

20 Years of the Rosauero Marimba Concerto

BY JEFF MOORE

This year marks the 20th anniversary of Ney Rosauero's "Concerto for Marimba." In the first twenty years of its existence, it has been performed with orchestra over one thousand times¹. In the past ten years, the concerto has received, on average, well over one hundred performances per year with orchestra and wind ensemble. Although the number of performances includes high school, community, and university ensembles, the number also reflects performances with professional orchestras from all over the world.



Original Cover of the Marimba Concerto

While some students choose to perform the concerto in various music competitions, many of the world's premier marimba soloists have performed this work in professional engagements. The list of performers includes Evelyn Glennie, Michael Burritt, Katarzyna Mycka, Mark Ford, Mamoko Kamiya, Shee Wu, Li Biao, Naoka Takada, Babette Haag, Andy Harnsberger, and many others. Although over a thousand official performances with orchestras worldwide is impressive, imagine how many more times the piece has been performed with piano or percussion ensemble. Rosauro's "Concerto for Marimba" is arguably the most popular percussion concerto in history.

The popularity of Rosauro's concerto contributed to a wider acceptance of the marimba as a legitimate solo instrument with orchestra. Ensembles at all levels began to program the Rosauro concerto, encouraging and giving more percussionists the opportunity to perform with orchestras for the first time.

The number of marimba concerti has grown significantly since the 1990s. The popularity of the "Concerto for Marimba" and the programming opportunities may have influenced some composers to become more interested in writing for marimba. There were certainly many factors involved in the explosion of the marimba concerto genre, but it's possible that the number of performances that the Rosauro concerto received worldwide was one of those factors.

HOW POPULAR?

It is interesting to compare the number



of performances the Rosauro concerto has received relative to other percussion concerti. Prior to Rosauro's work, the Creston "Concertino" and the Basta and Kurka concerti were considered by some to be the most popular². Although exact performance figures on all the pieces are difficult to obtain, some publishers have provided partial data so we may begin to compare the performance numbers. This performance data can be deceiving. Simply considering the number of performances a work receives leaves out many other important analytical factors. Here are some things to keep in mind when considering the data shown on the accompanying chart:

1. This chart is not comparing the composition quality or making any other deter-

minations regarding the level of difficulty in the solo or ensemble parts.

2. This chart is based on numbers provided by the publishers and some additional sources. They are not all-inclusive and probably contain some unintentional omissions.

3. The list does not distinguish between the type of performance (school, community, professional, etc.). All performances have been combined together, as the separation by levels for all the works was not available from the publishers.

4. The list is intended to provide a context, admittedly an imperfect one, by which to judge the relative popularity of the Rosauro concerto compared to other compositions in the genre.

Title	Composer	Date	Available Years of Performance Totals	# of Performances w/Orchestra	Annual Avg.
Concertino for Marimba and Orchestra	Paul Creston	1940	2002-03	48	24
Concerto for Marimba	James Basta	1956	2004-05	7	3.5
Veni, Veni, Emmanuel	James MacMillan	1992	1992-2004	350	27
Marimba Concerto #1, op. 25	Nebojsa Zivkovic	1986	1986-2006	15	1.25
Marimba Concerto #2, op. 25	Nebojsa Zivkovic	1997	1997-2006	35	3.5
Concerto for Marimba	Eckhard Kopetzki	1999	1999-2006	33	4
Concerto for Marimba	Ney Rosauro	1986	1991-2006	1068	71

The following works were also considered, but no data was provided: "Concerto for Percussion and Small Orchestra" by Darius Milhaud, "Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra, op. 34" by Robert Kurka, "Prism Rhapsody" by Keiko Abe, "UFO" by Michael Daugherty and "Percussion Concerto" by Joseph Schwantner.

5. This list does not take into consideration the multiple programming of a single artist. In other words, a single performer could perform one particular work many times.

INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

One important innovation with Rosauero's "Concerto for Marimba" is that it was the first to have a percussion ensemble version in addition to the standard piano reduction. When the wind ensemble version was added, it provided performers with many different options and many more potential performance opportunities from this one piece. Another innovative aspect is that it was self-published at a time when most concerti were released by commercial publishers. With advancements in technology and print-music distribution capabilities, we are seeing more composers, especially for percussion instruments, following the self-publication model.

BACKGROUND

The concerto was written between June and July of 1986 while Rosauero had a broken left wrist. The main marimba solos were finished later when his wrist had healed, so that the solos would be idiomatic to the instrument. The premiere (with piano reduction) occurred in September 1986 at the Teatro Nacional de Brasilia, performed by the composer and pianist Ana Amelia Gomide. This work was originally written for marimba and string orchestra and was premiered in this format by Rosauero and the Manitowoc Symphony Orchestra (USA) in November of 1986. The concerto is dedicated to Rosauero's son, Marcelo, who was born around the time of the composition.

Because Rosauero could not find a suitable concerto that he liked, he wrote this concerto with the intention of programming it on the final recital for his master's degree in music at the Hochschule fur Musik Wurzburg in Germany under the direction of Professor Siegfried Fink. The initial title was "Serenata" for Marimba and String Orchestra. The eighteen-minute lyrical work uses classical, jazz, and Brazilian motifs and consists of four movements instead of the traditional three-movement concerto form. The movement titles are "Saudação" ("Greetings"), "Lamento" ("Lament"), "Danca" ("Dance") and "Despedida" ("Farewell"). Although no folkloric or popular Brazilian theme is di-



Manuscript from the Marimba Concerto

rectly applied in the work, a Brazilian musical atmosphere still permeates the entire piece as evidenced by the use of syncopated rhythms and charming melodies in its texture.³

OVERVIEW

Rosauero's "Concerto for Marimba" is an important addition to solo marimba repertoire for several reasons. First, he composed it in response to the lack of true marimba works requiring the use of exten-

sive four-mallet techniques.⁴ Most of the early marimba concerti were written for an "extended xylophone" and focused on two-mallet technique. By contrast, Rosauero's concerto not only explores the many possibilities of modern four-mallet techniques (thus presenting the marimba's range of possibilities to a larger audience), but also represents the most essential aspects of musical expression on the marimba.⁵

In addition, this is the first marimba con-

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certo written by a performing percussionist who also composes and teaches. He wrote the concerto with performers and educators in mind. As the result, this work is very idiomatic and lends itself equally well as both an educational tool for the teacher and concert/recital piece for the performer—not to mention, it is quite enjoyable for an audience.⁶ This concerto has become a frequently performed marimba piece for entrance auditions, concerto competitions, recitals, orchestras, and courses of study at colleges and universities worldwide.

Though it is occasionally criticized for its simplicity, the music is technically challenging and weaves its way through beautiful harmonies and melodic themes while

conveying compositional and cultural ideas unique to the composer. This endeavor to create original concepts and establish a genre brought new creations and styles of marimba writing into the orchestral and compositional realm.⁷

Rosauro's intention was to create a concerto in which the marimba is the primary focus and presents most of the thematic material. Much of the marimba part can also be performed as a solo work without the orchestral accompaniment. In 2003, Rosauro wrote the "Marimba Concerto Suite" for solo marimba using most of the important themes in the "Concerto for Marimba."

A review from *Percussive Notes* states that "the concerto is superbly written for

the unique timbre, virtuosity, and technical qualities of the marimba."⁸ Rosauro initially wrote the concerto with the idea of improving his own technique, resulting in one of the first idiomatically composed concerti for marimba. But while the work showcases the marimba's unique qualities and potentials, it is also recognized for its artistic compositional approach.

In 1992, Rosauro's "Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra" received worldwide recognition when it was recorded by Evelyn Glennie and the London Symphony Orchestra.⁹ In 1989, Rosauro arranged movements I, II, and IV for marimba with percussion ensemble, and in 1995 he completed this version by adding the third movement. In 1997, Dr. Thomas (Tony) McCutchen arranged it for marimba and wind ensemble. The availability of these versions has led to even more performances of the "Concerto for Marimba."

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Rosauro's Reflections on "Concerto for Marimba"

JEFF MOORE: *What were your initial experiences with the concerto after you finished it?*

NEY ROSAURO: Initially, I did not have good luck with this concerto. After I finished writing it, I presented it to the Orchestra Director at the Music School in Wurzburg, Germany. He told me that the manuscript was unacceptable and that if I wanted the orchestra to play it, I had to re-write it using a ruler. I spent every evening for three months recopying the score with a ruler and paid a guy to copy out the parts. Before the concert, I presented the newly copied score and parts to the director and he said, 'No, we are not going to play it.' So I did my final concert with piano instead of orchestra.

I also entered an orchestra competition with it and I did not win. In 1987, I presented the concerto to five different publishing companies; all were focused on percussion music, and all five turned me down. One publisher told me, 'You are from Brazil. Why don't you write a nice samba? Nobody is interested in a Brazilian marimba concerto.' Later, when the concerto got popular, some of those same publishers asked me to write a concerto for them to publish. I reminded them that they rejected my first one ten years ago, and they were quite surprised when they remembered our earlier meeting.

MOORE: *Was self publishing such a bad thing?*

ROSAURO: No, it turned out to be the best deal for me. Because of the rejection, I started my own publishing company, Pro Percussao. It was great because I owned my own music and I was in charge. When I started, I think I was one of the first people to self-publish, but today it is such a popular thing for composers to do. To distribute it, I sold to Steve Weiss and Herbert Brandt in Germany. That was it. Weiss covered the American market and Brandt the Euro-



pean market. In the beginning of the 1990s, MalletWorks Music became my worldwide distributor.

MOORE: *When and why did you decide to rent the parts to the concerto? Was there a time when you could buy the score and parts?*

ROSAURO: Yes, there was a time when you could buy the parts very early on. Maybe it was available for one year. As soon as I learned from other composers that it was better to rent the parts to maintain control of the music, I switched my approach.

MOORE: *I have an old copy called "Concert for Marimba." Why did you change the title?*

ROSAURO: Originally I was going to call it "Serenata" for marimba and orchestra. A "Serenata" is a serenade, like you go to the window of a loved one and you make a greeting, then a lament, when you sing something sad, then to show off you do a dance—something lively—and finally a farewell. This is where the ideas for the movement titles came from.

I changed it from "Serenata" because I thought people would not take the piece seriously. I called it "Concert" because my English was not so good. I did not know it was wrong, and someone asked me about it and I corrected it to "Concerto." The first edition is called "Concert" because nobody had told me I had the wrong name.

MOORE: *After it was written, how long before you noticed it was getting very popular?*

ROSAURO: In 1989, after a publisher in Germany had rejected the concerto, I received a letter from Evelyn Glennie stating she was going to be in Brazil for the Carnival and wanted to play music by Brazilian composers. She said she was starting her career as a solo percussionist and the letter requested that I submit any pieces I would like considered. I submitted the "Concerto for Marimba" and "Cenas Amerindas." I never heard back from her, but then almost a year later I got a letter from the BBC saying they were going to do a video with Evelyn in Brazil and they wanted to buy

the rights to the music. They offered, I think 1,000 pounds, which was about 3,000 dollars. I thought, 'Man, I was never paid so much money for my music in my life!' I got a contract and signed it right away. But it turned out to be a bad deal for me commercially because that video is still played all over the world and I receive no royalties.

I have absolutely no regrets, though. At the time it was great for me because it was the first time I had seen money from the music I had written, but most importantly it got my music and the concerto out to everybody. After Evelyn's recording, I noticed a great deal of interest in my music and especially the concerto. By the time I finished my DMA and left the United States for Brazil in 1992, I felt there was an awareness of my music and the concerto in particular within the American market.

MOORE: *These experiences had to say something about perseverance.*

ROSAURO: I learned you have to believe in what you are doing. The only reason for doing something is because you believe in it. Much of the music in the 1980s was avant-garde and atonal; I got the feeling that nobody cared for melodies and harmony anymore. Some of the criticisms I have heard about the concerto is that it is "not good because it is too tonal." I could have said, "I am a loser, I am a failure," but instead I thought, "I like the music, it sounds good to me, so I will keep writing." I write my music primarily for me. It has to please me. I am happy when other people enjoy the music, and sometimes when they do not, they tell me. I hear their feelings and I understand, but the music pleased me and that it was what I did it for.

MOORE: *Do you consider the concerto more tonal or modal?*

ROSAURO: I consider it tonal. Much of my music is modal, like my "Rhapsody" percussion concerto. So much of my music is influenced by Brazilian music, so, for example, you will hear Mixolydian or Lydian modes coming from the music of the *baiao* from Northeast Brazil, and those modes find their way into some of my melodies.

The concerto is interesting because it is harmonically so simple. That might be one of the reasons it is so popular. It is a

very percussive concerto and the harmonies are simple. It is very rhythmic and marimbistic. I feel that my "Vibraphone Concerto" and my "Marimba Concerto #2" are much more mature musically, but the first is the one that most people know me by.

MOORE: *Do you think the arrangement of the concerto with percussion ensemble and your "Suite from the Marimba Concerto" for solo marimba has helped the popularity of the "Concerto for Marimba"?*

ROSAURO: I think if you work on the "Concerto for Marimba" and learn all of it, the more opportunities you have to perform it the better. Perhaps the different settings provide more opportunity for performance, but I am not sure if it has impacted the popularity one way or another.

MOORE: *Have you heard any criticisms about the concerto that bother you?*

ROSAURO: Because I write for myself, criticisms do not really bother me. You cannot please everyone, and I am not trying to. Pablo Casals said something that really means a lot to me. He said, "The simplest things in music are the ones that count. The simplest things are, of course, the most difficult to achieve and take years of work." My concept is that I want to hear music that relaxes and soothes me. I am a simple man with simple tastes. I feel my music is a reflection of me personally; it is honest. I write only when I have something to say, something to get it out of my imagination. I am looking forward to having more time to dedicate to composition in the future, but I still will only write when I feel I have something to say.

For further reading: "An Interview with Brazilian Percussionist and Composer Ney Rosauro" by James Lambert. *Percussive Notes*, February 1997, Volume 35, No. 1 (available online in the Research Archives of the PAS website at www.pas.org).

ENDNOTES

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2. Kevin R. Lucas, "A Study of Selected Works for Marimba and Large Ensemble" (Masters of Music Research Document, Southern Illinois University, 2003).
3. Wan-Chun Liao, "Ney Rosauro's Two Concerti for Marimba and Orchestra: Analysis, Pedagogy, and Artistic Considerations" (Doctoral Essay, University of Miami, 2005).

4. Dometico Equilio Zarro, "Ney Rosauro: A Comprehensive Instructional Video and Reference Study Guide on the Composer and His Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra" (DMA essay, Columbia University Teachers College, 2000).
5. Ney Rosauro, Personal Interview with Wan-Chun Liao, April 12, 2004.
6. Wan-Chun Liao, "Ney Rosauro's Two Concerti for Marimba and Orchestra: Analysis, Pedagogy, and Artistic Considerations" (Doctoral Essay, University of Miami, 2005)
7. Ibid.
8. Ney Rosauro, Ney Rosauro—Percussionist, Composer and Educator, 2000 [on-line] available from <http://www.neyrosauro.com>; Internet, accessed 22 April 2004.
9. Evelyn Glennie in Rio (1992). Program notes for Ney Rosauro's "Concerto for Marimba and Orchestra," Evelyn Glennie, percussion; London Symphony Orchestra; Barry Wordworth, conductor, Decca, CD.

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