

Program notes for Concerto for Xylophone by Samuel Stokes

My main goal in composing Concerto for Xylophone was to show the expressive range of one of my favorite percussion instruments, which is among the less represented instruments in the history of the concerto. I chose a five movement structure in order to display the capability of the xylophone to convey a range of different emotions.

I. Intrada

The opening movement begins with a stately, majestic theme using quartal harmonies (based on the perfect fourth and augmented fourth intervals). The contrasting middle section is mostly triadic (chords built in thirds), but highlights root movement of the dissonant tritone interval between chords. This movement highlights several idiomatic techniques of the xylophone, including double-strokes, quadruple-stops (all four-mallets striking simultaneously), and rapid broken-chord patterns.

II. Waltz

This movement begins with a more contemplative mood in A minor inspired by music of the Baroque period. This alternates with contrasting waltz sections in F major, with a slightly off-kilter three-measure phrase structure. This odd phrase structure is further complicated the second time the F major section appears, as the xylophone part features two-measure broken chord groupings, at odds with the three-measure phrases in the rest of the orchestra.

III. Scherzo

When hearing this whimsical movement, you might feel like you are in the middle of a circus. The beginning and ending sections feature rapid double-stop and single-line chromatic motion. The middle section, however, is the most technically challenging part, with constant quadruple-stops. Humor is a very important part of my life, and I truly hope the listener has as much fun hearing this movement as I had writing it!

IV. Ballade

The xylophone is not usually thought of as the most romantic instrument, but this movement was written to show that the instrument does have the potential to express feelings of love and sentimentality. Composed in the key of D major, the lyrical melody is harmonized using secondary dominant chords and mode mixture to give the melody more emotional depth.

V. Rondo

This furious movement is written in an ABACBA modified rondo form. The A sections feature a rapid 16th-note melody on the xylophone using harmonically ambiguous scales including E Dorian $\hat{2}$, D Dorian $\hat{2}$, and two different whole-tone scales. The contrasting B sections are waltz-like and use the scales of F Lydian $\hat{7}$ and G Lydian $\hat{7}$. This movement uses the full 3.5 octave range of the instrument with both the lowest and highest keys, F4 and C8.

When I first started playing percussion with the Sedalia Symphony Orchestra as a teenager in the 1990s, I dreamed of composing a work to premiere with the orchestra. I can't express enough how honored I feel to have the opportunity to premiere this work today, and certainly hope that you will enjoy it!