

Arranging for the Solo Marimbist

An Improvisational Approach

Presented by Dr. Brian Mueller



**Percussive Arts Society
International Convention**

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1:00pm, Room 120



Dr. Brian Mueller is currently Lecturer of Percussion at Middle Tennessee State University, where he has been on faculty since 2015. He is also on faculty with the Tennessee Governor's School for the Arts. He holds a Doctor of Music degree from the Indiana University Jacob's School of Music (2016). His prior academic background includes a Master of Music degree from the University of North Texas (2009) and a Bachelor of Music degree from Wichita State University (2007). Brian has worked as a freelance drummer and percussionist for many years, and is a published composer and arranger, with pieces available through Tapspace Publications and C. Alan Publications. He has performed and presented clinics nationally and internationally, including at the the MTSU Jazz Festival; the Shanghai Jazz Festival; the Columbus (OH) International Festival; the North Georgia Percussion Festival; the McCormick Marimba Festival; Reinhardt University; Southeastern University; Florida State University; Tennessee Tech University; Indiana University; Wichita State University; Kansas State University; Middle Tennessee State University; the University of the South (Sewanee, TN); the Conservatoire à Rayonnement Régional de Paris; the Central Conservatory of Beijing; the Midi School of Music (Beijing); Wuxi Grand Theater (Wuxi, China); Hangzhou Normal University (Hangzhou, China); the Zhejiang Conservatory of Music (Hangzhou, China); and the Wuhan Conservatory of Music.

Brian proudly endorses Pearl/Adams Concert Percussion and Innovative Percussion.

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Over the Rainbow.....Harold Arlen (1905-1986)
arr. Brian Mueller

Part 1 - Essential Improvisational Exercises

Part 2 - Application: Danny Boy

Danny BoyTraditional
arr. Brian Mueller

Closing Remarks

Blue in Green / The Fairview HymnsMiles Davis (1926-1991)
Gustav Holst (1874-1934)
Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)
arr. Brian Mueller

*Note: I will be at the Pearl/Adams Booth (#701) this afternoon at 3:00!
Feel free to stop by if you have any questions!*



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1) Practicing technique on **specific chords** rather than static blocks. Become familiar with the *sound*.

2) **Harmonic Planing:** Moving up and down within a key.

3) Applying **Left-hand Positions** to the major scale. Beginning the scale on various chord tones.

4) Applying Left-hand Positions to diatonic arpeggios.

5) Exploring all diatonic **modes** (scales) and chords (arpeggios) - Applying the planing concept.

12 Modes of the Dorian Scale

Gm (ii - Dorian) Etc... Am (iii - Phrygian) Etc... Bb (IV - Lydian) Etc...

C (V - Mixolydian) Etc... Dm (vi - Aeolian) Etc... E \emptyset 7 (vii - Locrian) Etc...

6) Separating the hands: Keeping the left hand on the LP notes while the right hand plays the “melody.” The upper note of the LP serves as a **Rotation Note**.

(Square brackets denote the rotation note: 1/[5].)

Exercise 6: Separating the hands. The left hand plays a sequence of notes: F, Gm, Am, etc. The right hand plays a melody. The left hand notes are labeled 1/[5]LP.

7) Using **chord inversions** to generate chordal motion across the keyboard.

Exercise 7: Using chord inversions to generate chordal motion across the keyboard. The left hand plays a sequence of notes: F, Gm, Am, etc. The right hand plays a melody. The left hand notes are labeled 1/[5]LP.

8) The **Left-hand Structure** and the **Rotation Interval**.

(Square brackets denote the rotation interval: 1/[5,8].)

Exercise 8: The Left-hand Structure and the Rotation Interval. The left hand plays a sequence of notes: F, Gm, Am, etc. The right hand plays a melody. The left hand notes are labeled 1/[5,8]LS.

9) **Diatonic improvisation** utilizing the techniques discussed so far. Strive to create a smooth melodic line above the changing harmonies. Play freely - have fun and be expressive.

Exercise 9: Diatonic improvisation. The left hand plays a sequence of notes: F, Gm, F/A, Bb, etc. The right hand plays a melody. The left hand notes are labeled 1/5LP, 1/5LP, 3/1LP, 1/5LP, etc.

Part 2 - Application: Danny Boy

Build your knowledge of the tune one layer at a time. Get to know the Melody, the Bass line, and the Harmony (ideally by ear), gradually combining these elements until you can control all three together:

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
MELODY	MELODY		(singing)	MELODY
		HARMONY	HARMONY	HARMONY
	BASS	BASS	BASS	BASS

The following outline of Danny Boy includes all the basic information you need in order to craft a “complete” version of the tune: Melody, Bass / Left Hand information, and the chord changes. Build this one layer at a time:

The musical score for Danny Boy is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a treble staff (melody) and a bass staff (bass line). Chord changes are indicated above the treble staff, and fingerings for the bass line are indicated below the bass staff.

System 1:

- Chords: E7, A, A7/G, D/F#, Bm7, A/C#, F#m7, Bø7/F, E7, A, A7/G
- Fingerings: 1/7LP, 1/5LP 7/5LP, 3/1LP 1/7LP, 3/1LP 1/5LP, 5/1LP 1/7LP, 1/5LP 7/5LP

System 2:

- Chords: D/F#, Bm7, A/E, E7, A, E7, A/C#, D, A/C#, F#m7, A/C#, D
- Fingerings: 3/1LP 1/7LP, 5/3LP 1/7LP, 1/5LP 1/7LP, 3/1LP 1/5LP, 3/1LP 1/5LP, 3/1LP 1/5LP

System 3:

- Chords: E7(sus4), E7, A7, D, Dø, A/E, C#7/E# F#m7, A/E, E7, A
- Fingerings: 1/7LP, 1/7LP 1/5LP 1/5LP, 5/3LP 3/1LP 1/5LP, 5/3LP 1/7LP, 1/5LP

Put it all together: *Three-Dimensional Music*. Think about the balance and interplay of Melody, Bass, and Accompaniment. Each of these “dimensions” will be present but they do not always need to occur simultaneously. Since we have two hands and three “dimensions,” each hand assists the other to varying degrees in order to sustain the complete picture. The following table lists the primary and secondary responsibilities of each hand:

Left Hand	Right Hand
Bass Notes	Melody
Other supporting notes (LP/LS) / basic accompaniment	Harmonization of Melody (3rds, 6th, octaves, other intervals)
Accompanimental / Harmonic figures	Assisting with Accompanimental / Harmonic figures
Assisting the Right hand during faster / more elaborate melodic passages	Assisting the Left hand during faster / more elaborate bass lines

Continuing the arranging process from this point:

- It is at this point in the process that we can truly begin “arranging.” Up to now, we have simply become very familiar with the musical materials inherent in the tune we are working on.
- *Imagine* your ideal version. What does it sound like? This is an important step in the creative process - whether you are arranging or composing.
- You don’t have to always hear your arrangement as a marimba solo - imagine your arrangement as a duo, a string quartet, a band, or even a whole symphony orchestra! This allows you to “think outside the bars” and come up with ideas not necessarily rooted in marimba techniques.
- Think about the form of your arrangement - how should it begin, develop, and end?
- Build the arrangement around your presentation of the melody.
- Keep the arrangement fluid - be willing to discard ideas if they are not working.

Excerpt from my own arrangement of “Danny Boy,” with the outline on the lower staff so you can see the relationship between the basic information and the complete arrangement:

The musical score for "Danny Boy" is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a top staff with a complete arrangement and a bottom staff with a simplified harmonic outline. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 4/4.

System 1:

- Top Staff:** Chords E⁷, A (reserved), A⁷/G, D/F#, D, Bm⁷, E⁷(b⁹)/D. Includes dynamics *mp* and triplets.
- Bottom Staff:** Fingerings 1/7LP, 1/5LP, 7/[5]LP, 3/1LP, 1/5LP, 1/7LP, 7/5LP.

System 2:

- Top Staff:** Chords A/C#, F#m⁷, B^o/F, E, A, A⁷/G. Includes triplets.
- Bottom Staff:** Fingerings 3/1/3LS, 1/[5,9]LS, 5/[1,3]LS, 1/5LP, 1/5LP, 7/[5]LP.

System 3:

- Top Staff:** Chords D/F#, D, Bm⁷, B^o/F, A/E, F#7(b13) Bm⁷, E⁷(sus4), A/E, E⁷, A/C#. Includes a *rall.* marking and triplets.
- Bottom Staff:** Fingerings 3/1LP, 1/5LP, 1/7LP, 5/3LP, 5/1LP, 3/7LP, 7/3LP, 1/7LP, 5/[9,3]LS, 1/[5,7]LS, 3/1LP.

Recommended Resources

I have learned a great deal about harmony and chord voicings by transcribing artists such as Bill Evans, Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarrett, and Ralph Towner. Consider transcription to be your best direct source of information regarding improvisation. If you can learn how to learn from the music itself, you can truly take control of your own musical development.

Instrumental Technique / Methods

The Art of Piano Playing: A Scientific Approach by George Kochevitsky
Four Mallet Marimba Playing by Nancy Zeltsman
Four Mallet Studies by Gary Burton
How To Sight Read Jazz and Other Syncopated Rhythms by Mike Longo
Ideo-Kinetics: A Workbook for Marimba by Gordon Stout
Impressions on Wood by Julie Davila
Marimba: Technique Through Music by Mark Ford
Method of Movement by Leigh Howard Stevens
Permutations for the Advanced Marimbist by Kevin Bobo
Sequential Studies books 1-2 by Julia Gaines

Jazz Improvisation

The Art and Language of Jazz Vibes by Jon Metzger
Connecting Chords Through Linear Harmony by Bert Ligon
Forward Motion by Hal Galper
How To Play Bebop vol. 1-3 by David Baker
The Jazz Piano Book by Mark Levine
The Jazz Language by Dan Haerle
The Jazz Theory Book by Mark Levine
Jazz Improvisation by David Baker
Patterns for Jazz by Jerry Coker
Visualization for Jazz Improvisation published by JazzAdvice.com

Improvisation (general, non-jazz)

Bach and the Art of Improvisation by Pamela Ruiter-Feenstra
Creative Music Making by William Cahn
Improvisation and Performance Techniques for Classical and Acoustic Guitar by Ralph Towner
Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music by Derek Bailey
The Improvisational Technique of Éric Sammut [diss.] by Brian Mueller
Improvise for Real by David Reed
Techniques of Keyboard Improvisation in the German Baroque and Their Implications for Today's Pedagogy [diss.] by Michael Richard Callahan

Theory / Harmony / Voicings

A Creative Approach to Jazz Piano Harmony by Bill Dobbins
The Harmony of Bill Evans vol. 1-2 by Jack Reilly
Jazz/Rock Voicing for the Contemporary Keyboard Player by Dan Haerle

Ear Training

The Ear Training Method published by JazzAdvice.com

Intervallic Ear Training for Musicians by Steve Prosser

Primacy of the Ear by Ran Blake

Instructional DVD's

Creating a Jazz Vocabulary vol. 1-3 by Jerry Bergonzi, published by JazzHeaven.com

Effortless Mastery of Melody, Harmony, and Rhythm by Kenny Werner, published by JazzHeaven.com

John Abercrombie Teaches Jazz Guitar Improvisation by John Abercrombie

The Universal Mind of Bill Evans by Bill Evans / Harry Evans

Inspiration and Learning

Can't Hurt Me by David Goggins

Discipline Equals Freedom by Jocko Willink

Effortless Mastery by Kenny Werner

Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art by Stephen Nachmanovitch

A Mind for Numbers by Barbara Oakley

Music Primer by Lou Harrison

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey

Listening (A very incomplete list of recordings I have been inspired by over the years!)

Bill Evans – *The Last Waltz, The Complete Village Vanguard Sessions, Affinity*

Charlie Haden / Hank Jones – *Steal Away*

Chick Corea Akoustic Band – *Alive*

Chris Thile, Yo-Yo Ma, Stuart Duncan, Edgar Meyer – *The Goat Rodeo Sessions*

Dave Grusin – *The Gershwin Connection*

Dave Weckl – *Hard Wired, Synergy, Live and Very Plugged In*

Éric Sammut – *Four-Mallet Ballet, Mirages, Sailing in Seoul*

Gary Burton – *Alone at Last, Matchbook (w/ Ralph Towner)*

Gene Harris – *A Little Piece of Heaven*

Hamilton de Holanda – *Brasílianos, Brasileños 2, Brasileños 3*

Herbie Hancock – *The Piano, The Gershwin Connection, The Imagine Project*

John Fahey – *America*

Keiko Abe / Dave Samuels – *Improvisations on Nature*

Keith Jarrett – *Tokyo '96, The Carnegie Hall Concert, The Melody At Night With You, La Scala*

Kevin Eubanks – *World Trio*

Maria Schneider – *Cerulean Skies*

Marian McPartland – *Piano Jazz Interview with Bill Evans*

Michael Hedges – *Aerial Boundaries*

Michel Camilo – *Live at the Blue Note*

Miles Davis – *Anything!!!*

Ralph Towner – *Solo Concert, Ana, Anthem, Timeline, My Foolish Heart, Verso*

Stefon Harris – *Evolution*

Steve Reich – *Music for 18 Musicians*

The Tony Bennett / Bill Evans Album

Wayne Shorter – *Speak No Evil, Without a Net, Emanon*

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It is truly a dream come true to present at the 2019 Percussive Arts Society International Convention. I owe a big thank you to the Percussive Arts Society, the Executive Committee, and the Keyboard Committee for allowing me to be here today, and for the countless opportunities to learn and be inspired, through events such as Days of Percussion and PASIC, as well as the enormous collection of resources available online through www.pas.org. We all benefit from this great organization.

Thank you all - - - and have a great PASIC!

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