits was young before being exposed to these two composers at the age of seventeen or eighteen.³⁹

Mellits first heard the music of Philip Glass the summer before he began his studies at Eastman. Mellits was part of the jazz scene in Baltimore and would read *Downbeat Magazine*, a publication devoted to "jazz, blues, and beyond."⁴⁰ The magazine

³⁶ Helen Armitage, "10 Young Composers Who Are Redefining Classical Music," Culture Trip, April 03, 2015, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/articles/top-10-young-composers-who-are-redefining-classical-music/>.

³⁷ Mellits, interview, 2016.

³⁸ Marc Mellits, accessed May 20, 2017, <https://www.marc mellits.com/margen>

³⁹ "How a mentor put composer Marc Mellits on his career path - CSO Sounds & Stories," CSO, accessed March 11, 2018, <https://csosoundsandstories.org/how-a-mentor-put-composer-marc-mellits-on-his-career-path/>.

⁴⁰ Downbeat magazine, accessed November 12, 2018, <http://www.downbeat.com>

mentioned Philip Glass's album *The Photographer*, and thinking he must be "some jazz guy," Mellits purchased the album.⁴¹ When he listened to it, Mellits was surprised to find how similar it was to the piano music he had been writing.⁴²

While at Eastman, Mellits encountered Reich's music through performances of *Music for 18 Musicians* and *Drumming*. These experiences gave Mellits confidence and validation about the style of music he had already been composing: "I felt like I was writing two musics [sic] at the time when I got to Eastman. I was writing the music that I thought I should be showing my teachers and then I was writing this very repetitive stuff, which I didn't think was worthy."⁴³ Hearing Glass and Reich for the first time gave Mellits a tremendous sense of confirmation more than musical influence since he had been composing in that style.

Influences on his music writing have come from a variety of sources. As a composer, Mellits has mentioned being in love with sound and gaining inspiration from all organized sound. When Mellits was a child, his father would fill the young boy's ears with classical music at the opera house and at home. A big enthusiast of the Baroque era, Mellits referred to Antonio Vivaldi as his favorite composer but Johann Sebastian Bach as his most influential: "I feel like that is where I live: squarely in the Baroque era."⁴⁴ Other influences include Corelli, Rachmaninoff, Bruckner, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms, with Reich and Glass rounding out the list.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Mellits, interview, 2016.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

In addition to the classical canon, Mellits has been influenced by popular music, especially rock and roll. When he was a youth, his older brothers would take him to the basement to listen to bands like Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, the Beatles, and the Kinks.⁴⁶ He believes these groups represent “today’s folk music” and holds them in as high esteem as he does classical composers.⁴⁷ Being surrounded by classical and rock music growing up, Mellits did not make a distinction between these two contrasting genres due to his affinity for all music. Instead, he saw rock music as having the same level of virtuosity as that of Mozart and other classical composers; he did not consider it a question of low art versus high art.⁴⁸ This had a significant impact on him during his formative years as the styles merged at some point in his writing style.⁴⁹ Pianist and friend Andrew Russo described his music as having “a little rock edge to it.”⁵⁰

Compositional style

Although the music of Reich and Glass share some similarities with the music of Mellits, they also significantly differ in their use of process. In his 1968 manifesto entitled “Music as a Gradual Process,” Reich explained his minimalist style through the slow perceptible processes heard throughout the music:

I begin to perceive these minute details when I can sustain close attention and a gradual process invites my sustained attention. By “gradual,” I mean extremely

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Frank Herron, "Marc Mellits: a life surrounded by music," Syracuse Post-Standard (Syracuse), January 26, 2006.

gradual; a process happening so slowly and gradually that listening to it resembles watching a minute hand on a watch—you can perceive it moving after you stay with it a little while.⁵¹

Reich created his large-scale gradual process music through pulsed repetitions, phase shifting, interlocking patterns, and overlapping canonic patterns. Mellits fostered his compositional style by taking a somewhat different direction through the musical development of his works. In the late 80s and early 90s, Mellits found himself writing longer and longer pieces, developing music into large formal structures.⁵² Mellits felt lost in these formal structures as he took thematic material and developed it in “every possible way.”⁵³ Mellits’s first attempt at composing a shorter piece came from a composition assignment. He was tasked with composing a piece that was two minutes in length. The final product, *Fanfare* (1990), for orchestra, was an early launching point into his compositional style. This was the beginning of his miniaturist style of short pieces.

His approach to composition would evolve after having a lesson with composition teacher Karel Husa. Husa instructed Mellits to present a short idea, develop it fast, but keep it streamlined by cutting off all the excess material.⁵⁴ This approach was the genesis of his use of different movements based on separate ideas with no extra development that got “to the heart of the matter.”⁵⁵ These short movements were put in a suite that was first presented in his 1992 work *11 Pieces for Flute and Piano*. A later review of his music in

⁵¹ Robert K. Schwarz, "Steve Reich: Music as a Gradual Process Part II." *Perspectives of New Music* 20, no. 1/2 (1981): 225-86. doi:10.2307/942414.

⁵² Mellits, interview, 2016.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

the New York Times described this quickly developed music, saying that it “freely partakes of stylistic elements from minimalism, but he uses them in tightly concentrated bursts that more accurately reflect an era of short attention spans and text messaging.”⁵⁶

Compositional process

Mellits characterizes composing as a solitary and lonely process in which he sits at a desk with a piano or keyboard and begins to think, compose, and improvise with his short ideas.⁵⁷ Having a piano nearby is important, as he considers composing to be a very physical undertaking: “I think through my fingers as I play musical ideas on the piano, and often I will have one hand on the piano and the other with a pencil.”⁵⁸ Many of his compositions have been written while spending the summer months in Romania. There, Mellits can be alone by locking himself in an apartment in Bucharest’s city center to write with the beautiful scenery in his view.⁵⁹

Until recently, Mellits composed all his music with only a pencil and paper. He has updated his process to digital composing with the computer notation software Sibelius. However, the way Mellits uses the program is more akin to using a pencil and paper since he does not use Sibelius as a sequencer and rarely employs the playback feature. He prefers to work only with the sound of the acoustic piano, with the computer program serving as a graphic organizer. He can then easily orchestrate the parts from a

⁵⁶ Marc Mellits, accessed March 11, 2018, <https://www.marcmellits.com/nyt-tight-sweater>.

⁵⁷ Frank Herron, "Marc Mellits: a life surrounded by music," *Syracuse Post-Standard* (Syracuse), January 26, 2006.

⁵⁸ Marc Mellits, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.marcmellits.com/orpheus>.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

short piano score to a full score. The move to a computer represented a major shift in his compositional method; however, Mellits has stated that the best computer sequencer you could ever have is your brain.⁶⁰

The compositional process for Mellits always begins the same way: having no idea where to start the piece.⁶¹ Before writing a note, Mellits imagines himself shrinking down to crawl inside the instruments to understand how they work and how they feel when resonating.⁶² From there, he thinks about how they might fill up the performance space:

So, instead of finding the music, I am just chipping away at the space and letting the music come out. If I think about it that way, the music is already there; it is really freeing, much like a sculptor looks at a rock and sees the sculpture on the inside. Music really is the same thing. Music is in that silence; it's in that space. It is trapped in those instruments. It just needs to get out.⁶³

Mellits has stated that the notes never start stylistically but rather idiomatically.⁶⁴ While composing at the piano, Mellits comes up with ideas that are natural for the instrument for which he is writing.⁶⁵ To him, practicality is of the utmost importance. Mellits describes this part of the process: “I think about what the instrument can do really well, what the instrument can't do well and then come up with ideas that I think are born in

⁶⁰ Marc Mellits, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.marc mellits.com/orpheus>.

⁶¹ Mellits, interview, 2016.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

those instruments and start playing around with them.”⁶⁶ From there, Mellits proceeds to realize the pitch content, the rhythm, the harmony, and the orchestration.⁶⁷

Once an initial idea is germinated, he builds the piece or movement around it. Mellits has compared his writing process to a constructionist’s point of view of building a house, making soup, or chipping away as a sculptor at the music that is already in the space.⁶⁸ That first idea is rarely the beginning of the piece; the piece, therefore, does not grow in a linear fashion. The initial idea tends to be fodder for the middle of the piece, and from there the piece develops. These ideas are given numbers and letters for each different version that he composes and are kept in an “ideas” folder: “They are all numbered at that point; Idea 5C, Idea 7E. I’ll have different versions [of each idea].”⁶⁹ These ideas may end up in a marimba solo, a saxophone quartet, a string orchestra, or another mixed chamber ensemble, but they all stem from the same process.

Mellits’s compositional method consists of complex mathematical processes that work themselves over time.⁷⁰ He wants to write music that he thinks of as being “complicated simple music.”⁷¹ When everything comes together with the pitch and rhythm, there must be more than one reason why those things appear in the piece. Mellits has mentioned that he likes to play with different compositional aspects like a game:

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Marc Mellits, accessed May 20, 2017, <https://www.marc mellits.com/margen>

⁶⁸ Mellits, interview, 2016.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Marc Mellits, email correspondence with Oliver Molina, Jan. 7 2018.

⁷¹ Marc Mellits, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.marc mellits.com/orpheus>.

playing around with pitches by moving or substituting one with another “like the bricks in a house that are positioned in certain patterns and still support the structure.”⁷² He also uses rhythmic displacement by inserting rests and moving the rhythms around until they cycle back to the beginning. He employs these methods to develop more and more material.⁷³

Since Mellits’s primary instrument is the piano, he believes in collaborating with performers during the compositional process to ensure that the music is playable and accessible. While he was a composition student at Eastman, he often asked classmates to read through parts to help facilitate rewrites. This collaborative process is a vital part of his current composition curriculum, and he instructs all his composition students to do the same. Mellits also warns them about the use of notational software that makes the playback of the compositions sound pleasant even though the music may not be practical in real-life performances. As a result of the number of pieces Mellits has composed over the years, he has become very acquainted with what instruments can and cannot do.⁷⁴ Through this collaborative effort, Mellits has become more familiar with particular instruments, such as the marimba or the violin.⁷⁵

Some of Mellits’s commissions have resulted from performers wishing for new versions of his older works with different instrumentation. Since he aims to write idiomatically, his pieces often work well for similar instruments or instrument families.⁷⁶

⁷² Marc Mellits, accessed May 20, 2017, <https://www.marcmellits.com/margen>

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Mellits, interview, 2016.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

For example, one of his most popular pieces, *Black* (2006), originally written for two bass clarinets, has versions arranged for two saxophones, two marimbas, two cellos, two violins, two bassoons, two tubas, a saxophone quartet, and a bassoon quartet.⁷⁷ This versatility of instrumentation allows each piece to have maximum availability for performers.

The last part of the compositional process for Mellits involves giving a title to the work. Mellits's works stand out in a program with titles such as *paranoid cheese*⁷⁸ (2001), *Tight Sweater* (2005), or *Green* (2016), as well as movement names such as "Wedge I," "Pickled Trousers," and "The Seduction of Brie." The titles are usually short and descriptive and are open for interpretation: "It is fun for the audience to try to come up with the meaning behind the title. Sometimes there is no meaning whatsoever, [but] sometimes there is a meaning, or more often, multiple meanings."⁷⁹ Mellits does not want to give listeners pre-conceived notions of how the music is going to sound. Ambiguous titles that do not allude to a particular style of music – in the way that Sonata No.1 or Symphony No. 5 might – can help set the audience at ease. Instead, he wants the ears and the mind to decide how the music will be accepted and interpreted.⁸⁰ Mellits elaborates further:

When you go to a concert and you see something called *Tight Sweater*, you let your guard down right away. You don't have to worry about when to clap. You don't have to worry about what you're wearing even. I think when you title

⁷⁷ Marc Mellits, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.marc mellits.com/works>.

⁷⁸ The title of this work is listed in all lower case in the score. The work titled *Paranoid Cheese* refers to the album of music produced by the Mellits Consort.

⁷⁹ Marc Mellits, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.marc mellits.com/orpheus>.

⁸⁰ Marc Mellits, accessed May 20, 2017, <https://www.marc mellits.com/margen>

something *Tight Sweater*, you try to get some of that crap out of the way so that they can approach the music cleaner. That's all, that's the only reason I do that. Just kind of break down some barriers.⁸¹

Many of the unique titles were suggestions from friends, especially his good friend and guitarist Dominic Frasca.⁸² Often, the titles of the pieces and movements are given after the piece is completely finished since they are not programmatic but abstract in nature.

Once the piece is complete, Mellits is never satisfied with the final product. He states, “All I hear are the mistakes I made or how I could have done it better. It could be better. Could be tighter. I'm very picky.”⁸³ A piece is done “enough” when he puts the final bar line in the music. However, he always finds places in the music where he could have written something differently. Due to this critical nature, when people ask which piece his favorite is, he answers that he does not like any of them.⁸⁴

Writing for marimba

It was in junior high school, when he was enrolled at Peabody, that Mellits first encountered the sounds of the marimba. Since then, the marimba has become Mellits's favorite instrument to write for and, most recently, play.⁸⁵ He is enamored by the sound that it makes, especially the mallet choices that produce different tones and shades of color.⁸⁶ Mellits often prefers the use of rubber mallets on the marimba because of the

⁸¹ Mellits, interview, 2016.

⁸² Marc Mellits, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.marc mellits.com/orpheus>.

⁸³ Mellits, interview, 2016.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ With the two versions of *Gravity*, Mellits often performs the fifth part on bass marimba with a percussion quartet.

⁸⁶ Mellits, interview, 2016.

contact noise and tone they can create.⁸⁷ After working with several percussionists over the years, he has realized there are other mallets with yarn or cord-wrapped heads that can create great colors on the instrument as well.⁸⁸ Mellits uses the marimba in his works frequently because he finds that the sound quality combined with this compositional style acts like a sonic glue to keep the ensemble together.⁸⁹

His writing style for the marimba has evolved over the years. Mellits was given some practical advice by one of his composition teachers, Jacob Druckman, whose solo marimba piece *Reflections on the Nature of Water* (1986) has become part of the standard marimba repertoire. Druckman informed Mellits that he composed his marimba solo at the piano using only two fingers at a time on each hand, usually the thumb and pinky finger.⁹⁰ Druckman figured that, if he could play like this on the piano, it could be written for the marimba.⁹¹ Mellits applied this method in several of his earlier pieces.

Mellits also learned how to write for the marimba through trial and error. Several of the first marimba parts he wrote were quite difficult to play. *Disciples of Gouda* (2003), a piece where Mellits admittedly did not follow Druckman's compositional advice, was deemed almost beyond playable according to percussionist Joseph Gramley.⁹² These pieces, however, do not reflect his current idiomatic, practical

⁸⁷ Marc Mellits, email correspondence with Oliver Molina, Jan. 7, 2018.

⁸⁸ Mellits, interview, 2016.

⁸⁹ There are 34 pieces that use marimba to date.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Joseph Gramley is a Professor of Percussion and Director of Percussion Studies at the University of Michigan.

compositional style. It was not until the marimba solo *Zodiac* (2016) that Mellits composed at the marimba for the first time.

Percussion writing style

Mellits's percussion writing has changed over the years, as he has written more and more for the instrument family. His first chamber piece using percussion was *Polysorbate 60* (1994). The piece calls for seventeen different percussion instruments played by one person (Figure 3.1).

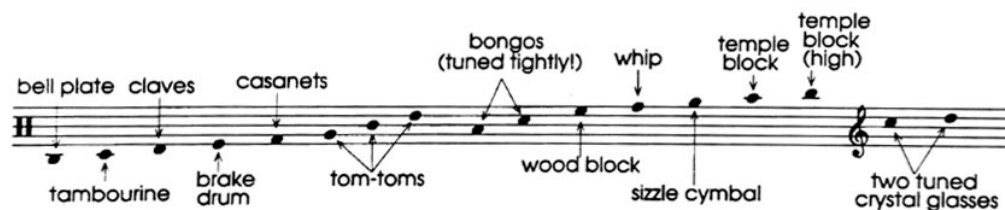


Figure 3.1. *Polysorbate 60*, Percussion Notation Legend

To gain insight on percussion instruments when writing *Polysorbate 60*, Mellits enlisted the help of percussionist Danny Tunick, who would later become the marimbist for the Mellits Consort. Tunick helped by providing advice as well as articles on how to write for percussion.⁹³

The percussion part in *Polysorbate 60* is mainly used in conjunction with the other instruments to create different timbres to add colors during impact points and unison hits. Figure 3.2 displays the percussion part played on bongos in tandem with brass, string bass, and piano.

⁹³ Mellits, interview, 2016.

97

Fl. *(cresc.)* *fff*

Ob. *(cresc.)* *fff*

Cl. *(cresc.)* *fff*

Tpt. *(cresc.)* *f*

Trb. *(cresc.)* *f*

Tuba *(cresc.)* *fff*

Pno. *(cresc.)* *fff*

Perc. *(cresc.)* *fff*

Vln. *(cresc.)* *fff*

D.B. *(cresc.)* *fff*

Figure 3.2. *Polysorbate 60*, mm. 97–100

There are a few instances when the percussion part serves as transitional material, much like a drum fill. However, as the percussion use is minimal, the nine other instrumentalists contribute the bulk of the musical content. The percussion writing is in

an orchestral model, as it only uses one instrument at a time instead of taking a multiple-percussion approach that intertwines the sounds of several instruments. His use of percussion would soon change with the next few pieces that followed *Polysorbate 60*.

Mellits first used the marimba in his 1998 chamber piece *Troica*. The piece was written for an amplified trio of instruments: flute, guitar, and marimba. All three parts are equal in musical content, as the instrument voices interact and weave in and out of the texture (Figure 3.3).

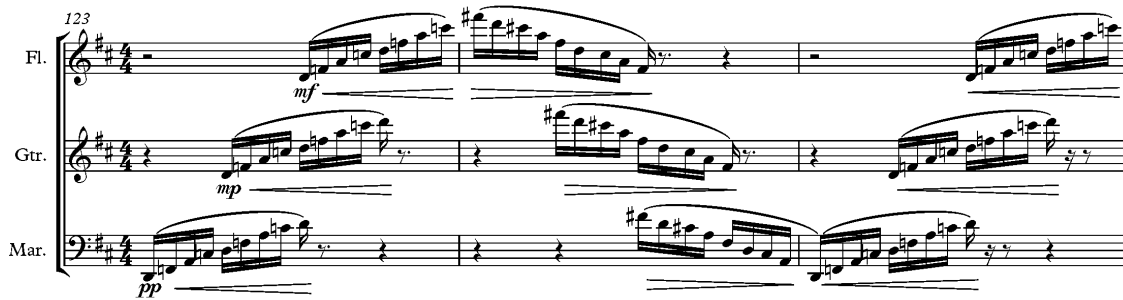


Figure 3.3. *Troica*, mm. 123–125

In this piece, the marimba part proves to be challenging, as the notes are spread across four octaves of the instrument, with quick arpeggios and runs. The guitar part carries the heaviest load of the musical material, serving as the sonic glue to keep the ensemble together (Figure 3.4).



Figure 3.4. *Troica*, mm. 146–149

The marimba part, like the flute part, acts more like a single-line instrument. Mellits had not fully realized the capabilities of the marimba to add to the ensemble sound, as he would demonstrate in subsequent pieces.

As in many of his other pieces, the instrumentation in *Troica* is flexible, and Mellits gave alternate instrument suggestions, including the marimba part being played by a piano, the flute part by a violin, and the guitar part by an electric guitar or a piano, without doubling the instrumentation. Due to the virtuosity needed to play this piece, it has rarely been performed, and the only available recording of the piece is by the Kevin Gallagher Trio with all parts on three guitars, replacing the marimba and the flute.⁹⁴

The peak of Mellits's difficult marimba music is found in the duet for violin and marimba *paranoid cheese* (2001). The six-movement piece showcases virtuosity required for both instruments. As previously mentioned, many of his early marimba parts are extremely difficult to play, and *paranoid cheese* is no exception. The difficulty of playing the marimba parts comes from note accuracy while playing perfect-fifth intervals in accompaniment figures over several measures, fast arpeggiated runs, and the challenge of playing a bass line under a "dead-stroked" melody that spans over two octaves. Mellits also wrote two versions of the fourth movement: one for four mallets and another for six mallets.⁹⁵

During the early 2000s, Mellits's compositions started to gain consistency in terms of instrumentation. Many of the pieces were written for a chamber-ensemble setting, as demonstrated by the fact that the composer formed his own group, the Mellits

⁹⁴ Marc Mellits, accessed March 1, 2018, <https://www.marc mellits.com/works>.

⁹⁵ Performing with six mallets on marimba is not widely taught or used with only a handful of pieces that require it.

Consort. The first piece for this type of instrumentation was *5 Machines* (2000), written for an amplified sextet. At the core of these pieces is the marimba, and its role in the ensemble functions as the sonic glue that Mellits enjoys using. The piece also has parts for vibraphone, brake drums, and tom-toms, all performed one at a time by a single performer.

The marimba is used the most among all the percussion instruments throughout the different movements: “Machine I,” “Machine II,” the second half of “Machine IV,” and almost all of “Machine V.” The marimba shares rhythmic and harmonic responsibility alongside the piano and adds to the texture and timbre of the unison chords (Figure 3.5).

118

B. Cl.

Guit.

Vc.

Bs.

Mar.

Pno.

Figure 3.5. *5 Machines*, “Machine V”, mm. 118–121

“Machine IV” utilizes the vibraphone as a single instrument, creating long melodies over sustained notes. The vibraphone is bowed to mimic the treble clef of the piano part, creating a bell-like quality to the piano when combined with the sustained pitch of the vibraphone. The brake drums are used sparsely to accentuate certain notes coming from

71

B. Cl.

Guit.

Vc.

Bs.

Perc.

Pno.

fff

fff

fff

(arco)

Tom-toms

fff

fff

fff

Figure 3.6. 5 *Machines*, “Machine IV”,
mm. 71–72

The Mellits Consort album *Paranoid Cheese* was released in 2007 and showcases eleven of Mellits’s original compositions that share similar compositional qualities with *5 Machines*. The marimba is the only percussion instrument used in the consort, as it helps drive the pulse and keep the ensemble together. Some of the pieces have been reimagined to fit the newly formed ensemble. Pieces such as *Troica*, *paranoid cheese*, and movements from *5 Machines* (“Machine III” and “Machine IV”) have been rearranged, finding new life with this amplified instrumentation of the Mellits Consort.

After Mellits composed *5 Machines*, he wrote more works with marimba, and his use of the instrument developed a style of its own. He often combines the marimba part with another instrument to create a thicker sound. The marimba and piano drive the pulse rhythmically and often share pitch content. The two also play off one another rhythmically and texturally within the chord voicing (Figure 3.7). Using tremolos or rolls, the marimba adds sustain to the ensemble's overall sound (Figure 3.8). The marimba musically connects everything together as an anchored ensemble member with parts that are steady and that fit into the texture in an accompaniment-style role (Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.7. *Srečan Rodenadan, Marija!*, mm. 145–148

21 **B**

Vln. *always bring out arco; espr;*

Vc. *mp*

E. Gtr. *mp*

Mar. *p tremolo all chords*

Pno.

Figure 3.8. *Mara's Lullaby*, mm. 21–28

37 **Low Claves**

Fl. I *cresc*

Fl. II **High Claves** *cresc*

B. Cl. I *cresc*

B. Cl. II *cresc*

Vln. **Egg Shaker** *cresc*

Vc. *cresc*

Mar. I *cresc*

Mar. II *cresc*

Piano *cresc*

8th

Figure 3.9. *240 Weeks*, “Nina’s Dance”, mm. 37–40

Although the marimba has become Mellits's favorite instrument to compose for, he has involved several other instruments from the percussion family over the course of his career. As previously mentioned, *Polysorbate 60* uses a random assortment of seventeen different percussion instruments. *Groove Canon* (2002) calls for the use of prayer bowls, bongos, congas, Brazilian *tamborin*, *axatses*, closed hi-hats, Tibetan cymbals, and an assortment of other unpitched percussion instruments for improvisation. In *240 Weeks* (2007), a pair of percussionists have to use a similar setup of instruments: a marimba, five tom-toms, two brake drums, a metal tube, a slapstick, and a glockenspiel. In the chamber piece *Prime* (2008), Mellits left the instrument selection unspecified by only referring to certain types of sounds instead of naming each particular instrument.⁹⁶

Another notable aspect of Mellits's percussion writing is his use of improvisation in non-pitched percussion parts. This can also be found in any of the pieces that include a drum set (Figure 3.10).

9

The figure shows a musical score for three staves: Vc. (Violoncello), Pno. (Piano), and D.S. (Drum Set). The Vc. and Pno. staves are in 3/4 time and feature a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes. The D.S. staff is in 3/4 time and features a simple rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. A bracket labeled '8th' spans the 8th measure of the Vc. and Pno. staves, with a note below it stating: 'Basic 4/4 beat + 3 extra (4/4 + 3/4, NOT 3/4 + 4/4 as meters suggest!)'. The D.S. staff has a slash in the 8th measure, indicating a specific drum set pattern.

Figure 3.10. *Canonda*, mm 9–12

⁹⁶ From the music score: The above list of percussion instruments contains both specific instruments as well as three instrument groups: metal, skin, & wood. When a group is asked for (metal, skin, wood), the choice of the actual instrument within the group type is left up to the performers. Any struck instrument with great sound is acceptable. For example, the metal group could include brake drums, the wood group could be a set of four woodblocks, and the skin group could be tom-toms. The percussionists themselves are best suited in finding great sounding choices within their arsenal of instruments.

Mellits outlined the form but gave no indication of style, rhythm, or grooves except the word “improvise.” In *Disciples of Gouda* (2003), a possible rhythm is suggested, but all the hand-percussion parts are to be improvised (Figure 3.11). Due to the inherent idiomatic nature of these instruments Mellits allows the percussion performer to interpret the piece and decide on the music that fits the character of the work.

50

Vc.

Mba.

Pc.

Pno.

(possible perc. suggestion)

f

(smooth)

8^{va}

54

(dashed slurs indicate phrasings, not bowings)

improvise

8

Figure 3.11. *Disciples of Gouda*, mm. 50–57

CHAPTER 4: Works for solo percussion

Of the 163 pieces that Marc Mellits has composed to date, 13 are for large ensembles, 119 are for chamber ensembles, 28 are for solo instruments and 3 are scores for films.⁹⁷ Mellits prefers to write for chamber ensembles as opposed to writing pieces for solo instruments. He is fascinated by the combinations of sounds that can be produced by ensembles: “I write very little solo music because I like socially just music. I like everyone working together. It’s the connections and combinations of the instruments that fit together like a puzzle.”⁹⁸

Because of this affinity for writing for a chamber or large ensemble, Mellits perceives writing solo literature as challenging and as requiring a completely different mindset and manner of thinking when composing.⁹⁹ However, when writing for solo marimba, he experienced the process as liberating because the music “was not bound to other sounds.”¹⁰⁰ This enabled him to compose music that is more virtuosic for a solo performer relative to his writing for chamber ensembles.¹⁰¹ Of his twenty-eight solos, two are for percussion instruments: *Stick* was written for the snare drum, and *Zodiac* was written for the marimba.

⁹⁷ Large ensembles include the orchestra, band, or choir. Chamber ensembles also include duets and trios. There are 19 solos with accompaniment or concerti, and 22 are strictly instrumental solos.

⁹⁸ Mellits, interview, 2016.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

***Stick* (2010)**

The snare drum solo *Stick* was commissioned by Tom Sherwood, a percussionist in the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (ASO), for the 2010 Modern Snare Drum Competition hosted by the ASO. The performance competition is an annual event which is intended to promote and advance the art of snare drumming. It endeavors to expand the existing snare drum repertoire through the commissioning of new works and the exposure of the percussion community to notable works for the instrument that are less well-known.¹⁰² In its second year, Sherwood began to commission composers to write specifically for the competition. He attempts to commission one or two composers for the annual contest, alternating between percussionist-composers and non-percussionist-composers each year.¹⁰³ Since 2009, eighteen new snare pieces have been commissioned and written by a variety of composers. Mellits was the second composer commissioned and the first non-percussionist-composer to write for the competition.

The competition involves two levels of participants divided by age. Division I participants are under twenty-five years old. They compete in three distinct rounds, in which different repertoire is judged in terms of musicality, technique, and interpretation. Division II competitors are nineteen and under, and they compete in two rounds of different music. *Stick* was selected for the Division I-level competitors. It was premiered in Atlanta, Georgia at the Woodruff Arts Center on June 13, 2010 during the final round

¹⁰² “Modern Snare Drum Competition.” Modern Snare Drum Competition. Accessed December 27, 2017. <http://www.modernsnaredrum.com/>.

¹⁰³ Tom Sherwood, email correspondence with Oliver Molina. December 27, 2017.

for the Division I-level finalists. *Stick* was selected again in 2013 for the Division II-level participants.

Background and notes

In 2008, Sherwood was introduced to Mellits's music at the Strange Beautiful Music Festival, a three-day marathon of contemporary music in Detroit, Michigan.¹⁰⁴ This was hosted by New Music Detroit and Sherwood's wife was performing at the festival where Mellits was a featured composer. Because he was interested in Mellits's music, Sherwood purchased the Mellits Consort album *Paranoid Cheese* and maintained contact with him.¹⁰⁵ To help pay for the commission, Sherwood procured the assistance of several of his percussion friends, including Marc Damoulakis, Charles Settle, and Ian Ding.¹⁰⁶ Sherwood was hands-off in the writing process but provided notational suggestions before the piece was published.¹⁰⁷ Mellits, however, enlisted the help of local Syracuse percussionist Rob Bridge¹⁰⁸ during the compositional process. They initially met through the Society of New Music, based in Syracuse, New York, and have collaborated on several occasions to perform various works by Mellits, Reich, and others.

¹⁰⁴ Sherwood, email correspondence, 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Marc Damoulakis is the Principal percussionist with the Cleveland Orchestra and faculty member at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Charles Settle is a former percussionist with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, and current principal percussion with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Ian Ding is the former assistant principal percussionist with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and faculty member at the University of Michigan.

¹⁰⁷ Sherwood, email correspondence, 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Professor of Music at Onondaga Community College in Syracuse, New York.

Since he had never written a snare drum solo, Mellits experimented with the sounds the singular instrument could produce. He borrowed a snare drum from Bridge to explore his sound choices: “I didn't realize that a snare drum had maybe three or four different ways of hitting it. The first thing I did was to figure out how many sounds [it] can do. I made a list. Then I started to come up with material that worked with my sounds.”¹⁰⁹ Using a key of eighteen different methods of striking the drum (Figure 4.1), *Stick* creates thematic material through unique timbres that are not commonplace in most snare drum solos.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Mellits, interview, 2016.

¹¹⁰ In Figure 4.1, numbers were assigned to the notation key for ease of clarification throughout the document.

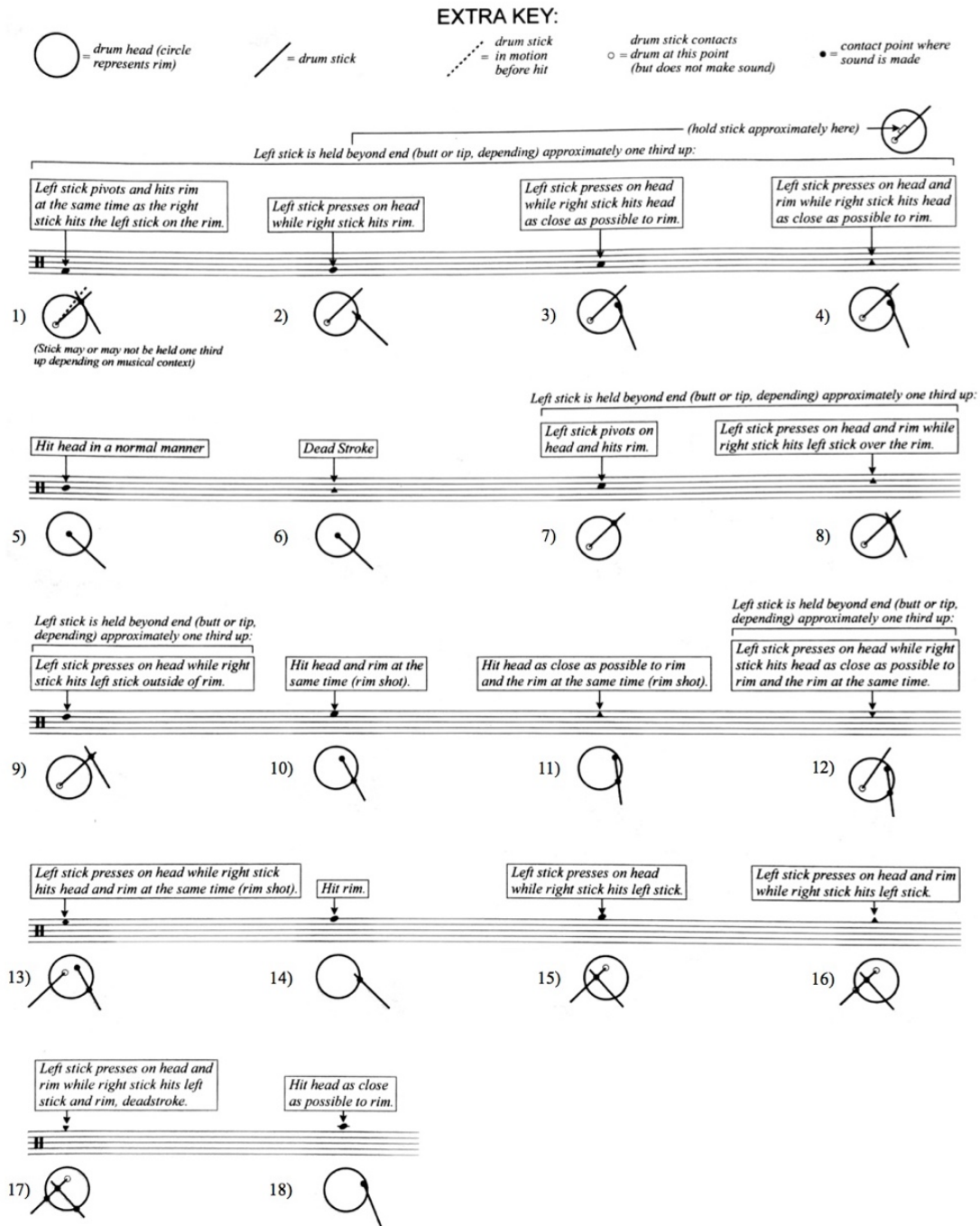


Figure 4.1. *Stick*, Notation Key

In addition to loaning Mellits a snare drum to enable him to compose *Stick*, Bridge offered his assistance during the compositional process and was the first to read through the piece. Both Mellits and Bridge recalled a similar friendly interaction in which

Bridge was unable to sight-read through the initial sketches of the piece. Bridge could not read more than a measure at once because of the myriad of special symbols and playing techniques. Mellits played through the opening of the piece for him, and Bridge conceded that Mellits was highly competent and that he therefore did not require substantial help writing the piece. Since then, Bridge has performed the piece several times, and Mellits has been pleased with his interpretation of the piece.¹¹¹

Form and structure

Stick is a *fantasia* because of its lack of musical form. However, it is organized by rehearsal marks into eight distinct sections. Each section contains limited thematic material and is based on minimal material from previous sections. In terms of tempo, the piece is divided into three major sections. The piece begins with a tempo of quarter note equaling 156, and after a metric modulation at m. 82, the tempo changes to quarter note equaling 234. At m. 143, the piece returns to the original tempo of quarter note equaling 156. The form can be further analyzed using different sound techniques and rhythmic vocabulary. Table 4.1 indicates the overall form.

Table 4.1. *Stick* formal analysis

Section (rehearsal marks)	Measure numbers	Form
Introduction	1–27	A
A	28–58	B
B	59–67	C
C	68–83	D
D	84–93	E
E	94–142	F
F	143–149	G
G	150–155	H

¹¹¹ Mellits, interview, 2016.

Vocabulary

As an unconventional snare drum solo, *Stick* employs two rudiments, the roll and the flam. The roll, appearing only three times in the introduction, is designated with four tremolo marks in the score, but Mellits does not provide an indication of whether it should be interpreted as a closed (multiple bounce) or open (double stroke) roll. The flam is notated with a grace note, but it is not played in the traditional manner of using both sticks to create the desired effect. Instead, Mellits creates the flam effect with only one stick, by hitting the drumhead with one end immediately before the stick strikes the rim as a “rim knock” or “cross stick.”¹¹²

In lieu of pitches on a marimba or piano, Mellits mixes different timbres which result from hitting the drum. Using the key which includes the various symbols on the staff, Mellits creates sound sources by using the stick to hit the head, the rim, and the other stick. He also combines these strokes to create different timbres and tones by using different playing spots on the drum and pressing the left stick on the head. Table 4.2 categorizes the eighteen different sounds in terms of the primary surface that is struck.

Table 4.2. *Stick* sound techniques

Primary sound	Note head
Stick	1, 8, 9, 15, 16, 17
Rim	2, 7, 14
Head	3, 4, 5, 6, 18
Head and rim (rim shot)	10, 11, 12, 13

Table 4.3 further classifies the sounds into groups that are created by combining the primary sources or by pressing on the head to yield a different tone. In addition to the

¹¹² A rim knock or cross stick is a sound created when the stick pivots on the head and hits the rim.

timbres mentioned below, the performer is asked to change the pitch of the drum by moving the stick from the edge and toward the center of the head while holding the stick in the cross-stick position.

Table 4.3. *Stick* sound technique combinations

Sound combination	Note head
Head pressing combo	2, 3, 4, 7, 12, 13, 15, 17
Stick, head, and rim combo	1, 8, 9, 16, 17

To aid in the learning process, Mellits suggests learning each individual section of the piece separately.¹¹³ He limits the number of playing techniques in each section. All of the possible sounds are never used within any given section of the piece. This ensures that the piece is formally cohesive and prevents confusion related to reading the notation. Since Mellits is highly cognizant of what the drum can do and of how the sticks can perform different sounds, he allows time to quickly transition between playing techniques or playing positions. Table 4.4 presents a breakdown of the number of different techniques used in each section.

Table 4.4. *Stick* sound techniques per section

Section	Number of sound techniques
Top–A	8
A–B	6
B–C	7
C–D	7
D–E	4
E–F	5
F–G	7
G–end	1

¹¹³ Mellits, interview, 2016.

Rhythm and texture

Mellits utilizes rhythm to develop themes, phrasing, and formal structures. The rhythmic vocabulary implemented is limited to quarter notes, eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and eighth-note triplets. Mellits combines these rhythms into different groupings through twenty-seven different time-signatures. Duple rhythms drive the piece until m. 69, when eighth-note triplets are introduced. This subtle rhythmic change shifts the texture of the piece, and beginning at m. 82, Mellits employs the eighth-note triplet to metrically modulate to a faster tempo.

Once the piece begins, the sticks are in constant motion, creating a thick texture by filling the sonic space with rhythms that continually flow from one phrase to the next and from one idea to another. Several moments of respite appear in the form of transitory material. On these occasions, one stick and hand finish the phrase, thereby allowing the other hand time to prepare for the next section and allowing for less dense rhythmic material before the beginning of the subsequent phrase (Figures 4.2, 4.3, 4.4).

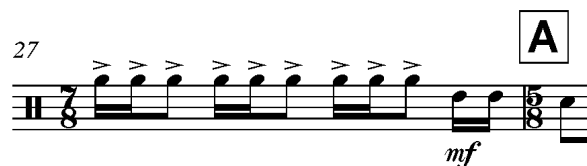


Figure 4.2. *Stick*, m. 27

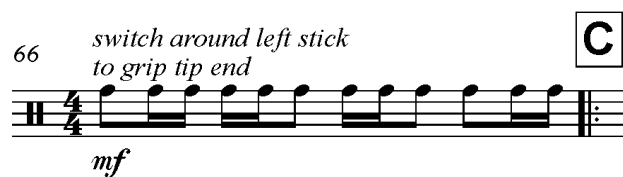


Figure 4.3. *Stick*, m. 66



Figure 4.4. *Stick*, mm. 81–83

Thematic material

In m. 9, a thematic rhythm consisting of eight notes is first used (Figure 4.5). Written in 13/16 time, this rhythmic theme is used twelve times throughout the piece and serves to provide interjections which help connect the entire piece. In m. 103, the rhythm appears again, but it is converted into eighth notes due to the faster tempo and meter change (Figure 4.6). After a sudden shift back to the initial tempo, this main theme is re-introduced in its original form at m. 143 and is interspersed between previous themes.



Figure 4.5. *Stick*, m. 9



Figure 4.6. *Stick*, m. 103

Additive and subtractive rhythms can be observed throughout the piece; they serve to build phrasing. In the introduction, an example of additive rhythms is used over a three-measure idea. The initial statement of the idea is found in mm. 4–6 (Figure 4.7). The subsequent two instances of this theme appear in mm. 11–13 and mm. 18–20. Mellits elongates the phrase by including an eighth note at the end of the phrase before transitioning to a three-count roll (Figures 4.8 and 4.9).



Figure 4.7. *Stick*, mm. 4–6



Figure 4.8. *Stick*, mm. 11–14



Figure 4.9. *Stick*, mm. 18–21

At m. 28, Mellits develops this section through rhythmic palindromes of additive rhythms. The groupings begin with one eighth note, followed by two sixteenth notes. The eighth notes continue to be added individually up to three and then back down from three to one, in a palindromic form (Figure 4.10). Beginning at m. 35, after an interjection of the main rhythmic theme, this phrase is repeated using different timbres and techniques as seen with different noteheads (Figure 4.11). Mellits uses this palindromic idea again at m. 41 with different grouping of rhythms.



Figure 4.10. *Stick*, mm. 28–29



Figure 4.11. *Stick*, mm. 34–36

Another use of a palindrome, on a larger scale, occurs in section E. Beginning at m. 107 a series of alternating 4/4, 6/8, and 2/4 bars is stated over an eight-measure phrase. All of the 6/8 and 2/4 measures are grouped as follows: 6, 2, 6, 2, 6, 6, 2, 2. A transition bar in 3/4 time at m. 123 reverses the beat, and the phrase is then presented in reverse order, as follows: 2, 2, 6, 6, 2, 6, 2, 6 (Figure 4.12).



Figure 4.12. *Stick*, mm. 107–139

Aside from rhythmic themes, Mellits creates a “melodic” theme with a specific sequence of timbres or sounds. First found in m. 72 as eighth-note triplets, the sounds and motions alternate between the stick, head, and rim (Figure 4.13). The entire section from mm. 72–87 develops this idea, but it is also apparent in eighth notes in m. 110. These variations are employed alongside different rhythms and across various time signatures. This theme moves at a quicker pace and finally climaxes at m. 142, immediately before the repetition of the main theme at m. 143 (Figure 4.14).

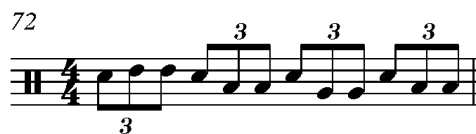


Figure 4.13. *Stick*, m. 72

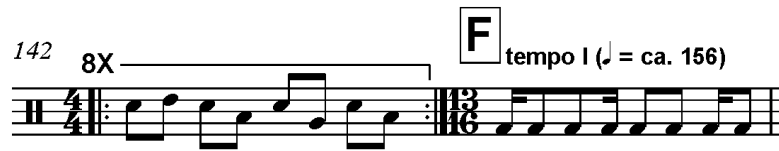


Figure 4.14. *Stick*, mm. 142–143

Performance notes

On April 17, 2016, a concert exclusively comprising Mellits's music was performed in celebration of his fiftieth birthday at Constellation¹¹⁴ in Chicago, IL. During the concert, *Stick* was performed by percussionist Chris Sies¹¹⁵ on an amplified snare drum. Mellits highly appreciated the sound of the piece with amplification and recommended that, if possible, the piece should be played in this manner with subtle reverberation, which can accentuate the subtle nuances of the timbre changes.¹¹⁶ Sherwood also suggests playing the piece at a softer dynamic level than marked to achieve clarity in timbre differences.¹¹⁷ The piece begins with *fortissimo* stick-on-stick accented rim shots; the remainder of the piece is not marked lower than a *mezzo forte*.

For most of the piece, the left stick is in a cross-stick or rim-knock position. Of the 155 written measures, only 44 (28%) involve the normal snare drum playing position of both sticks on the head. In the remaining 111 measures (72%), the left stick is in the cross-stick playing position. To achieve consistency while alternating the stick between

¹¹⁴ Constellation is an alternative chamber venue on Chicago's northwest side founded in April 2013 by drummer/composer Mike Reed. Constellation's mission is to present progressive performance and forward-thinking music with a focus on jazz, improvisation, and contemporary classical.

¹¹⁵ Chris Sies is a freelance percussion performer and educator. He is currently on faculty at Baylor University.

¹¹⁶ Mellits, interview, 2016.

¹¹⁷ Sherwood, email correspondence, 2017.

the different playing positions, it may be beneficial to the percussionist to find or place markings on the stick to aim for a consistent tone across the various techniques. On the drum, the percussionist could execute consistent rim knocks by using a tension rod as a guide to hit the same part of the drum each time. The quality of sound is better if the playing spot or area remains reliable.

Mellits does not specify the type of drum or stick necessary to perform his snare drum solo. However, during the compositional process, Mellits experimented on a Ludwig Black Beauty snare drum. This drum has a brass shell, which creates a distinct metal sound or resonance that differs from wood shell snare drums. A metal shell drum is recommended to produce the sounds envisioned during the compositional process. Due to the technical demands of the piece, a lighter or thinner stick, such as a 5A, can enable the athleticism necessary to perform the work.

Stick is a unique solo from a non-percussionist composer. Mellits uses different sounds, techniques, and notation not commonly used in most snare drum literature. *Stick* also strays from Mellits's use of pitched instruments in his compositions; it is the only solo he has written for a non-pitched instrument. The piece can be intimidating at first glance but once you decipher the notation and the playing techniques, the piece is very manageable to learn and play. The five-minute solo is also accessible for audiences and would be good to program for both educational and professional venues.

***Zodiac* (2016)**

Zodiac is a twelve-movement marimba solo that was commissioned through a consortium of thirty percussionists.¹¹⁸ This tour-de-force marimba solo displays a broad array of musical character through different movements, which correspond to each of the astrological signs. *Zodiac* was premiered by Peter Ferry¹¹⁹ as part of the world premiere consortium cycle at the Thirsty Ears Classical Music Street Festival in Chicago, Illinois, on August 13th, 2016.

Background and notes

The idea for the commission was conceived by Tim Feerst.¹²⁰ He was first introduced to the music of Marc Mellits through the chamber piece *Tight Sweater* in a DMA recital by classmate Adam Groh at the University of Texas at Austin in 2011. Feerst also programmed *Tight Sweater* for one of his doctoral recitals at the University of North Texas. While perusing Mellits's works for percussion, Feerst noticed that Mellits had not written a marimba solo. Since he was familiar with the keyboard writing in pieces such as *Tight Sweater* and *Gravity*, Feerst was enthusiastic about commissioning Mellits for a marimba solo. Since Feerst had never commissioned a composer, he collaborated with Groh as a co-organizer to assemble the consortium.

¹¹⁸ Consortium members include: Justin Alexander, Alex Alfaro, Thad Anderson, Megan Arns, James Beauton, Andrew Bliss, Omar Carmentes, Pius Cheung, Ian Ding, Tommy Dobbs, Chris Eagles, Andrew Emerich, Tim Feerst, Peter Ferry, Matt Greenwood, Adam Groh, Matthew Halligan, Luke Hubley, Ji Hye Jung, John Kilkenny, Christopher Lizak, Joseph MacMorran, William Moersch, Oliver Molina, Doug Perkins, Michael Ptacin, Luis Rivera, David Saad, Chris Sies, and Annie Stevens.

¹¹⁹ Peter Ferry is a freelance percussionist based in Chicago.

¹²⁰ Tim Feerst currently serves as an Associate Instructor of Percussion at the University of Utah.

Feerst and Groh contacted Mellits to initiate the commission in 2015. Mellits agreed and (unexpectedly) had been intending to compose a marimba solo. Mellits expressed that he was “dying to write for solo marimba”¹²¹ and had previously begun to develop ideas for an uncommissioned piece. Mellits began to transcribe these ideas after he had collaborated with marimba artist Pius Cheung several years prior.¹²² Mellits was impressed by Cheung’s marimba playing to the extent that he was determined to write a solo with him in mind.¹²³

In addition to seeking the advice of percussionist Rob Bridge and borrowing his snare drum, Mellits also solicited the help of friends who owned marimbas. Mellits visited percussionists Ian Ding, Jordan Kamps¹²⁴, and Peter Ferry at their homes. Mellits practiced the bass marimba part of his mallet quintet *Gravity* but also devoted time to composing at the marimba. Peter Ferry was particularly instrumental during the compositional process. Upon the urgent request of Mellits, Ferry was one of the thirty who comprised the consortium. Living in Chicago, he was not distant from Mellits and offered to read through the music and allow Mellits to utilize his marimba to compose.¹²⁵ According to Mellits, he would frequent Ferry’s residence: “Show up with a six-pack and say, ‘Can I play your marimba?’ That usually works.”¹²⁶ With Ferry’s help, Mellits

¹²¹ Mellits, interview, 2016.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Jordan Kamps is a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Illinois at Chicago, teaching courses in percussion.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

learned what was possible and problematic on the marimba through his early sketches. During the compositional process, Ferry worked on and played through all of the movements of *Zodiac*.¹²⁷

Zodiac transformed through many drafts and versions. It was first titled *Green* and then *Carnage*, but Mellits settled on *Zodiac* after working through several old ideas. Mellits claimed that he had been writing this piece his whole life without realizing it: “Pieces I have been writing for cello, pieces I have written for other things that don't work always seemed to work for marimba, and they all went into *Zodiac*. I had gone through some of this old material, redoing it, and writing all the new material.”¹²⁸ Initially, Mellits had planned to write only eight movements. However, the plethora of musical material resulted in the addition of four more movements. Mellits determined that the title would be *Zodiac*, as a reference to the twelve astrological signs.¹²⁹

As each movement was written, Mellits began to pair the music with each horoscope; he loosely assigned the names of the movements to align with the characteristics of each astrological sign. Mellits notes that two of the movements written precisely align with their signs; Aries is the first movement and sign, and Pisces is the last movement and sign.¹³⁰ Other astrological names also paralleled the composed music: “‘Libra’ seemed to be Libra, ‘Scorpio’ seemed to be Scorpio. Oh, Capricorn! I always saw the music in ‘Capricorn’ being kind of goat-like and jumping around, and then it's

¹²⁷ This was accomplished either in person or via Skype sessions.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

the tenth sign, which is Capricorn, which is goat. This is definitely going to work for me as a title.”¹³¹ The remaining untitled movements were fit as effectively as possible with a suitable astrological sign. In keeping with Mellits’s practice, movements were titled after the music had been written.

General considerations

Although each movement differs in content, the entire piece is analyzed in terms of the major trends and tendencies which Mellits used. The piece is examined in terms of form and structure, harmony, rhythm and meter, texture, and thematic material. The following are some general considerations that can be applied to the overall piece in preparation for study or performance.

Each movement has a different character and style; the distinct tempo of each contributes to this. Additionally, some movements have an established tempo marked, while others have a tempo range recommendation listed. In *Zodiac*, Mellits is willing to vary the performance tempo. The score notes that “further +/- tempi possible; dynamics may be added where desired throughout.”¹³² Artistic interpretation may influence tempo because of the performer’s selection of mallets, technical challenges, specific instrument tendencies, or changes in the acoustics of the performance venue.¹³³ Mellits states, “There is no ideal tempo that will fit all the different versions. I am very loose with tempo, and I want people to find their own tempo.”¹³⁴ However, the tempo should not

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Marc Mellits, *Zodiac*, Dacia Music, 2016.

¹³³ Mellits, interview, 2016.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

drastically deviate from the tempo listed because this could change the character of the music. The acceptable tempo range would compare to the tempo ranges of *allegro*, *andante*, or *largo*; the prescribed tempo should align with the sound characteristics of the style. The tempos listed serve as a guideline; only differences of a few beats per minute faster or slower are recommended. This trend involving tempo ranges or “further tempi for performance” emerged only recently in Mellits’s music. It also used in his 2016 work for alto saxophone and marimba entitled *Escape*.

Mellits also allows the performer more freedom in terms of mallet selection and sticking options. In other pieces composed before *Zodiac*, Mellits had been highly specific about mallet suggestions for the marimba.¹³⁵ He prefers the sound of rubber mallets on marimbas for his music but has realized that other options are equally valid. Therefore, Mellits does not suggest certain mallets for any of the movements of *Zodiac*. He also does not specify stickings or how the music should be played technically. He does not include fingerings in his solo piano music or bowings in his solo violin music, and his solo marimba music does not differ in this respect. His idiomatic style of writing allows for ease in playability and avoids confusion about sticking choices.¹³⁶

Lastly, Mellits is concerned with the overall form and structure of the piece. If performed as an entire piece with all twelve movements, Mellits recommends that the work be played in the astrological order listed, beginning with “Aries” and ending with “Pisces.” This facilitates a flow between the different movements in terms of style and

¹³⁵ Mallet choice in his marimba duet *Red* is discussed in chapter 5.

¹³⁶ Mellits, interview, 2016.

tempo. If only select movements are performed, then no specification applies to the order of movements.

Form and structure

The twelve movements of *Zodiac* all vary in terms of thematic material, tempo, style, mood, rhythm, key signature, and texture. However, Mellits skillfully integrates the musical material through his use of form. Form is an important compositional tool which Mellits uses to create his music; it is also helpful for analyzing and describing the music.

Table 4.5 lists the forms for each for twelve movements of *Zodiac*.

Table 4.5. *Zodiac* formal analysis
by movement

Movement	Form
“Aries”	ABA’
“Taurus”	ABCD A’
“Gemini”	ABCDCA’
“Cancer”	AA’
“Leo”	AA’A’’A’’’A’’’’A’’’’’A’’’’’’
“Virgo”	ABA’
“Libra”	AA’A’’
“Scorpio”	ABCD A’
“Sagittarius”	ABCA’
“Capricorn”	ABCD A’
“Aquarius”	ABACDA’
“Pisces”	AA’

Although Mellits develops each movement in a different manner, 8 of the 12 movements use a general outline of ternary, or ABA, form. Mellits introduces an idea, develops the idea, and returns to the idea to end the movement. The overarching B section may be divided into multiple parts (as in BCDE form), with the movement ending with the return of the opening A section material. The return of the A section in the various movements is never an exact repetition from the beginning; instead, slight

variations are incorporated. These variations may be an octave transposition or the use of a slightly shorter phrase than the introduction.

On a smaller scale, nearly all of the phrases are in regular structures of two to four measures. Mellits seldom uses an odd number of measures. After four measures of material, Mellits slightly alters, develops, or transitions to another idea. A prime example of four-bar phrasing is visually apparent throughout the entire movement of “Capricorn.” The repeat signs and markings indicate a repetition of one measure four times or a two-measure idea twice. (Figure 4.15). This movement develops form through slight variations of pitches and chords that change across regular occurrences of four measures.

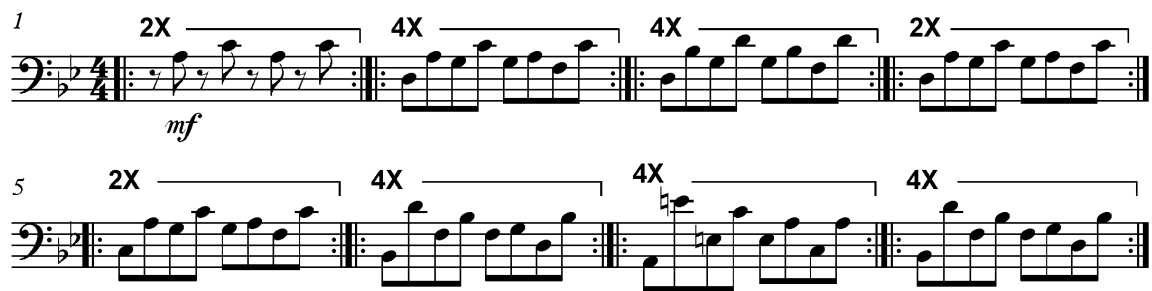


Figure 4.15. *Zodiac*, “Capricorn”, mm. 1–8

In addition to the ABA form, Mellits also includes binary and strophic forms in *Zodiac*. Binary form is used in the movements “Cancer” and “Pisces.” These movements immediately repeat the opening A section, but with slight changes in the A’ section. The movements “Leo” and “Libra” are in strophic form. “Libra” develops with a soprano melody that is varied throughout the repeating of the same twenty-six measure accompaniment. “Leo” develops over seven repetitions of an eight-measure phrase of the same chord progression. In this slow movement, musical interest is fostered through orchestration and voice-leading over the same chords.

Harmony

The harmonic language in *Zodiac* is primarily limited to diatonic harmonies. Major and minor sixth and seventh chords as well as an occasional dominant seventh chord permeate his harmonic language. To infuse a fresh sound to the music Mellits occasionally uses non-diatonic chords such as Neapolitan chords or chromatic mediant chords. For example, “Pisces,” which is in the key of C minor, only uses the following chords: C minor seventh, F minor seventh, E \flat major, G minor, G major, and the non-diatonic chords D \flat major seventh and A \flat minor. Throughout *Zodiac* the chords were meticulously selected by choosing chords and voicings that are closely related. The chords transition with minor adjustments which involve shifting as few as one note in a chord to the subsequent chord.

The chord selection may also be dictated by its harmonic function within descending and ascending stepwise bass motion within the progression. In the entire movement of “Capricorn,” chords develop over the stepwise changing bass notes. It begins with a D minor chord over a D4 bass note in m. 2, descends diatonically to C3, and then ascends back to the initial D minor chord.

Table 4.6. *Zodiac*, “Capricorn”,
Chord progression with bass notes

Measure number	Chord	Measure number	Chord
1	N/A	15	Dm
2	Dm7	16	Cm7
3	G/D	17–18	Dm7
4	Dm7	19–20	Cm7
5	Fadd2/C	21–22	Dm
6	B \flat	23–24	E \flat M7
7	Am	25	B \flat /F

Table 4.6 – continued

8	B ♭	26	Am
9	Am	27	Am/G
10	Am/G	28–29	Gm7/Bb
11	B ♭ /F	30–31	Fadd2/C
12	E ♭ M7	32	Dm7sus4
13	Dm7	33	Fadd2/C
14	E ♭ M7	34	Dm7

In addition, chords are voiced in a conventional manner, typically in root position. When chords are arpeggiated, the root of the chord begins the measure as the lowest note (Figure 4.16).

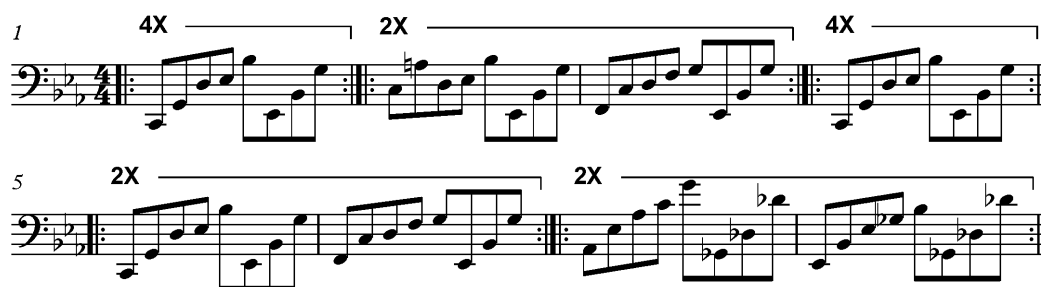


Figure 4.16. *Zodiac*, “Gemini”, m. 1–8

In addition to chord progressions, modes are used in lieu of harmonic changes. Linear melodic material is employed in C minor in “Scorpio” and in D minor in “Taurus.” The key signatures or key centers in *Zodiac* remain primarily centered around the natural or white notes of the marimba and within a minor key. Five of the movements are in C minor, three are in E minor, two are in D minor, and one is in each of the following: A minor, B minor, and G mixolydian.¹³⁷ These key signatures are prevalent because Mellits has an affinity for the sound of the lower range of the marimba, which

¹³⁷ Aquarius shares material in both A minor and C Minor.

has a lowest note of C3.¹³⁸ All of the movements utilize bass clef, with the exception of a grand staff used in the movement “Libra.”

Rhythm and meter

The majority of the rhythms used in *Zodiac* is limited to duple-based rhythms, primarily sixteenth notes. Eight of the twelve movements are largely developed over continuous eighth or sixteenth notes. Combinations of eighth and sixteenth notes appear in “Aries” and “Aquarius,” while “Leo” is a four-part chorale written in whole notes. “Cancer” and “Taurus” are the most rhythmically different from the remainder of the piece because of the inclusion of eighth-note triplets and sixteenth-note triplets.

Due to the lack of rhythmic variation, rhythmic interest must be fostered through different means. Note groupings and implied meters help to mitigate the monotony of the rhythm. This can be observed when the bass and melody notes are arranged within the measure. In “Virgo” a syncopated five-note bass line is utilized throughout the entire movement. The interaction of the bass line with the upper voice generates interest in the sound and rhythmic feel (Figure 4.17).



Figure 4.17. *Zodiac*, “Virgo”, mm. 1–5 with layers notated

¹³⁸ Earlier pieces that Mellits composed with marimba do not showcase the low tessitura. This may have been because Mellits may not have had been exposed to or had access to the larger range of a five-octave marimba.

[illegible]

The most interesting use of rhythmic variation occurs in the second phrase of the A section. After the sudden introduction of sixteenth-note triplets in m. 55, an eighth-note triplet overlaps the phrases in mm. 64–65. The use of the third partial of a major triad creates an implied eighth-note pulse before the phrase suddenly changes to a new key in the A section (Figure 4.19).

[illegible]

63

Texture

Various types of texture are created within each movement in *Zodiac*. Mellits employs a recurring compositional technique to create a full texture; this technique entails completely filling the aural space of the performance venue and ensuring that constant sound saturates the open physical space.¹³⁹ Every movement in *Zodiac* employs this idea of constant sound with only two instances deviating from this texture. The first and last two measures of the first movement “Aries” utilize a five-note motif that is repeated but divided with two counts of rest. Another break in sound is more prominent in “Cancer.” At the end of the A section Mellits resolves the phrase on the downbeat and subsequently includes three counts of rest. This silence nearly serves as a general pause, or as a slight breath before the sound resumes in the next measure to start the A’ section. Aside from these two instances, Mellits creates a full texture of ongoing sound and motion from when the movement begins until the final bar.

Seven of the twelve movements in *Zodiac* are set to a monophonic, single-line texture. The notes are arranged in a linear fashion with rare vertical material of dyads or triads. A homophonic texture is used in three movements: “Leo” includes a four-part chorale, “Libra” includes a basic melody over an arpeggiated accompaniment, and “Sagittarius” repeats a four-note descending melody over changing chords with a repetitive rhythmic structure (Figure 4.20).¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ This textural style resembles the sounds of minimalist composers Reich and Glass.

¹⁴⁰ “Virgo” may also be considered homophonic in nature because of the bass line that is established before a melodic pattern is added in the upper voice.



Figure 4.20. *Zodiac*, “Sagittarius”, mm. 2–6

“Aquarius” is created using a linear approach, but several phrases could be regarded as bi-phonic. Thematic material is developed from the various layers that are played by the right hand as opposed to the left hand. The movement begins with the outlining of an A minor ninth chord with a five-note bass line in the left hand and a four-note melody in the right hand (Figure 4.21). This uneven grouping of notes creates an unsettled, over-the-bar line, effect that unravels by the conclusion of the fourth measure of the phrase when both voices resolve rhythmically on the downbeat of m. 5. This idea appears six more times, but with slight variations in harmonic and melodic content.

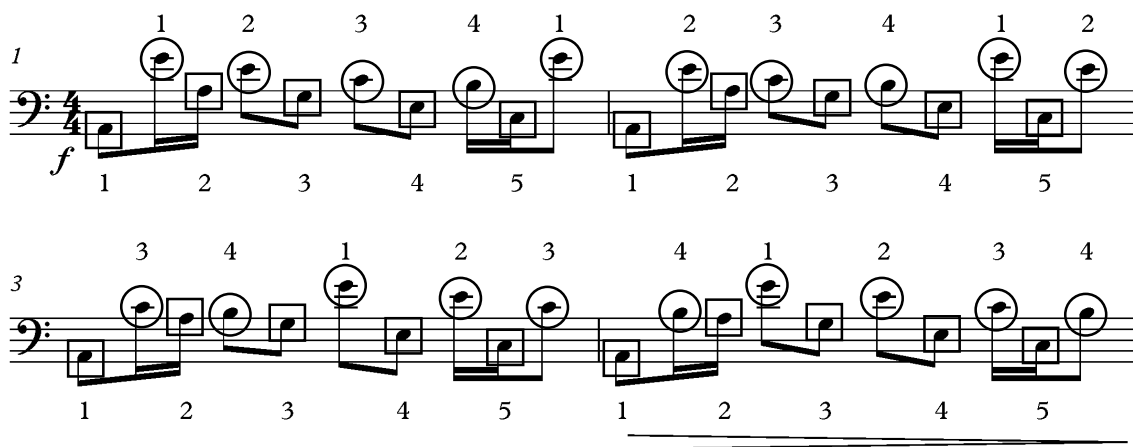


Figure 4.21. *Zodiac*, “Aquarius”, mm. 1–4

Thematic material

Mellits limits his use of musical material in each movement of *Zodiac*. The use of a single idea, such as a repeating pattern, rhythm, chord progression, or melodic line, is developed throughout each movement. For example, arpeggiated patterns that adhere to

the same general shape in “Gemini” cycle through different chords. “Pisces” also employs this repeated arpeggiated pattern idea as a four sixteenth-note grouping utilizing the same outline throughout the entire movement (Figure 4.22).



Figure 4.22. *Zodiac*, “Pisces”, mm. 1–4

Using the ABA formal structure, Mellits rapidly constructs and deconstructs musical material with the piece ending in the same manner as it begins. This compositional idea is particularly apparent in the following three movements: “Leo,” “Sagittarius,” and “Capricorn.” In “Leo,” an eight-measure chord progression expands its voicing from octave E’s to covering two and half octaves in four voices before a return to octave E’s. “Sagittarius” repeats a four-note melody within a four-measure phrase using the same concept of expansion and contraction through various chords and the instrument’s range. “Capricorn” also employs this compositional technique, but with a retrograde chord progression. The music advances until m. 17, when the chord progression repeats in reverse order. Form regulates the development of the musical material and ensures that the music deviates from and returns to the opening material.

Performance notes

Since Mellits lists the music at variable tempos for greater flexibility in artistic expression, it may be beneficial for some movements to be on the lower end of the range

listed. This will aid in technical issues and note accuracy but also ensure that the music does not sound rushed or frantic. A slower tempo of as much as ten beats per minute less than the marked tempo may help in practice and performance.¹⁴¹ The movements to apply this tempo deviation include “Aries,” “Taurus,” “Capricorn,” and “Pisces.”

Another performance aspect to consider involves how many mallets to use to play each movement. Based on the movement, two, four, or even three mallets are recommended. The factors that must be considered when determining the number of mallets include tempo and note-to-note interval size. Using four mallets can help with large interval leaps. However, holding four mallets while playing fast passages of small intervals may be cumbersome. Table 4.7 lists the number of mallets suggested for each movement recommended by Adam Groh, Peter Ferry, and myself.

Table 4.7. *Zodiac* number of mallet recommendations

Movement	Number of mallets
Aries	4
Taurus	2
Gemini	4
Cancer	3 or 4
Leo	4
Virgo	4
Libra	4
Scorpio	2
Sagittarius	2 or 4
Capricorn	2
Aquarius	4
Pisces	2

Mallet choice must be considered when performing the various movements in *Zodiac*. Since each astrological sign has a different character, using a variety of mallets is recommended. Mellits is aware of the different types of mallets, which can produce

¹⁴¹ Adam Groh, email correspondence with Oliver Molina, December 5, 2017.

different sounds and colors from the marimba bars. The same set of mallets may be effective for the entire piece, but the individual style and character of each movement may be sacrificed. Since most of the piece is in the lower range of the marimba where the bars are the thinnest, appropriate mallets and striking areas are crucial in practice and performance.

To aid in the learning process, completing a harmonic analysis and determining the note and rhythmic patterns in the music can save significant practice time. “Virgo” is based on four different one-measure note or sticking patterns (Figure 4.23).



Figure 4.23. *Zodiac*, “Virgo”, mm. 2–6

Table 4.8 indicates the breakdown of the patterns within the different phrases.

Table 4.8. *Zodiac*, “Virgo” pattern analysis

Measure numbers	Pattern sequence	Chords
2–5	A, B, C, D	Em7
6–9	A, B, C, D	Em7
14–17	A, B, D, C	Em7
18–21	A, B, C, D	CM7
22–25	A, B, C, D	Em7
26–29	C, B, C, A	Am7, Am7/G
30–33	A, D, C, D	FM7, Em7/G
34–42	All A	Am7, G/B, CM7, Dm7, Em7, D/F#, G6, FM7/A
42–45	A, B, C, D	Em7
46–49	A, D, A, D	CM7
50–54	A, B, C, D	Em7

Because of the linear and idiomatic writing, most of the music in *Zodiac* can be performed while reading the music. However, memorization is recommended so that your eyes can focus on note accuracy with the consonant harmonies over the wide range of the instrument. The following two practice techniques may be effective in preparing the work. The first involves dividing the notes played by each hand into separate parts. In “Sagittarius,” the hands are split both rhythmically and thematically for the entire duration, rendering it simple to learn. The second strategy involves playing the linear notes as block chords to gain facility around the instruments and achieve enhanced note accuracy (Figure 4.24). This can help to set one’s hands in the correct position.



Figure 4.24. *Zodiac*, “Aries,” mm. 5–6 with practice technique

Although *Zodiac* is the newest piece in this study and the only piece for solo marimba, the compositional techniques used are also showcased in his other percussion works. Subsequent chapters reveal Mellits’s compositional style with the addition of more instruments or voices. His writing style is best-suited for a chamber setting, since the voices interact to help create an overall ensemble sound. Utilizing two marimbas, *Red* uses different textures, ideas, and compositional devices that were not possible in the marimba solo *Zodiac*. However, the music nevertheless sounds completely Mellits.

CHAPTER 5: Work for percussion duo

Red (2008)

Red was the first percussion-only piece Mellits composed. Written in 2008, the marimba duet consists of six movements that each adopts a distinct character that abstractly portrays different shades of the color red.¹⁴² The piece requires a 4.3-octave marimba for the first player and a 5.0-octave marimba for the second player.¹⁴³ The addition of another marimba voice transforms how Mellits approaches the piece and writes for it. Mellits creates various textures, melodic dialogue, and rhythmically displaced patterns. However, some basic compositional ideas in the marimba solo *Zodiac* are used in the marimba duet *Red* as well. Since the creation of the original marimba version, Mellits arranged a new version for saxophone quartet in 2018.

Background and notes

Red was commissioned by Neva Pilgrim, who is the artistic director of the Society of New Music, a new music ensemble from Syracuse, New York, which was founded in 1971. The Society's purpose is to share contemporary music with the central New York community by presenting concerts, commissioning new works, producing recordings, and presenting awards to young composers.¹⁴⁴ The commission of *Red* was enabled by the generous support of the Argosy Foundation, a private family foundation based out of

¹⁴² Mellits, interview, 2016.

¹⁴³ The lower range of a 5.0 octave marimba is only needed in the first movement.

¹⁴⁴ Maryellen Casey, "Society Mission," Society for New Music about, accessed December 18, 2016, <http://www.societyfornewmusic.org/about.cfm>.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The duet was commissioned for a documentary titled *A Resonant Chord: Rodger Mack & the Creative Process*. The film was dedicated to sculptor Rodger Mack, who passed away in 2002. Mack was a professor of studio arts, head of the Sculpture Department at Syracuse University for 34 years, and the first director of the School of Art and Design.¹⁴⁵ The film was presented on July 26, 2008 at the Stone Quarry Hill Art Park in Cazenovia, New York.¹⁴⁶ The park displays four of Mack's sculptures, including *Jazz Diz*, named after the trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie (Figure 5.1). Founded by Mack's close friends Dorothy and Bob Riester, the park became an official venue in 1991 and was one of the first art parks to be established in the United States.¹⁴⁷



Figure 5.1. *Jazz Diz* (1990) by Rodger Mack

¹⁴⁵ "Renowned Sculptor Rodger Mack Dies after Long Illness," SU News, accessed December 18, 2016, <https://news.syr.edu/2002/09/renowned-sculptor-rodger-mack-dies-after-long-illness/>.

¹⁴⁶ "Society for New Music to Present Film Premiere, Retrospective, Concert in Celebration of Late Sculptor and VPA Faculty Member Rodger Mack at Stone Quarry Hill Art Park on July 26." SU News. Accessed December 18, 2016. <https://news.syr.edu/2008/07/society-for-new-music-to-present-film-premiere-retrospective-concert-in-celebration-of-late-sculptor-and-vpa-faculty-member-rodger-mack-at-stone-quarry-hill-art-park-on-july-26-2/>.

¹⁴⁷ Stone Quarry Art Park. Accessed December 18, 2016. https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoypizjW3WknFiJnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/Stone_Quarry_Hill_Art_Park.html

Along with Marc Mellits, composer Edward Ruchalski, who is the Director of Music and Professor of Practice in the Department of Visual and Performing Arts at Le Moyne College, was commissioned to compose music for the Mack documentary. Their pieces were also premiered live at a chamber concert titled “An Artist’s Muse” on the same day the documentary film was shown. *Red* was premiered by local upstate New York percussionists Rob Bridge and Rob Sanderl, who also recorded the piece for the documentary.¹⁴⁸

Mellits composed *Red* in the summer of 2008, while visiting Romania. Mellits experienced a period of “writer’s block,” during which he believed that nothing he composed was adequate and that he was “stuck.”¹⁴⁹ However, this changed when he encountered his idol Andrei Codrescu, a Romanian journalist, poet, and author on National Public Radio, while dining out, and he was star-struck.¹⁵⁰ Mellits has referred to him as one of his heroes, since Codrescu “was a voice for people that you didn’t have in the media;”¹⁵¹ he also admired him for addressing subjects and sharing opinions that were often taboo and risqué and expressing ideas that people believed but were afraid to share.¹⁵² Mellits and Codrescu conversed for many hours, and they ultimately exchanged information to remain in contact.¹⁵³ When Mellits returned home, he attempted to

¹⁴⁸ Robert Sanderl, email correspondence with Oliver Molina, December 4, 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Mellits, interview, 2016.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

compose again; this time, he found it effortless: “I think my brain was so focused on writing *Red*, and to have it jarred out and forget what I was working on by meeting this guy, I then was able to write.”¹⁵⁴ Mellits completed the piece in three days.

The title *Red* was inspired by Mellits’s time in Romania, a former communist country, and a book about the Romanian Revolution by Codrescu.¹⁵⁵ Mellits was also influenced by many of the materials that the sculptor Rodger Mack used, which had a reddish bronze color.¹⁵⁶ He has indicated that the mahogany marimba mallets he used at the time were somewhat red in color.¹⁵⁷ The color red influenced his motive for the work: “There was a lot of red going on in my mind at the time. But it was this total break through and all to this chance meeting with someone.”¹⁵⁸

Form and structure

Each movement in *Red* is different in terms of form and structure. Four of the six movements in *Red* use a version of ABA, or ternary form, in which the opening material is repeated to conclude the movement. The fourth and fifth movements are the only movements without repeated formal structures and are described as a *fantasia*; the music continually develops over changing chords with no repeating material. However, in the remainder of the movements, musical phrases are developed over regular changes in

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

chords, rhythms, textures, or ideas every two or four measures. This rule applies even in the sixth movement, which has time signature changes in nearly every measure.

The first movement of *Red* adheres to an overall ABA form. However, upon closer inspection, the movement is in ABA'B'A'' form. Each repeated section is slightly distinct, as they are developed through different rhythms or chord voicings. The second movement of *Red* showcases the clearest ABA form. The A sections contain a homophonic texture with a melody over the accompaniment, while the B section introduces unison chords and rhythms for both players for the first time in the piece.

Movements III and V develop through four-measure phrases that consist of a pair of two-measure ideas. Movement III develops through several chords and descends within the range of the instrument; it then returns to the A section material an octave lower than the opening statement. The fifth movement is through-composed with no repeated material. A general outline of a two-bar idea permeates the movement; it uses different chords and a set grouping of eighth and sixteenth combinations per player. The only semblance of form is provided by the rehearsal marks which Mellits incorporated; loosely following a crescendo. If this is the case, then the form is ABC, and each section lasts for twelve measures. The movement concludes with a short four-bar codetta of a one-measure pattern repeated four times.

Movement IV is a four-part chorale with another ambiguous phrase structure. Written in unison chords an octave apart, the two marimba parts are written in whole notes for the entire movement. Each chord transitions to the next with no clear phrase or cadence points; the tonal center is ambiguous. The dynamics are the only indication in the score for phrasing and form. A diminuendo is used from mm. 17–20 to transition the

piece into the softest dynamic of *pianississimo*, and a crescendo at mm. 22–28 indicates a transition to a *mezzo piano* dynamic level.

In addition to the form used in each individual movement, the formal design of the entire suite is pivotal. Like *Zodiac*, *Red* is intended to be performed in order, from movement one to six, to integrate the ideas of the suite. Playing the movements in order infuses the entire piece with an overarching shape. Hints of thematic material, including harmony, rhythm, and quoted material, are used and developed across the movements.

Harmony

The harmonic language in *Red* resembles that used in *Zodiac* because of the abundance of diatonic chords, primarily major and minor sixth and seventh chords. The following non-diatonic chords are also used which shift to closely related notes and motion: chromatic mediants, borrowed chords from related key signatures, and Neapolitan chords. In the first movement, a D minor seventh chord over a D minor scale is used in the A sections, while the B sections offer new chords by modulating up a half step to E \flat major. Once this is established, a descending-thirds harmonic progression begins at m. 11; this progression cycles through the chords until they circle back to the opening D minor seventh chord. This descending-thirds chord progression of seventh chords gradually develops by simply moving one note from the previous chord to the following chord. For example, the E \flat major seventh chord changes to a C minor seventh chord when the D chord tone transitions to a C. The C minor seventh chord then changes to an A \flat major seventh chord when the B \flat becomes an A \flat .

The fourth movement of *Red* also utilizes another descending-thirds harmonic progression on a larger scale through a four-part chorale in E \flat major. Beginning with the

top voice, followed by the alto, the tenor, and then the bass voice, the chord quality and notes change through stepwise motion of the following chords: E ♭ major seventh, C minor seventh, A ♭ major seventh, F minor seventh, D half-diminished seventh, B ♭ dominant seventh, G minor seventh, etc. (Figure 5.2). The harmonic language used in Movement IV is also showcased in Movement VI through fast rhythms in various time signatures.

Figure 5.2. *Red*, Movement IV, mm. 1–8

Mellits connects the movements harmonically by selecting identical or similar chords or key centers. Key signatures such as D major and minor and E ♭ major predominate movements I, II, III, and VI. Movement IV begins on an E ♭ major seventh chord, but the tonality is ambiguous because of the chord progression and harmonic motion that shifts every measure. Movement V is also vague in terms of a tonal center; its chords shift frequently, beginning with a B ♭ minor chord and ending on an A major sixth chord.

Rhythm and meter

In terms of rhythm, Mellits again limits his vocabulary to duple rhythms of eighth and sixteenth notes. However, in terms of meter, Mellits continues to use the simple meters of 4/4 and 3/4 but also endeavors to implement other meters, such as 5/8, 7/8 and

5/4. Movements III, IV, and V are regulated to only 4/4, while the remaining three movements gain more rhythmic interest with the mixed meters.

Although written in 5/4, several sections have an implied 5/8 time signature sound due to groupings of five notes that repeat within one measure. This is evident in Movement I at the sections beginning at m. 23 and m. 47 (Figure 5.3). The 5/8 “feel” returns in Movement II.



Figure 5.3. *Red*, Movement I, mm. 23–24

At a fast tempo of a quarter note equaling 200, this rhythmic theme is transformed into a “half-time” groove over alternating 3/4 and 7/8 time signatures (Figure 5.4). This combined two-measure idea creates a hyper-meter of 13/8; this is featured as the main rhythmic motive in Movement VI.

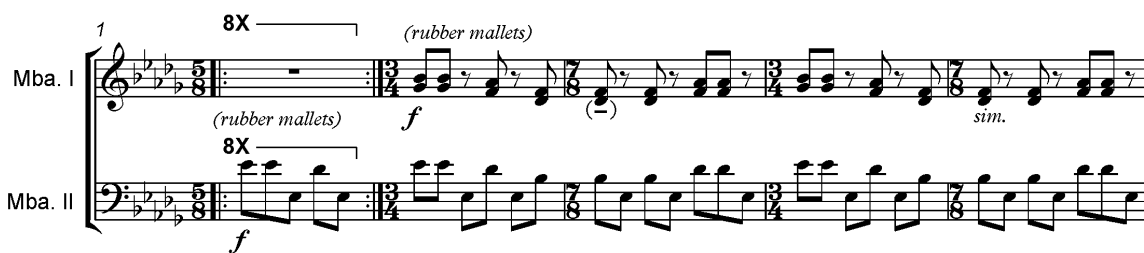


Figure 5.4. *Red*, Movement II, mm. 1–5

Texture

A full texture is present throughout all of the movements of *Red*, since Mellits writes a stream of sound produced by both players. A homophonic texture is highlighted in the first two movements. In the remaining movements, both parts share an equal role written in simple heterophony or contrapuntal motion through several chord changes.

Movements III and V establish a pattern, first in eighth notes for two measures, then sixteenth notes are added between the chord tones for two measures. The added sixteenth notes alternate patterns between both marimba parts to create a composite melody throughout the entire movement. The sixteenth notes create melodies across both marimbas as the notes emerge from the texture at a *forte* dynamic level.¹⁵⁹ This occurs at the first entrance of the thematic idea at mm. 5–7. In these specific measures, the split sixteenth notes create a melodic line that descends the notes in a D major scale (Figure 5.5). No paired notes ever overlap into the other part; instead, they trade counts, which results in a melodic line between both voices.



Figure 5.5. *Red*, Movement III, mm. 5–7

The fourth movement of *Red* differs considerably, with a four-part chorale played by both players. The movement has a homophonic and homorhythmic texture, since whole-note chords are used throughout the entire movement. This texture encompasses a two-octave range of the same notes in both parts, with the first marimba in treble clef and the second marimba in the lower bass clef. This homophonic and homorhythmic texture is also used in movements II and VI. Vertically-stacked chords are played in unison, which infuses the music with clarity and power.

¹⁵⁹ Mellits uses the caption “bring out sixteenths” and marks them with tenuto articulations.

The opposite of the thick texture appears at the end of Movement I, as the notes transition into single-line melody that is divided between both players (Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6 shows two musical staves for Movement I, measures 67-70. The top staff, labeled 'Written:', is for Marimba I (Mba. I) and shows a single-line melody in the treble clef and a rhythmic accompaniment in the bass clef. The bottom staff, labeled 'Composite:', shows the same melody divided between two marimba parts, with the first part in the treble clef and the second part in the bass clef.

Figure 5.6. *Red*, Movement I, mm. 67–70 with composite melody

Additionally, only fourteen measures in *Red* are performed by one player alone. This solo material consists of repeated measures that serve as introductory material before the other player joins.

Thematic material

With the addition of another marimba voice, the musical material Mellits uses in *Red* is primarily developed from the integration of the parts. The use of various types of texture, such as homophony and heterophony, is central to the composition as both parts are combined to create a unified sound in each movement. The homophonic texture in Movement I is akin to popular music forms. The movement opens with the first marimba part, which establishes an eighth-note groove over a D minor seventh chord. This part includes high notes on counts 2 and 4; this is reminiscent of a drum set rock groove with toms and snare drum (Figure 5.7).

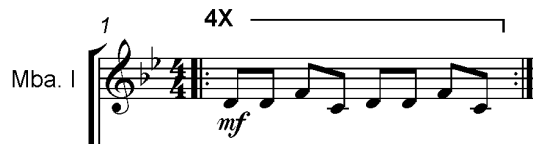


Figure 5.7. *Red*, Movement I, m. 1

The second marimba part begins in m. 2 with the nine-count bass line in the lower range of the instrument.¹⁶⁰ These two parts are heard simultaneously in this manner over four separate phrases of melody and accompaniment. The parts are in uneven counts for phrasing since the parts must unfold over several repetitions. This idea is repeated and developed as a variation at m. 33, when the bass line pattern begins over nine counts before it is shortened to only five counts, and finally to three counts. In addition to the shortened patterns in the syncopated bass line, a melody is played by the first marimba part; this is also reduced rhythmically in the same manner as the bass marimba part (Figure 5.8).

¹⁶⁰ This nine-count bass line is also used in “Wedge II” of the violin and marimba duet, *paranoid cheese*.



Figure 5.8. *Red*, Movement I, mm. 33–46

Both parts finally align musically when they reach the beginning of their respective ideas on the downbeat of m. 47.

The next thematic compositional device Mellits uses appears for the first time in Movement I and is utilized in Movements III and VI. At m. 23 of Movement I, a phrase consisting of unison eighth notes is introduced in both marimba parts. However, the parts are not played in unison but are rhythmically displaced, since the first marimba part follows the second marimba part. Both marimbas play the same content but are out of phase from one another by one beat thus creating a two-part unison canon (Figure 5.9).



Figure 5.9. *Red*, Movement I, mm. 23–26

This resembles how Steve Reich's marimba duet *Nagoya Marimbas* (1994) is constructed. Both marimba parts are slightly out of phase by a count or two as the music is developed throughout the various movements.

These phased unison canons are also used in Movement III, which consists of nineteen four-bar phrases that are rhythmically displaced or out of phase by one beat, with the marimba II following the marimba I part in terms of pitch content. The four-bar phrase uses a pattern of two measures of eighth notes followed by two bars that use the same pitch content; however, some eighth notes are replaced by pairs of sixteenth notes.

Movement VI showcases this idea of two-part unison canon throughout the entire movement. The opening A section is played in unison an octave apart, which sets up the movement both rhythmically and harmonically (Figure 5.10).

The musical score for Figure 5.10 shows two staves, Mba. I and Mba. II, in 3/4 time with a key signature of two flats. Measures 1-4 are marked *fff* and measures 5-8 are marked *sim.*. The music features eighth notes and chords, with Mba. II following Mba. I in pitch content but displaced in time.

Figure 5.10. *Red*, Movement VI, mm. 1–8

The anchor, or non-moving part, is played by the first marimba, and the second marimba displaces the same material by one count, beginning at m. 25 (Figure 5.11). The displaced rhythms fill any rests or spaces to drive the music forward. The phrases of displaced rhythms are interspersed by phrases of unison rhythms for brief moments of clarity

before the parts diverge again. Each two-part canon is rhythmically displaced by only one quarter note when implemented throughout the movement.

The musical score for Movement VI, measures 25-48, is presented in six systems. Each system consists of two staves, Mba. I and Mba. II, joined by a brace. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The time signature is 3/4. The score begins at measure 25, marked with a section marker 'L'. Measures 25-28 are marked with a forte dynamic 'fff'. Measures 29-32 are marked with a 'sim.' (simile) dynamic. Measures 33-36 are marked with a 'sim.' dynamic. Measures 37-40 are marked with a 'sim.' dynamic. Measures 41-44 are marked with a 'sim.' dynamic. Measures 45-48 are marked with a 'sim.' dynamic. The notation includes various musical symbols such as accents, slurs, and dynamic markings like 'fff' and 'sim.'

Figure 5.11. *Red*, Movement VI, mm. 25–48

Movement V is developed from one pattern in each of the parts; these patterns are used for the entire movement. The shape, intervals, and direction of these measures are

consistent through various chords. The first marimba plays different octave pitches as eighth notes and then adds sixteenth notes to fill in the notes as a passing motion. The second marimba part is constructed similarly and shares the general shape of each measure throughout the movement. The note selections are limited to a fourth interval up to a sixth interval, with the added sixteenth notes to fill in the notes as a passing motion. Figure 5.12 showcases the patterns used in each of the marimba parts. In this movement, both parts also share equal roles and merge to create a composite rhythm, melody, and sound.

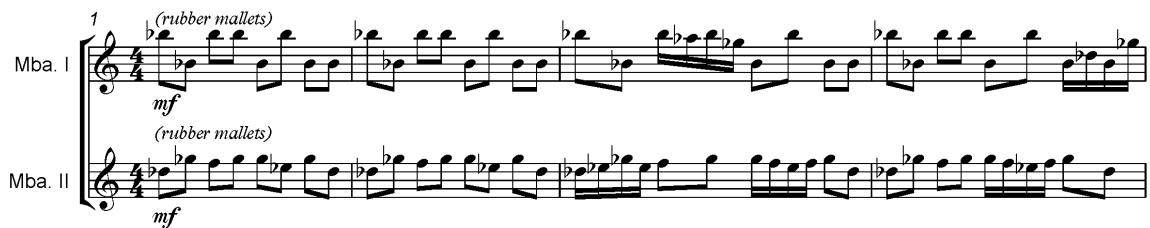


Figure 5.12. *Red*, Movement V, mm. 1–4

The thematic ideas used throughout *Red* are weaved in and out of each movement. The suite is developed and integrated through the thematic material related to rhythm in movements II and VI, harmony in movements I, VI, and VI, shifted patterns or canons in I, III, and VI, and traded ideas and composite melodies created between both parts in I, III, and V.

Performance notes

The number of mallets necessary for each movement is made apparent through the melodic or chordal content. Movements I, III, and V, which primarily consist of single-line ideas, require two mallets, while the even-numbered movements II, IV, and VI require four mallets because of the four-note chords, or tetrads. It is possible to use more

than two mallets for movements I, III, and V, but similar problems were revealed in *Zodiac* concerning technique and note accuracy. In addition, a consistency of tone is more achievable in single-line music when using only two mallets; however, this renders accuracy with large leaps more difficult to achieve (i.e., the bass clef sections in the marimba II part of Movement I).

In the score, Mellits provides mallet suggestions to use when performing his piece (Table 5.1). Mellits's affinity for rubber mallets is apparent, since they are recommended for four of the six movements. Rob Sanderl, who premiered and recorded the piece, states that the mallet choices listed were most likely those he had in his mallet bag and the ones they used at the recording session.¹⁶¹ It is important to remember with Mellits's music that "other choices are entirely possible."¹⁶²

Table 5.1. *Red* mallet suggestions, title page

Mallet Suggestions (other choices are entirely possible):
<p>Marimba I:</p> <p>Movement I: Musser Good Vibes</p> <p>Movements II, III, V, VI: Innovative Percussion ENS360 (rubber)</p> <p>Movement IV: a very soft mallet</p>
<p>Marimba II:</p> <p>Movement I: Encore Mallets; LH: NZ6B, RH: 43YB</p> <p>Movements II, III, V, VI: Innovative Percussion ENS360 (rubber)</p> <p>Movement IV: a very soft mallet</p>

Since most of Mellits' music is created in a single-note linear fashion that is idiomatic to the marimba, performing the work is minimally challenging. In several sections, a sticking pattern does not lay well on the instrument; however, this can easily be resolved through repeated practice. Practicing numerous sticking patterns or

¹⁶¹ Sanderl, email correspondence, 2017.

¹⁶² *Red*, title page from score

combinations (similar to those in *Stick Control* by George Lawrence Stone) in a scalar or arpeggiated diatonic patterns can help to improve the quality of sound necessary for this work. Additionally, careful attention is necessary to properly balance the volume between the parts to highlight the clarity of the compositional intent. This idea particularly applies to movements III and V as the melodic content alternates between both voices at the eighth and sixteenth-note level.

The instruments are typically arranged in one of two manners when performing the piece. The more common setup involves both marimbas and players facing each other; in this arrangement, the accidentals on both marimbas are opposite each other allowing for greater communication, both visually and audibly (Figure 5.13).

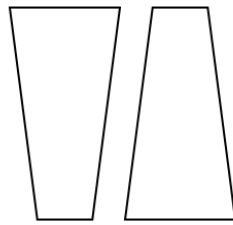


Figure 5.13. *Red*,
Face-to-Face
Instrument Setup

The other setup is similar but involves a slight angle or opening, to create a “V” between the marimbas (Figure 5.14). This setup can allow an enhanced view for the audience because this setup displays how the parts interact through the visual aspect of performing percussion.

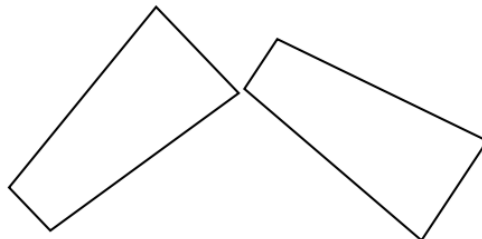


Figure 5.14. *Red*, “V” Instrument Setup

CHAPTER 6: Work for percussion ensemble

Gravity (2013)

The mallet ensemble work *Gravity* was commissioned by a consortium led by Thad Anderson.¹⁶³ Anderson first met Mellits during a production of Steve Reich's *Sextet* at the University of Central Florida (UCF) in March 2010.¹⁶⁴ Familiar with Reich's works, Mellits often travels to perform the piano parts in Reich's large ensemble works.¹⁶⁵ In February 2012, Mellits returned to UCF to play in Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians*.¹⁶⁶ During this visit, Anderson and Mellits began to arrange the details of the commission for a mallet quartet.

This quartet was part of a bigger project that Anderson was producing; the final product was an album of mallet quartets that Anderson both produced and recorded with a few of his students.¹⁶⁷ The album was completed in 2014 and is titled *Patterns: music for two marimbas and two vibraphones*. This mallet quartet instrumentation was modeled on Steve Reich's *Mallet Quartet* (2009). Other pieces and composers on the album included *Stardance* by Jonathan Kolm, *Patterns* by Paul Lansky, *Small Change* by Scott Lindroth, and *by-and-by* by Thad Anderson. The album also included Mellits's short work *Farfalle Cotte*.¹⁶⁸ To pay for the commission, Anderson contacted his friends and

¹⁶³ Anderson is an Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Central Florida.

¹⁶⁴ Thad Anderson, email correspondence with Oliver Molina, August 8, 2017.

¹⁶⁵ Mellits, interview, 2016.

¹⁶⁶ Anderson, email correspondence, 2017.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Originally written for two ocarinas or two treble instruments. It would later be transcribed for 2 marimbas and 2 vibraphones for *Patterns*. The performance length of the work is 1 minute.

colleagues to help by creating a consortium. The consortium was comprised of fifteen professional percussion groups and collegiate percussion programs.¹⁶⁹

Background and notes

At the beginning of the compositional process, Mellits was in France working with the group Percussion Claviers de Lyon.¹⁷⁰ Mellits inquired if they would like to join the consortium. Interested in the idea, they told Mellits they only play as a quintet. Mellits contacted Anderson about writing for a quintet versus a quartet. Since the quartet was the original plan, Mellits started to write a quintet version alongside the original quartet version. Mellits explains his compositional conundrum: “Basically, what I wanted was a quartet version that you could add a bass marimba and the other parts would stay exactly the same, which made it really hard to write. I didn't want a different piece. I wanted the same piece with an extra player.”¹⁷¹ The music for the quartet instrumentation of two marimbas and two vibraphones is identical in both versions. The optional fifth part, the bass marimba, may be added if the players and instruments are available. The bass marimba is mainly used to create additional depth to the overall sound of the ensemble.

Mellits was apprehensive about the use of a vibraphone in the piece. Although he had written for vibraphone before, he was not as accustomed to the sound or technique

¹⁶⁹ Members of the consortium are Clocks in Motion, Colorado State University (Eric Hollenbeck), Furman University (Omar Carmenates), NEXUS, Percussions Claviers de Lyon, Temple University Percussion Ensemble (Phillip O'Banion), Robert Bridge & Friends, Talujon, Tennessee Tech University (Eric Willie), Texas Tech University (Lisa Rogers), Third Coast Percussion, University of Central Florida (Jeff Moore & Thad Anderson), University of Michigan (Jonathan Ovalle), University of North Florida (Charlotte Mabrey), University of South Alabama (Luis Rivera and Matt Greenwood)

¹⁷⁰ Mellits, interview, 2016.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

issues as he was with the marimba. As he was writing, he workshopped the piece with a few of the consortium ensembles. Working with Percussion Claviers de Lyon, Mellits recognized the potential of the vibraphone and realized that it could be a much more aggressive instrument that blended well with the marimba.¹⁷²

In February 2013, Mellits returned to UCF as a featured composer for the Collide Contemporary Music Festival.¹⁷³ While there, the UCF percussion studio read through sketches of the work with the bass marimba part implemented for the first time.¹⁷⁴ After reading through multiple versions, Mellits continued writing the piece based on what developed in the session.¹⁷⁵

Gravity was premiered on May 14, 2013, by Percussions Claviers de Lyon in Lyon, France, and within that first month, the group performed it two more times. In that same month, the piece had its premieres in the United States by three professional groups: Third Coast Percussion in Chicago, Illinois; Talujon in New York City, New York; and Clocks in Motion in Madison, Wisconsin.

Mellits mentions that the quintet version is performed more often and prefers it over the quartet version.¹⁷⁶ Mellits first participated in a performance of *Gravity* when his friend Rob Bridge asked Mellits to come to Syracuse to play Reich's *Sextet*. For the same concert, Bridge programmed *Gravity*, and after three months of asking, he convinced

¹⁷² "Mellits Consortium Update," Vimeo, July 23, 2012, accessed December 1, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/46448317>.

¹⁷³ Anderson, email correspondence, 2017.

¹⁷⁴ Mellits, interview, 2016.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

Mellits to play the bass marimba part. Mellits recalls his first experience performing his work:

I was super excited. I practiced for months. He was totally serious, and he trusted me to do it. I showed up and we did it. It was great. I had my part learned and nailed it. It was so much fun and it was this great opportunity he gave me. I thanked him a million times because after that I ended up doing it with other groups, but it was Rob who was the first one.¹⁷⁷

Mellits has since performed the bass marimba part on several occasions with Third Coast Percussion, Clocks in Motion, and other groups.¹⁷⁸

Mellits gave *Gravity* its abstract title after realizing how the music created a feeling of depth and falling or of drawing objects to the center.¹⁷⁹ Mellits refers to the piece as having different textures that fall, combine, and get increasingly faster; these textures produce a “gravitational pull in the music.”¹⁸⁰ This musical pull can also be felt through tempo shifts that use metric modulations, *accelerandi*, and *subito* tempo changes. Mellits was eager to use this compositional device with percussionists: “Percussionists can do that. Get four guys together. BAM! Hit another tempo. It’s exciting to see them do that.” Mellits confidently wrote challenging ensemble parts with percussionists in mind to execute them.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

Form and structure

In *Gravity*, Mellits creates the formal structures through similar processes to his other works. His streamlined compositional approach quickly develops the thematic material, then transitions to a new section or has a stark change to another idea. The resulting form is divided into clear sections that could be considered separate movements, similar to many of his multi-movement works or suites. Mellits delineates the form through his placement of rehearsal marks throughout the music. At each rehearsal mark, a new variation or different idea may appear by changing any combination of the following: harmony or tonal center, texture, tempo, meter, dynamics, or rhythm. These ideas will be discussed in detail later in the chapter, but the overall form for *Gravity* is ABCDEFB. Table 6.1 shows the main musical components that help determine the form, including the key center, tempo, and time signatures used in each section.

Table 6.1. *Gravity*, formal analysis

Measure Numbers	Rehearsal Mark	Form	Key Center	Tempo	Meter
1–66	Beginning	A	D minor	Q=120	4/4
67–74	C	Transition	D minor		
75–87	m.75	A'	D major		
88–99	m.88	Transition	D Major	Accelerando to Q=160	
100–135	D	B	G Major/D Major/ D Minor	Q=160	5/4
136–147	E	Transition	D Minor	Q=160, 120	
148–174	F	C	D Minor	Subito Q=160	
175–191	m. 175	Transition	D pedal/A minor	Accelerando to Dotted Q=72	6/8
192–214	m.192	D	D minor	Dotted Q= 72	
215–235	H	D'	D minor		6/8, 3/4
236–256	I	E	D minor	Q=90	3/4
257–260	m. 257	Transition	E minor	Accelerando to Q=120	

Table 6.1 – continued

261–288	J	F	E minor	Q=120	4/4
289–296	m. 289	Transition	B minor	Accelerando to Q=160	
297–356	K	B'	D Major	Q=160	5/4

Harmony

The harmonic language is consistent with Mellits's other pieces, especially with the percussion works examined in this study. Mellits mainly uses consonant, diatonic chords, often major and minor sixth and seventh chords, in relation to the key center. Mellits again utilizes the descending-thirds harmonic progression, which creates a flow of closely related chords with a seventh chord tone moving down to the first chord tone of the next chord.¹⁸¹ This can create major seventh, minor seventh, dominant seventh, and half-diminished seventh chords within the key. For example, after a brief introduction that establishes a D pedal tone, the chord sequence starts the descending-thirds harmonic progression at m. 11: F major seventh, D minor seventh, B \flat minor seventh, G minor seventh, E half-diminished seventh, C dominant seventh, and A minor seventh (Figure 6.1). This circular pattern of chords loops back around to the beginning chord. Other types of chords are also used in *Gravity*: triads with added second or fourth scale degrees, chromatic alteration chords, and Neapolitan sixth chords. These chords also help outline the form and thematic material in the sections.

¹⁸¹ Mellits also uses this technique in *Red*.

9 Dm(add2) Fmaj7/C

12 Dm7

15 Bbmaj7

V. I

V. II

M. I

M. II

B.M.

Figure 6.1. *Gravity*, mm. 9–17

Moreover, Mellits changes the speed of the harmonic rhythm to create tension in the music. The progression has a regular pattern of changing chords every two measures in a 4/4 time signature. Mellits changes the harmonic rhythm of each chord from eight counts down to four counts, then to two. He then reverses the process back up to two measures, or eight counts, for each chord.

Rhythm and meter

The rhythmic vocabulary used is limited to half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, and sixteenth notes. Like the harmony used in this piece, the rhythm changes with the texture and form. Figure 6.3 shows the introduction of the main thematic rhythm with sixteenth notes played by the entire ensemble (with the exception of the optional bass marimba part).¹⁸²

¹⁸² In this opening section, the optional bass marimba part bass marimba only plays eighth notes that fold into the 16th note texture.

1

Pedal ad lib. throughout unless specifically indicated.
Blend and match ensemble.

V. I *f* intense

Pedal ad lib. throughout unless specifically indicated.
Blend and match ensemble.

V. II *f* intense

Blend and match ensemble.

M. I *f* intense

Blend and match ensemble.

M. II *f* intense

Blend and match ensemble.

B.M. *f* intense

5

8

Figure 6.2. *Gravity*, mm. 1–10

The *tutti* rhythm finally switches to eighth notes, with a texture change of arpeggiated chords in the vibraphone parts. This transitory theme spans only four measures before the piece returns to using all sixteenth notes (Figure 6.4).



Figure 6.3. *Gravity*, mm. 67–70

Rhythmic vocabulary is also connected to time signature usage. The overuse of duple rhythms creates different senses of pulse or meter through various note groupings and accents. Beginning at m. 100, the rhythm and feel of the piece change with the introduction of the 5/4 time signature. A 5/8 meter of two plus three is implied in the first and second marimba voices. The composite rhythm of both vibraphone parts also achieves this odd meter feel (Figure 6.5).

This musical score shows measures 104 and 105 of 'Gravity'. It includes five staves: V. I (vibraphone), V. II (vibraphone), M. I (marimba), M. II (marimba), and B.M. (bass marimba). The time signature changes to 5/4 at measure 104. The vibraphone parts (V. I and V. II) are marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *sub.* (sustained) instruction. The marimba parts (M. I and M. II) also have a piano (*p*) dynamic and *sub.* instruction. The bass marimba part (B.M.) is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The score shows complex rhythmic patterns with many beamed notes, creating a sense of a 5/8 meter within the 5/4 time signature.

Figure 6.4. *Gravity*, mm. 104–105

The introduction of a 6/8 time signature at m. 180 is used to create a triplet-feel in compound meter. This thematic material is developed for several measures but then

returns to a 3/4 simple meter with the addition of the second marimba and bass marimba voices at m. 217 (Figure 6.6). The quarter note rhythms in the two lower marimba voices firmly establish the time signature change.

Figure 6.5. *Gravity*, mm. 215–218

The only other variation from the previously mentioned basic rhythms is used in a phrase beginning at m. 289 (Figure 6.7). Here, Mellits gives the vibraphones an indication of note length with half notes, dotted quarter notes, and other tied rhythms as the melody exchanges between both players. This also creates a timbre and texture change, as the vibraphone bars sustain the note length of the pitches with the pedal down.

289

V. I

V. II

M. I

M. II

B.M.

293 accel. — — — — —

Ped.

Ped.

Figure 6.6. *Gravity*, mm. 289–296

Texture

The textures used in *Gravity* are primarily homophonic and homorhythmic in nature, as all parts work together for a unified ensemble sound. The opening material is densely scored, with all voices playing in unison. This section slowly morphs into an eighth-note arpeggio pattern that is shifted over one eighth note per player, creating a four-note counterpoint in the key of D minor. By isolating each eighth note, the vertical alignment of the harmony is easily seen across all the voices (Figure 6.8).



Figure 6.7. *Gravity*, mm. 11–12

At m. 100, the piece finally strays from the homophonic sixteenth note texture with a change of rhythms into a 5/4 time signature. The marimbas play the same accompaniment pattern with different voicings, while the vibraphones play offset chords that echo each other an octave apart. The two 5/4 sections of the piece, mm. 100–135 and 297–356, are the most densely orchestrated, requiring four-mallet chords played by every player. The vibraphones play stacked, closed position chords, while the marimbas split chord tones between players and play open fourth or fifth intervals in each hand. This can be seen in previous example Figure 6.5.

The thick texture, with all four voices playing, remains constant throughout the piece, with only a few exceptions that deal with transition material. Out of the 356 written measures, only 31 are not *tutti*, with everyone playing. Examples of texture changes through the omission of parts are found in the sections shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2. *Gravity* sections with non-tutti textures

Measure Numbers	Texture change
mm. 65–66	marimbas only on unison D notes
mm. 67–70	vibraphones only using arpeggiated notes from a Dm7 chord
mm. 71–74	marimbas only on unison D notes

Table 6.2 – continued

mm. 144–147	marimbas only using arpeggiated notes from a Dm7 chord (same notes from vibraphone excerpt found in mm. 67–70)
mm. 184–191	vibraphones accelerating to create a 6/8 feel
m. 236	Dm chord the downbeat from the entire ensemble but the only instance in the piece where there are written rests for all voices
mm. 297–300	vibraphones only arpeggiated a GM7 chord
mm. 301–304	marimbas only setting up the 5/4 (5/8 feel) on a GM7 chord

A major noticeable textural change is the addition of the bass marimba part in the bottom range of the instrument. Some of this optional fifth marimba part is within the mix and range of the rest of the ensemble, as seen in the beginning sections up to m. 100; however, the power of the instrument is heard when it is used in the lower two octaves. When applied in this way, the bass voice adds body and depth to the ensemble with driving eighth notes or quarter notes. Mellits does not use this low sound throughout the entire piece but reserves it for certain sections for maximum effect. The measures in which the bass marimba part is most important are from mm. 103–138 and mm. 217–356.

The only other section that is completely different texturally is found in m. 237. Here, a single-line melody is played in the second vibraphone part that is mimicked in both the first vibraphone and the first marimba parts (Figure 6.9). The first vibraphone part contains the melody an octave higher, with constant sixteenth notes while playing a pedal D on the non-melody notes. The marimba part plays the same melodic figures as the first vibraphone but offsets a sixteenth note on the second and fourth partials of the beat. After a short four-measure transition in m. 257, this heterophonic texture continues

in the second vibraphone part, while the other voices serve as homorhythmic accompaniment until m. 288.

Figure 6.8. *Gravity*, mm. 237–240

Thematic material

Thematic material is constructed through combining the various musical components of harmony, rhythm, and texture to create form. *Gravity* is developed by producing depth and directionality through contrast. Themes develop in an arch form, building from a “single point,” expanding out, and then condensing back in.¹⁸³ Mellits aims to create “three-dimensional” layers in the music.

The opening section uses this three-dimensional idea, starting with an eight-bar introduction. All players begin with unison sixteenth notes on the D4 pitch, and from there the notes ascend in register. In m. 3, the first marimba starts a pattern with the E4 note on count 1 and is followed by the first vibraphone on the upbeat of 1, the second marimba on count 2, and the second vibraphone on the upbeat of count 2. This process

¹⁸³ This thematic idea of constructing and deconstructing or building up and down is used in several movements of *Zodiac*.

builds up and adds more notes until all players are arpeggiating chords at m. 9, as shown in previous example Figure 6.3. Next, Mellits creates depth by moving the bass pedal tone down from the starting point pitch of D4 to G3. This idea develops through several chord changes shown in Table 6.3. The table lists the bass note motion down the scale, adding another layer of sound away from the starting pitch of D4.

Table 6.3. *Gravity*, Descending-thirds harmonic progression

Measure Number	Chord
9	Dm7
11	Fm7/C
13	Dm7/C
15	B ♭ M7
16	Gm7/B♭
17	E halfdim7/B ♭
18	C7/B ♭
19	Am7
20	Fm7/A
21	Dm7/A
22	B ♭ M7/A

At m. 23, chords start moving more quickly at one bar each, going through the same chords found in mm. 9–23. The piece shrinks again in sound, chord quality, and interval size as the notes move closer together and back to the unison D pitches at m. 63. Mellits states that the idea he is trying to convey is analogous to a black hole sucking in objects at a faster rate as they get closer to the center. This three-dimensional idea of expanding and contracting returns at m. 71 in the key of D major.

A break from the opening sixteenth-note texture happens when there is a stark contrast in the music, leaving the vibraphones outlining a D minor seventh chord arpeggio in eighth notes, as shown in Figure 6.4. This short four-measure B theme returns

in various ways throughout the piece. At m. 144, with a subito tempo change to 120 beats per minute, the marimbas play the same four-bar thematic material (Figure 6.10).



Figure 6.9. *Gravity*, mm. 144-147

This theme initially serves as transitional material before it is developed at m. 261. Here, the vibraphones and the first marimba part play the eighth-note arpeggiated chord figures as accompaniment to the second vibraphone melody. This thematic idea of chord arpeggiations develops until m. 300.

The theme of expanding and contracting from a single point is also used in the formal structures. This idea is seen in regard to tempo relationships throughout the entire piece.¹⁸⁴ Starting at 120 beats per minute, the tempo accelerates to 160 beats per minute at m. 92. Keeping the eighth note constant at this fast tempo, the meter shifts to a slower 6/8 feel at m. 180. The tempo increases again and switches to sixteenth note figures at m. 192. Here, the dotted quarter note tempo marked at 72 beats per minute.¹⁸⁵ The piece comes to a halt with a bar of rest at m. 236. At this point, the slowest pulse of the piece is heard at 90 beats per minute. Over the next two sections, the piece increases tempo from 90 to 120 beats per minute, finally settling at 160 at m. 297. Through different musical

¹⁸⁴ Table 6.2 shows the formal analysis of the tempo relationship throughout the whole piece.

¹⁸⁵ The 6/8 meter slows down to 106 for the dotted quarter note or 53 beats per minute for the dotted half note or grouping all six notes together in one bar. This is easier to see the tempo relationship through the metric modulations. The following accelerando goes from 53 bpm to 72 bpm.

components, the tempo variations add another level of thematic material of construction and deconstruction.¹⁸⁶

Performance notes

The following performance suggestions are based on my own experience playing and coaching the piece or given by composer Marc Mellits and members of Clocks in Motion.¹⁸⁷ The first performance suggestion is to not perform “false accents,” that is, not to play accents where they are not written. There are two moments where this might be problematic: the last notes of the phrases found on the quarter note on count four of m. 91 and 99, and the last note of the piece in m. 356. The tendency is to hammer the single note, which can destroy the phrasing.¹⁸⁸ The energy in the phrasing must not disrupt the line with an unintended accent. They also suggest exaggerating all the written dynamics and not play any “false dynamics,”¹⁸⁹ as the musical contrast in the piece is highlighted when the dynamics are exaggerated.

Further, the addition of new content at m. 215 in the first marimba part needs to be played very loudly over the rest of the ensemble. To execute the first octave correctly, with accuracy and proper dynamics, it is beneficial to leave out the final D sixteenth note in m. 214 (see previous Figure 6.9).¹⁹⁰ A *subito* tempo change occurs in m. 236,

¹⁸⁶ Table 6.1 showcases the tempo variations that occur throughout the piece.

¹⁸⁷ Clocks in Motion’s insight comes from working and performing with Mellits as one of the commissioning ensemble of the piece.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Sean Kleve, email correspondence with Oliver Molina, January 18, 2018.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

decreasing the tempo from 108 to 90 beats per minute. Just before the tempo change are three counts of silence. Although it is advantageous to complete the tempo change during the rests to cue the entire ensemble for a clean transition, Mellits encourages this measure of rest to be counted in the old tempo of 108 and not the new slower tempo of 90.¹⁹¹ Lastly, *Clocks in Motion* suggests taking the fast tempos even faster. The fast sections are marked at quarter note equals 160, but the group has taken the piece at 170 to make it more exciting.¹⁹²

Mallet choice is a big issue in this piece: Mellits wants an ensemble sound that will blend the bars of a metal vibraphone to a wooden marimba. In the score, he includes a short description of the sound he is after:

All instruments should match their sound and blend together. This may (or may not) mean all instruments use the same mallet. *Gravity* may be played with mixed mallets, for example, rubber on the Marimbas and yarn on the Vibraphones, or the same type of mallet may be employed throughout. The main objective is to get a rich blend and matched sound between the ensemble.¹⁹³

Sean Kleve of *Clocks in Motion* notes that Mellits loves mallets that have a strong rhythmic attack, with rubber on marimba and medium to hard cord on vibraphone.¹⁹⁴ Kleve also notes that Mellits is “fairly picky” about the sound of the bass marimba.¹⁹⁵ Mellits is looking for a soft resonant sound but prefers a mallet that has a bit more

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Mellits, *Gravity*, score.

¹⁹⁴ Kleve, email correspondence, 2018.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

“punch.”¹⁹⁶ Depending on the section of the piece, different bass marimba mallets may be utilized to get the correct sound.

Two basic setups are used to perform *Gravity*. Both present benefits and difficulties during a performance. The first setup is in a fan shape and is preferred by *Clocks in Motion* (Figure 6.11).

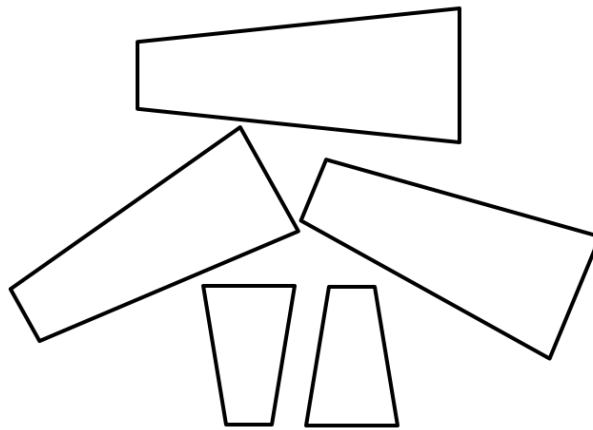


Figure 6.10. *Gravity* Setup Diagram, Fan Shape

The setup provides a better listening environment due to the proximity of the instruments. A negative aspect of this setup is the lack of sightlines to all the instruments and players.

The second setup is in the shape of a square or rectangle (Figure 6.12). The pros and cons of this setup are the opposite of the fan setup's; there are better sightlines but a less-than-ideal listening environment due to the area that each instrument takes up pushing the instruments and players further away from each other. The ideal setup would have good sightlines for communication, vital to execute the *subito* tempo changes, but also constitute a good listening environment to better balance the *tutti* textures.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

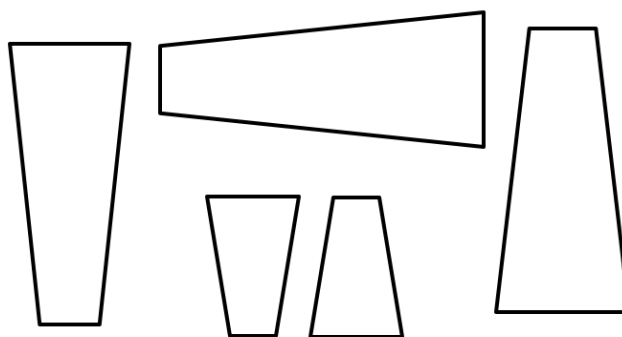


Figure 6.11. *Gravity* Setup Diagram, Square Shape

If using only four players (or if using only using two marimbas for the quintet version), the fan shape is preferred.¹⁹⁷ If playing the quintet version, having only two marimbas is not ideal due to the written part (the optional fifth part would need to share with the first marimba part). However, some sections of the bass marimba part are doubled in the same range as the first and second marimbas, to the extent that not much is lost. Cuts to the bass marimba part would be needed to prevent the player from interfering with the first marimba part. Table 6.4 shows the cuts for the bass marimba part if the piece is only performed on two marimbas.

Table 6.4. *Gravity*, Bass marimba cuts

Bass marimba	Measure numbers
Tacet	1–102
Play	103–138
Tacet	138–216
Play	217–356

Within these sections, the bass marimba may need to omit a doubled octave note so as not to disturb the melodic line in the first marimba part. These cuts are approved by Mellits if there is difficulty finding enough instruments to perform the quintet version.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Since *Clocks in Motion* is a quartet, an alternate performance version was created by ensemble member Matthew Coley. His version includes as many bass notes as can be covered by the second marimba part without losing the integrity of the original quartet version. This version tries to enhance the music by adapting the quintet version to only four players. They achieve the bass-note sound needed for the piece without the fifth player or third marimba.

CHAPTER 7: Conclusion

This paper should serve as an introduction to composer Marc Mellits and provide an exploration of his compositional style in writing for percussion. Each piece was analyzed in terms of the main building blocks of music: form, rhythm, harmony, texture, and thematic material. Through my analysis of Mellits's percussion works, I found the pieces to be compact in size, scope, and types of musical material. This limiting of material to only a few concepts or ideas firmly places Mellits's style in the post-minimalism genre. It is clear that Mellits takes extreme care to develop his works by limiting his musical palette.

The music of Marc Mellits is not overly complicated to learn or difficult to put together for a performance. The music is simple to understand at the surface level, but careful inspection reveals a compositional complexity crafted through the notes that he chose to write. Every note in his music serves a purpose in the overview of the entire piece. Additionally, his percussion ensemble pieces make good material for reading and practice to develop ensemble awareness. His music uses counterpoint that connects the different parts through layers to make the music have a unified ensemble sound. As mentioned, the music is mostly single line, making it easy to read because of the lack of vertical sonorities. However, his music is still difficult to play because of the large range covered on the instruments and the accuracy required to create the consonant harmonies.

Mellits's contributions to the percussion repertoire are still too new to predict their long-term impact on percussion repertoire. Mellits has expanded the percussion repertoire with the addition of the four pieces included in this study, and he has more

commissions in the works: a vibraphone solo titled *Parkland*, a chamber piece for marimba and string quartet, and a drum set solo.¹⁹⁹

It is my great hope that this document will encourage percussionists to further embrace Mellits's works. The research presented here should encourage deeper reflection on Mellits's compositions and inspire further examination of other works in his catalog. His percussion music is a snapshot of his musical style across other idioms. Research into his works for other instruments deserves examination, using this document as a launching point.

Through the process of this research, I have grown to appreciate the depth of craftsmanship it takes to compose music, although Mellits makes it look easy and sound effortless. I will continue to explore the music of Marc Mellits by performing, recording, and commissioning pieces. The hope is that the music studied and presented will stand the test of time and continue to be performed for years to come.

¹⁹⁹ Mellits, interview, 2018.

APPENDIX A: Complete list of works

Piano Concerto (1984)

Instrumentation: Piano Solo & Orchestra

Duration: 15'

Intervals (1985)

Instrumentation: Solo Cello

Duration: 10'

Piano Quartet (1985)

Instrumentation: Violin, Viola, Cello, Piano

Duration: 12'

Duo for Alto Flute & Cello (1986)

Instrumentation: alto flute & cello

Duration: 14'

String Quartet (1986)

Instrumentation: String Quartet

Duration: 20'

11 Piano Quaaludes (1987)

Instrumentation: Solo Piano

Duration: 25'

10 Pieces for Piano Solo (1987)

Instrumentation: Solo Piano

Duration: 25'

Road Trip (1987)

Instrumentation: Solo Organ

Duration: 15'

Whales Save Us (1988)

Instrumentation: Clarinet & Trombone

Duration: 9'

Insect Heads (1988)

Instrumentation: Soprano & Cello

Duration: 6'

Dark Age Machinery (1988)

Instrumentation: Large Chamber Ensemble

Duration: 16'

Hooley Fooley (1989)

Instrumentation: Violin & Cello

Duration: 8'

Music for 22 Strings (1989)

Instrumentation: Twelve Violins, Four Violas, Four Cellos, Two Basses

Duration: 12'

Fanfare (1990)

Instrumentation: Orchestra

Duration: 2'

Bucket (1991)

Instrumentation: Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Piano

Duration: 12'

Aggravated Assault (1991, r. 1994)

Instrumentation: Two Amplified Pianos

Duration: 20'

O (1991)

Instrumentation: Orchestra

Duration: 2'

11 Pieces for Flute & Piano (1992)

Instrumentation: Flute & Piano

Duration: 18'

Trio (1993)

Instrumentation: Flute, Clarinet, Cello

Duration: 12'

Aro (1993)

Instrumentation: Chamber Orchestra/Orchestra

Duration: 12'

Polysorbate 60 (1994)

Instrumentation: Flute, Clarinet, Oboe, Trumpet, Trombone, Tuba, Piano,
Violin, Bass, Percussion

Duration: 10'

Merge Left (1994)

Instrumentation: Two Flutes, Cello

Duration: 5'

Concerto for Piccolo and Orchestra (1995)

Instrumentation: Piccolo & Chamber Orchestra/Orchestra

Duration: 2'

Year: 1995

Spam (1995)

Instrumentation: Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Piano

Duration: 14'

Blue (1996)

Instrumentation: Solo Electro-Acoustic Guitar

Duration: 15'

11 Miniatures (1996)

Instrumentation: Baroque Flute, Baroque Oboe, Baroque Violin, Viola D'gamba,
Baroque Cello, Harpsichord

Duration: 20'

Large Man Looms (1996)

Instrumentation: Voice & Piano

Duration: 5'

5 Chanukah Etudes for the Frascas (1996)

Instrumentation: Solo Electro-Acoustic Guitar

Duration: 12'

Fruit Loops (1997)

Instrumentation: Amplified Chamber Orchestra

Duration: 7'

Spank Me (1997)

Instrumentation: Two Synthesizers

Duration: 8'

Jaana (1997)

Instrumentation: Solo Amplified Violin

Duration: 17'

Fruity Pebbles (1997)

Instrumentation: Violin, Cello, Piano

Duration: 18'

Groove Canon (1998)

Instrumentation: Brass Quintet & Drum Set

Duration: 18'

Minetudes (1998)

Instrumentation: Electro-Acoustic Guitar

Duration: 14'

Troica (1998)

Instrumentation: Flute (or Violin), Guitar (or Electric Guitar or Piano), Marimba
(or Piano)

Duration: 6'30"

Spin (1998)

Instrumentation: Violin & Piano

Duration: 8'

Troica (1998)

Instrumentation: Flute (or Violin), Guitar, Marimba (or Piano)

Duration: 12'

Edible Vinyl (1998)

Instrumentation: Two Amplified Guitars (or Guitar & Piano), Amplified Violin

Duration: 10'

Parking Violation (1999)

Instrumentation: Solo Oboe

Duration: 14'

8 Etudes for 2 Guitars (1999)

Instrumentation: Guitar Duo

Duration: 18'

Phase, Inc. (1999)

Instrumentation: Amplified Chamber Orchestra

Duration: 7'

Zoot Suit Riot (1999)

Instrumentation: Wind Ensemble

Duration: 3'

5 Machines (2000)

Instrumentation: Amplified Bass Clarinet/Soprano Sax, Electric Guitar, Amplified
Cello, Amplified Bass, Amplified Marimba, Amplified Piano

Duration: 18'

2 Pieces for Flute & Guitar (2000)

Instrumentation: Flute & Guitar

Duration: 7'

paranoid cheese (2001)

Instrumentation: Violin & Marimba

Duration: 12'

Canonada (2001)

Instrumentation: Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Piano, Percussion

Duration: 5'

Groove Canon (2002)

Instrumentation: Brass Quintet & Percussion Quintet

Duration: 12'

Machine V (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 4'04"

Machine III (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'

Dreadlocked (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'

Troica (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 2'43"

Opening (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'

Machine IV (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 3'39"

Lefty's Elegy (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'

Mara's Lullaby (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'30"

The Misadventures of Soup (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'

paranoid cheese (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'18"

Broken Glass (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 2'21"

Zrenden Rodejan, Marija! (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project:

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'29"

M/W (2002)

Instrumentation: Operetta: Piano 4-Hand, Cello, Three Actors (Concert Version: Piano 4-Hand & Cello)

Duration: 65'

Haiku (2003)

Instrumentation: High School Band, Orchestra, & Chorus

Duration: 9'

Season's Songs (2003)

Instrumentation: High School Band & Chorus

Duration: 6'

Disciples of Gouda (2003)

Instrumentation: Piano, Cello, Marimba, Percussion

Duration: 10'

Platter of Discontent (2004)

Instrumentation: Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Marimba, Piano

Duration: 18'

Agu (2004)

Instrumentation: Solo Piano

Duration: 12'

String Quartet No. 2: Revolution (2004)

Instrumentation: Two Violins, Viola, Cello

Duration: 18'

Tight Sweater (2005)

Instrumentation: Cello, Marimba, Piano

Duration: 19'

Gonzalo Speaks (2005)

Instrumentation: Baritone Voice, Flute, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet, Violin, Cello,
Piano, Marimba

Duration: 9'

Brick (2005)

Instrumentation: Orchestra

Duration: 22'

5 Quiet Machines (2006)

Instrumentation: Cello, Piano, Marimba

Duration: 18'

Farfalle Cotte (2006)

Instrumentation: Two Ocarina's (or Two Same Treble Instruments)

Duration: 1'

Etude No. 1: Medieval Induction (2006)

Instrumentation: Solo Piano

Duration: 5'

Etude No. 2: Defensive Chili (2006)

Instrumentation: Solo Piano

Duration: 5'

Zubrowka (2006)

Instrumentation: Violin

Duration: 1'

240 Weeks (2007)

Instrumentation: Two Flutes (& Piccolo), Two Clarinets/Bass Clarinets, Violin,
Cello, Piano, Two Percussion

Duration: 17'

Desperate Miniature Humans (2007)

Instrumentation: Oboe & Piano

Duration: 4'

No Strings Attached (2007)

Instrumentation: Auchincloss Piano

Duration: 15'

Nina's Lullaby (2007)

Instrumentation: Flute, Clarinet, Bassoon

Duration: 4'

3 Machines (2007)

Instrumentation: Orchestra

Duration: 10'

Tapas (2007)

Instrumentation: Violin, Viola, Cello

Duration: 14'

Shredded Paranoid Cheese (2007)

Instrumentation: Violin, Cello, Marimba, Vibraphone

Duration: 6'

Robotic Etudes (2007)

Instrumentation: LEMUR GuitarBot

Duration: 10'

Prime (2008)

Instrumentation: Bass Clarinet, Baritone Saxophone, Two Percussion, Piano

Duration: 15'

Black (2008)

Instrumentation: Two Amplified Bass Clarinets

Duration: 5'

Brickette (2008)

Instrumentation: Orchestra

Duration: 11'

Red (2008)

Instrumentation: Two Marimbas

Duration: 16'

String Quartet No. 3: Tapas (2008)

Instrumentation: Two Violins, Viola, Cello

Duration: 14'

Tom (2008)

Instrumentation: Violin & Cello

Duration: 11'

Tom (2008)

Instrumentation: Guitar Duo

Duration: 11'

Postcards of Dreadlock (2009)

Instrumentation: Piano 4-Hand

Duration: 6'30"

Mara's Lullaby (2009)

Instrumentation: Violin & Piano

Duration: 4'30"

Quad (2009)

Instrumentation: Wind Ensemble

Duration: 6'15"

Tight Sweater Remix (2005/09)

Instrumentation: Piano & Marimba

Duration: 9'

Mara's Lullaby (2009)

Instrumentation: Soprano Saxophone, Marimba, & Piano

Duration: 4'30"

Smoke (2009)

Instrumentation: Saxophone, Guitar, Marimba, & Drum Set

Duration: 17"

Octet (2010)

Instrumentation: Four Violins, Two Viola, Two Cellos

Duration: 14'

Stick (2010)

Instrumentation: Solo Snare Drum

Duration: 3'30"

Radu (2010)

Instrumentation: Four Cellos

Duration: 15'

Book of Ruth (2010)

Instrumentation: Solo Cello

Duration: 12'

This Side of Twilight (2010)

Instrumentation: Two Vibraphones & Two Marimbas

Duration: 2'

Black (2008/11)

Instrumentation: Two Baritone Saxophones

Duration: 5'

Black (2008/11)

Instrumentation: Two Cellos

Duration: 5'

Black (2008/11)

Instrumentation: Two Bassoons

Duration: 5'

Black (2008/11)

Instrumentation: Two Electric Basses

Duration: 5'

Black (2008/11)

Instrumentation: Two Violins

Duration: 5'

Black (2008/11)

Instrumentation: Two Tubas

Duration: 5'

Frost (2011)

Instrumentation: Solo Tenor Saxophone

Duration: 12'

Electric Sheep (2011)

Instrumentation: Piano & LEMURBots

Duration: 17'

Concerto for String Quartet & String Orchestra: Tapas (2011)
Instrumentation: Solo String Quartet & String Orchestra
Duration: 11'

Paranoid Cheese for Violin & String Orchestra (2011)
Instrumentation: Solo Violin & String Orchestra
Duration: 6'

Paranoid Cheese for Cello & String Orchestra (2011)
Instrumentation: Solo Cello & String Orchestra
Duration: 6'

Paranoid Cheese for Cello & String Quartet (2011)
Instrumentation: Solo Cello & String Quartet
Duration: 6'

Mara's Lullaby (2011)
Instrumentation: Cello, Marimba, & Piano
Duration: 4'30"

Mara's Lullaby (2011)
Instrumentation: Violin, Cello, & Piano
Duration: 4'30"

Mara's Lullaby (2011)
Instrumentation: Cello & Piano
Duration: 4'30"

String Quartet No. 4: Prometheus (2011)
Instrumentation: Two Violins, Viola, Cello
Duration: 22'

Zombie in a Penguin Suit (2012)
Instrumentation: Film Score for "Zombie in a Penguin Suit"
Duration: 5'

Mara's Lullaby (2012)
Instrumentation: Clarinet & Piano
Duration: 4'30"

Revolution (2012)
Instrumentation: Saxophone Quartet (arr. Nichol)
Duration: 18'

Requiem for a Hummingbird (2012)

Instrumentation: Wind Ensemble

Duration: 3'

Mara's Lullaby (2012)

Instrumentation: Tenor Saxophone & Piano

Duration: 4'30"

Black (2012)

Instrumentation: Saxophone Quartet

Duration: 5'

Flatiron (2012)

Instrumentation: Bluegrass String Band (Violin, Banjo, Mandolin, Guitar, Bass)

Duration: 25'

Bagatelle on a Theme of Beethoven (2012)

Instrumentation: Piano

Duration: 2'

Mara's Lullaby (2012)

Instrumentation: Soprano Saxophone & Piano

Duration: 4'30"

Just Noise (2013)

Instrumentation: Arr. of Beck: Just Noise (Flute, String Quartet, Drum Set)

Duration: 4'

Perfect Day (2013)

Instrumentation: Film Score for "Perfect Day"

Duration: 17'

Baby Chicken (2013)

Instrumentation: Film Score for "Baby Chicken"

Duration: 8'

Beatles Trip (2013)

Instrumentation: Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Soprano Saxophone, Piano, Two Violins,
Viola, Cello, Bass

Duration: 5'

Project Beck (2013)

Instrumentation: String Quartet, Baritone Sax, Voice

Duration: 12'

Gravity (2013)

Instrumentation: Two Vibraphones & Two marimbas (alt. vers. for
Two Vibraphones, Two Marimbas, & BS Marimba)

Duration: 13'

Max (2013)

Instrumentation: Violin & Piano

Duration: 3'

Chatter Box (2014)

Instrumentation: Audio Stack Box Array

Duration: 12'30"

Music for 5 Musicians (2014)

Instrumentation: Violin, Cello, Bass Clarinet, Marimba, Piano

Duration: 14'

Black (2014)

Instrumentation: Bassoon Quartet

Duration: 5'

Tachycardia (2014)

Instrumentation: Two Alto Saxophones

Duration: 5'

Splinter (2014)

Instrumentation: Reed Quintet

Duration: 17'

Black (2014)

Instrumentation: Two Soprano, Two Alto, or Two Tenor Saxophones

Duration: 5'

Black (2014)

Instrumentation: Bass Clarinet & Baritone Saxophone

Duration: 5'

Black (2014)

Instrumentation: Soprano Saxophone & Alto Saxophone

Duration: 5'

Nocturne (2014)

Instrumentation: Oboe and Piano

Duration: 5'30"

Black (2015)

Instrumentation: Clarinet Quartet (2 Clarinets & 2 Bass Clarinets)

Duration: 5'

String Quartet No. 5: Waníyetu (2015)

Instrumentation: Two Violins, Viola, Cello

Duration: 14'

Processations (2015)

Instrumentation: Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Piano, Marimba, Electronics

Duration: 5'

Saxology (2015)

Instrumentation: 12 Saxophones (Three Bb Soprano Saxophones, Three Eb Alto Saxophones, Three Bb Tenor Saxophones, and Three Eb Baritone Saxophones)

Duration: 5'

Book of Ruth (2015)

Instrumentation: Solo Viola (originally for solo Cello)

Duration: 12'

Ninkasi (2015)

Instrumentation: 4 Acoustic Guitars

Duration: 16.5'

Escape (2016)

Instrumentation: Alto Saxophone & Marimba

Duration: 14'

Zodiac (2016)

Instrumentation: Marimba

Duration: 20'

Green (2016)

Instrumentation: 2 Violins, Viola, 2 Cellos

Duration: 15'

Ex Machina (2016)

Instrumentation: Soprano Saxophone, Alto Saxophone, Tenor Saxophone, Baritone Saxophone

Duration: 17'

Dreadlocked (2010/16)

Instrumentation: Flute, Alto Saxophone, Violin, Cello, 4-hand Piano

Duration: 8'

Tight Sweater (2005/16)

Instrumentation: Bass Clarinet, Marimba, Piano

Duration: 19'

Tight Sweater (2005/16)

Instrumentation: Baritone Saxophone, Marimba, Piano

Duration: 19'

Mara's Lullaby (2005/17)

Instrumentation: Viola & Piano

Duration: 4'30"

Release (2017)

Instrumentation: 4 French Horns

Duration: 5'

Phoenix (2017)

Instrumentation: Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Horn, Bassoon

Duration: 5'

Revolution (2017)

Instrumentation: Soprano/Alto Saxophone, Bass Clarinet, Piano

Duration: 13'

Tapas (2017)

Instrumentation: Soprano Saxophone, Alto Saxophone, Tenor Saxophone,
Baritone Saxophone

Duration: 16'

ExtraSensory Perception (2018)

Instrumentation: 4 Soprano Saxophones, 4 Alto Saxophones, 4 Tenor
Saxophones, 4 Baritone Saxophones, 1 Bass Saxophone

Duration: 12'

Tachycardia (2018)

Instrumentation: Two Clarinets

Duration: 5'

Escape (2018)

Instrumentation: Clarinet & Marimba

Duration: 14'

Ex Machina (2016/18)

Instrumentation: 2 Clarinets & 2 Bass Clarinets

Duration: 17'

Red (2018/18)

Instrumentation: Soprano Saxophone, Alto Saxophone, Tenor Saxophone,
Baritone Saxophone

Duration: 12'

Splinter (2014/18)

Instrumentation: Saxophone Octet (SSAATTBB)

Duration: 17'

APPENDIX B: Complete list of works that include percussion

Solo or chamber works

Polysorbate 60 (1994)

Instrumentation: Flute, Clarinet, Oboe, Trumpet, Trombone, Tuba, Piano, Violin, Bass, Percussion (Bell plate, Set of bongos (tuned tightly), Brake drum, Castanets, Claves, 2 crystal glasses, sizzle cymbal, tambourine, 2 temple blocks (one high), 3 tom-toms, whip, wood block)

Duration: 10'

Groove Canon (1998)

Instrumentation: Brass Quintet & Drum Set

Duration: 18'

Troica (1998)

Instrumentation: Flute (or Violin), Guitar (or Electric Guitar or Piano), Marimba (or Piano)

Duration: 6'30"

5 Machines (2000)

Instrumentation: Amplified Bass Clarinet/Soprano Sax, Electric Guitar, Amplified Cello, Amplified Bass, Amplified Piano, Percussion (Amplified Marimba, Vibraphone, Brake drums, 2 Tom-toms)

Duration: 18'

paranoid cheese (2001)

Instrumentation: Violin & Marimba

Duration: 12'

Canonada (2001)

Instrumentation: Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Piano, Drum Set

Duration: 5'

Machine V (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 4'04"

Machine III (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'

Dreadlocked (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'

Troica (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 2'43"

Opening (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'

Machine IV (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 3'39"

Lefty's Elegy (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'

Mara's Lullaby (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'30"

The Misadventures of Soup (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'

paranoid cheese (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'18"

Broken Glass (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 2'21"

Zrenden Rodejan, Marija! (2001) - Paranoid Cheese Project:

Instrumentation: Amplified Violin, Amplified Cello, Amplified Marimba, Electric Guitar, Keyboard

Duration: 5'29"

Groove Canon (2002) - large ensemble version

Instrumentation: Brass Quintet & Percussion Quintet

Percussion: 2 Bass Marimbas (4 players on 2 marimba),
Glockenspiel, Vibraphone (2 players – 4 bows), assorted prayer
bowls, assorted unpitched percussion instruments for
improvisation

Duration: 12'

Disciples of Gouda (2003)

Instrumentation: Piano, Cello, Marimba, Percussion (hand drums)

Duration: 10'

Platter of Discontent (2004)

Instrumentation: Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Marimba, Piano

Duration: 18'

Tight Sweater (2005)

Instrumentation: Cello, Marimba, Piano

Duration: 19'

Gonzalo Speaks (2005)

Instrumentation: Baritone Voice, Flute, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet, Violin, Cello,
Piano, Marimba

Duration: 9'

5 Quiet Machines (2006)

Instrumentation: Cello, Piano, Marimba

Duration: 18'

Farfalle Cotte (2006)

Instrumentation: Two Ocarina's (or Two Same Treble Instruments)

Duration: 1'

240 Weeks (2007)

Instrumentation: Two Flutes (& Piccolo), Two Clarinets/Bass Clarinets, Violin, Cello, Piano, Two Percussion Percussion 1 (marimba 1, 5 tom-toms, 2 brake drums, metal tube (with dreadlocks) slapstick), Percussion 2 (marimba , 5 tom-toms, 2 brake drums, metal tube (with dreadlocks) slapstick, glockenspiel), Claves (played by Flutes), Violin (doubling egg shaker)

Duration: 17'

Shredded Paranoid Cheese (2007)

Instrumentation: Violin, Cello, Marimba, Vibraphone

Duration: 6'

Prime (2008)

Instrumentation: Bass Clarinet, Baritone Saxophone, Percussion 1 (2 Metal, 2 Skin, 4 Wood including and/or 3 Woodblocks, Vibraphone), Percussion II (2 Metal, 2 Skin, 4 Wood, Agogo Bell, Tambourine, Axatse, Marimba), Piano

Duration: 15'

Red (2008)

Instrumentation: Two Marimbas

Duration: 16'

Tight Sweater Remix (2005/9)

Instrumentation: Piano & Marimba

Duration: 9'

Mara's Lullaby (2009)

Instrumentation: Soprano Saxophone, Marimba, & Piano

Duration: 4'30"

Smoke (2009)

Instrumentation: Saxophone, Guitar, Marimba, & Drum Set

Duration: 17'

Stick (2010)

Instrumentation: Solo Snare Drum

Duration: 3'30"

This Side of Twilight (2010)

Instrumentation: Two Vibraphones & Two Marimbas

Duration: 2'

Mara's Lullaby (2011)

Instrumentation: Cello, Marimba, & Piano

Duration: 4'30"

Just Noise (2013) Arr. of Beck: Just Noise

Instrumentation: Flute, String Quartet, Drum Set

Duration: 4'

Gravity (2013)

Instrumentation: Two Vibraphones & Two marimbas (alt. version for
Two vibraphones, Two Marimbas, & BS Marimba)

Duration: 13'

Music for 5 Musicians (2014)

Instrumentation: Violin, Cello, Bass Clarinet, Marimba, Piano

Duration: 14'

Processations (2015)

Instrumentation: Flute, Clarinet, Violin, Piano, Vibraphone, Marimba, Electronics

Duration: 5'

Escape (2016)

Instrumentation: Alto Saxophone & Marimba

Duration: 14'

Zodiac (2016)

Instrumentation: Marimba

Duration: 20'

Tight Sweater (2005/16)

Instrumentation: Baritone Saxophone, Marimba, Piano

Duration: 19'

Tight Sweater (2005/16)

Instrumentation: Bass Clarinet, Marimba, Piano

Duration: 19'

Large ensemble works

Piano Concerto (1984)

Instrumentation: Piano Solo & Orchestra

Duration: 15'

Fanfare (1990)

Instrumentation: Orchestra

Duration: 2'

O (1991)

Instrumentation: Orchestra

Duration: 2'

Aro (1993)

Instrumentation: Chamber Orchestra/Orchestra

Duration: 12'

Concerto for Piccolo and Orchestra (1995)

Instrumentation: Piccolo & Chamber Orchestra/Orchestra

Duration: 2'

Fruit Loops (1997)

Instrumentation: Amplified Chamber Orchestra

Duration: 7'

Phase, Inc. (1999)

Instrumentation: Amplified Chamber Orchestra

Duration: 7'

Zoot Suit Riot (1999)

Instrumentation: Wind Ensemble

Duration: 3'

Haiku (2003)

Instrumentation: High School Band, Orchestra, & Chorus

Duration: 9'

Brick (2005)

Instrumentation: Orchestra

Duration: 22'

3 Machines (2007)

Instrumentation: Orchestra

Duration: 10'

Brickette (2008)

Instrumentation: Orchestra

Duration: 11'

Quad (2009)

Instrumentation: Wind Ensemble

Duration: 6'15"

Zombie In A Penguin Suit (2012) - Film Score for "Zombie In A Penguin Suit"

Instrumentation: Orchestra

Duration: 5'

Requiem for a Hummingbird (2012)

Instrumentation: Wind Ensemble

Duration: 3'

APPENDIX C: List of recorded works

Album: *Smoke*
Artist: New Music Detroit
Works: *Smoke, String Quartet No. 3, Tapas, Prime*

Album: *Marc Mellits – String Quartets No. 3, 4, 5*
Artist: Debussy String Quartet
Works: *String Quartets No. 3, 4, 5*

Album: *The Chamber Music of Marc Mellits*
Artist: La Filature Musicale
Works: *Green, Tapas, String Quartet No. 4, Prometheus*

Album: *Rhythm of Silence*
Artist: Erika Tazawa
Works: *Agu*

Album: *Entwined*
Artist: Jack Schepps Quintet
Works: *Flatiron*

Album: *Got Stung*
Artist: Splinter Reeds
Works: *Splinter*

Album: *Reich: New York Counterpoint/Mellits: Black*
Artist: Julian Bliss
Works: *Black*

Album: *Guerrilla New Music*
Artist: Great Noise Ensemble
Works: *5 Machines*

Album: *Patterns*
Artist: UCF Percussion
Works: *Farfalle Cotte, Gravity*

Album: *American Journey*
Artist: Roger McVey
Works: *Agu*

Album: *Tachycardia*
Artist: Dave Camwell and Stephen Page
Works: *Tachycardia*

Album: *Octuorissimo: Le Maitre & l'Eleve*
Artist: Quatuor Debussy – Quatuor Arranoa
Works: *Octet*

Album: *Mix Tape*
Artist: Andrew Russo
Works: *Spank Me, No String Attached* (“Kurried Kafka”)

Album: *Convergence*
Artist: Strike
Works: *Tight Sweater Remix*

Album: *Paranoid Cheese*
Artist: Mellits Consort
Works: *Opening, Broken Glass, paranoid cheese, The Misadventures of Soup, Lefty's Elegy, Machine IV, Sreen Rodendan, Marija!, Troica, Dreadlocked, Machine III, Machine V*

Album: *Common Sense Composers Collective*
Artist: Common Sense Composers Collective
Works: *Polysorbate 60*

Album: *Melville's Dozen*
Artist: Nicola Melville
Works: *Etude No. 2: “Defensive Chili”*

Album: *Electric Kompany*
Artist: Electric Kompany
Works: *Srekan Rodjendan, Marija!, Lefty's Elegy, Dreadlocked*

Album: *TIC*
Artist: Common Sense Composers Collective and New Millennium Ensemble
Works: *Spam*

Album: *Steve Reich, Marc Mellits*
Artist: Duke Quartet, Andrew Russo, Marc Mellits
Works: *String Quartet No. 2*

Album: *Dirty Little Secret*
Artist: Andrew Russo
Works: *Etude No. 1: “Medieval Induction”*

Album: *Back to Yourself*
Artist: Christian Elin
Works: *Mara's Lullaby*

Album: *Black*
Artist: Sqwonk
Works: *Black*

Album: *Timescape*
Artist: Dave Camwell
Works: *Farfalle Cotte*

Album: *Écouter*
Artist: Écouter
Works: *Merge Left*

Album: *Beyond Shadows*
Artist: The Nu:BC Collective
Works: *11 Pieces for Flute and Piano*

Album: *Serendipity*
Artist: Society for New Music
Works: *Platter of Discontent*

Album: *Los Angeles New Music Ensemble*
Artist: Los Angeles New Music Ensemble
Works: *Gonzalo Speaks*

Album: *Perspectives*
Artist: Roger McVey
Works: *Etude No. 2: "Defensive Chili"*

Album: *Escape Velocity*
Artist: Clocks in Motion
Works: *Gravity*

Album: *Groove Machine*
Artist: h2 Quartet
Works: *Groove Machine*

Album: *Differential Moods*
Artist: Jeff Loeffert
Works: *Farfalle Cotte*

Album: *Tight Sweater*
Artist: Real Quiet
Works: *Tight Sweater, Disciples of Guoda, Fruity Pebbles, Agu*

Album: *The Shock of the Old*

Artist: American Baroque

Works: *11 Miniatures for Baroque Ensemble, Slippery, Dark Age Machinery, Metoclopramide, Elegy for Lefty, Lunacy, Carpel Tunnel, Velocity, Lego, Lefty's Elegy*

Album: *Deviations*

Artist: Dominic Frasca

Works: *5 Chanukah Etudes for the Frascas: "Domemetude", Lefty's Elegy, Metoclopramide, Dark Age Machinery*

APPENDIX D: Interview questions

Mellits interview questions

- What is your background? Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
- You come from a family of scientists...do any other members of your family do music?
- Are any of your own family members musicians? How did you meet your wife (violinist)?
- Tell me about your academic studies. Where did you study music and composition and with whom? Who were your composition teachers? Who were some of your classmates?
- How was your formal musical training? What big things did you take from your composition teachers that have stuck with you and can be heard in your music today?
- What is your compositional process?
- Did any of the performers have input during commissions or compositional process? How much do you work with performers to write?
- What is the ratio of commissioned work vs non-commissioned pieces?
- In an article I read, you mention you had some ideas of minimalist writing before hearing Glass or Reich. Can you elaborate?
- When did you first hear Glass or Reich? What were the pieces? How did it affect you as a person and composer?
- From reading other interviews I know you don't like labels or putting your music into a genre. How would you describe your music?
- How would you classify or characterize your compositional style?
- How has your compositional style evolved over time?
- Was there a particular piece or time you thought this is the style of music I want to write?
- What was the first piece you wrote? First piece with percussion?

- How did you get to write these percussion pieces? Commissions?
- What are some of your non-classical music influences?
- Your music is played all over the world. How did you promote yourself as a composer to get this notoriety?
- What are your current composition projects?
- How much time do you spend composing on a daily/weekly basis?
- Have you had roadblocks in your creativity and how did you overcome them?
- How do you decide what pieces to write?
- Many of your pieces are in short movements? Why is this? What is the longest piece you have written? Reaction to Reich's longer works? Love of the baroque?
- Many of your works come without musical direction and I think this helps aid in the interpretation of each performance. Have you ever heard a performance of your music that you didn't like?
- Why have you gravitated to writing Marimba into so much of your music?
- When did you realize you made it as a composer? A performance, commission, award, festival? Carnegie Hall "Brick" performance?
- Balance teaching and composition time? Teaching workload at UIC?
- Do you have a list of performances of percussion pieces?
- People talk about the death of the orchestra. Where do you see the future of classical music heading?
- Where do you get the unique titles of your pieces? Title first or music first? Where do you start? Do you think your titles attract more people or repel because they may not know what they are going to hear?
- Are there certain forms you like to use in your music? Or do they just develop from your ideas?
- Do you have any pieces that are drastically different from the pieces you write now?

- Do you keep your early handwritten sketches of your music? Percussion music? Could I see them?
- When did you know you wanted to compose music/do music for a living?

Commission/consortium member questions

- How do you know Marc Mellits? When were you first introduced to his music?
- Have you played any previous Mellits' works?
- When/how did this commission/consortium come about?
- Were you involved in the composition process?
- Do you still have any of the correspondence with Mellits during the commissioning process? Would you mind sending them to me?
- Do you have any performance suggestions? (i.e. mallet choice, 2 vs 4 mallets, performance tempo, sticking considerations)
- Do you feel like the piece should be played in its entirety or better as select movements? Do you have a particular choice in movement order (both for select movements or the entire piece)?
- How many times have you performed the work?
- Do you have any other insight into Marc or his music?

APPENDIX E: Permission for use

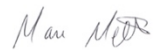
Marc Mellits
Dacia Music
1044 W. Harrison St.
Chicago, IL 60607
www.marcmellits.com

April 9, 2019

Dear Oliver,

Pursuant to your request, as said use is solely for educational purposes as a doctoral candidate, a gratis use is hereby granted; said rights are solely applicable to usage of the excerpts obtained from the pieces below in your dissertation only. You may not publish the excerpts listed below in any capacity outside of your dissertation.

Sincerely,



Marc Mellits

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