

Reflections on the Mallet Ensembles vol. 2 by Daniel Berg

In October 2017 the music score *Mallet Ensembles vol. 2* were published by Edition Svitzer in Copenhagen, Denmark. Front cover was made by Gaia Gomes, the photo by Per Buhre and the engraving by Johan Svitzer.

- Can you write a piece about when the earth was created?
- No.
- Why?
- The subject is too big and at the moment I have very little time.

Per Björkqvist, teacher at the Hulebäck High School asked me, but also woke me up and gave me the following artistic challenge:

1. Most young percussion players are focusing on drums. How can I inspire them to find the mallet instruments?
2. In what way can I write for an ensemble where every player has a different background and where the players are on different levels?
3. How can a musical work for percussion ensemble tell a story about when the earth was created and can the ensemble turn into living life?

Most young percussion players start playing drums and later in the teens they get in contact with the melodic percussion, such as marimba and vibraphone. Though the drumming, they build up a good technique and are used to read a score with complicated rhythms. On the other hand they are not used to read a melodic score. Based on these facts I wrote the songs in *Mallets Ensembles vol. 2* with repeated rhythmic patterns for the chord parts (four mallets), quite easy to learn, but a little tricky and hopefully joyful and technical challenging for a drummer to play.

The melody part was written for two mallets and easier than the chord parts. I tried to find a catchy melody, easy to remember. Many young drummers will probably learn the melody by ear, not by the score. For the very young player I wrote a part for glockenspiel with less difficulty. Totally every song in the *Mallet Ensembles vol. 2* got these parts:

1. Glockenspiel (easy)
2. Melody 1 (easy +)
3. Melody 2 (intermediate)
4. Chord (intermediate +)
5. Drums/percussion (ad lib)
6. Bass (intermediate -)

Per Björkqvist wanted a piece about when the earth was created. The big bang is not very hard to get from a percussion ensemble, but what time signatures and what kind of melody would I use? I wrote a short phrase and tried the phrase in different time signatures and found out that the 6/8 was more pompously than other time signatures, like moving material. I repeated the phrase several times, but every time it came back, I started the melody in a higher tonal register. Because of that I think I got a feeling of climbing higher up in the sky. The Italian composer Giacomo Puccini sometimes uses a bird sound in the percussion part in his Operas. From that I got the idea to let all the parts change from their instruments to bird sounds and “fly” from the stage. I named the piece *Tellus*.

Through these songs and educational material for young percussion players I hope I will awaken a young drummers curiosity for marimba and vibraphone. With the parts in different difficulty I also hope players with different background can join. I’m not sure if a percussion ensemble can tell a story about when the earth was created, but I am sure they will turn into living life.