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Unifying Elements of Paul Lansky's Threads

Gordon Hicken

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UNIFYING ELEMENTS OF PAUL LANSKY’S THREADS

By

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ABSTRACT

This treatise focuses on Paul Lansky’s percussion quartet *Threads*, a ten-movement work organized into three distinct movement families: Preludes and Arias, Recitatives, and Choruses. While the composer creates three distinct “threads” through formal naming, establishment of a specific instrumentation, and unique sound palettes, this treatise isolates and discusses salient musical elements throughout the work. This document presents a brief biographical overview of Lansky’s career and an introduction to the inspiration and conception of the piece. Rhythmic and melodic motives, pitch centers, musical texture, and compositional techniques are all examined within each individual movement while specific examples are analyzed and displayed. Other performance aspects in each movement family are taken into consideration, such as fabrication of required instruments, optimal implement choice, and logistics of instrument set-up. Finally, unifying elements from different movement families are identified and discussed, including rhythmic motives, musical voices, and departures from the established sonic contents of each movement group.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Paul Lansky

Paul Lansky is currently the William Shubael Conant Professor of Music at Princeton University. He studied at Queens College, CUNY with George Perle and Hugo Weisgall in the early 1960s and at Princeton University with Milton Babbitt, Edward Cone, and Earl Kim in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Prior to his studies at Princeton, Lansky played French horn professionally with the Dorian Wind Quintet and taught at Mannes College and Swarthmore College. During these early years, Lansky composed for acoustic chamber ensembles and developed upon George Perle’s idea of twelve-tone tonality, which combines twelve-tone serialism with the concept of a central pitch or pitches.¹ Once he returned to graduate school to study composition, Milton Babbitt’s teachings about the twelve-tone system drew Lansky to computer music with the intent of creating music that could surpass the limits of traditional instruments and human capability. Ultimately, Lansky discovered that manipulating twelve-tone sets with computers turned him off from twelve-tone music, but it did introduce him to his preferred compositional medium for the remainder of the century.²

Lansky began to produce compositions for computer-synthesized tape in the early 1970s. His 1979 piece, Six Fantasies on a Poem by Thomas Campion, signaled a complete shift to computer music composition. While some later compositions such as As If (1981-82), Values of Time (1987), and Stroll (1988) incorporate acoustic instruments along with computer-synthesized tape, Lansky realized early on the potential for the computer to manipulate existing material to generate full musical compositions.³ A majority of Lansky’s subject matter for computer-synthesized tape consisted of existing sounds produced by humans, which is grouped into three categories: previously existing music in the 1981 Folk Images suite; ambient urban

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sounds in his 1990 compositions *Night Traffic*, *Quakerbridge*, and *Tables’s Clear*; and spoken voice in *Idle Chatter* (1985), *just_more_idle_chatter* (1987), and *Notjustmoreidlechatter* (1988). Combined with “tonal” material added by Lansky, the manipulation of these human sources allowed him to experiment with rhythm, density, pitch, and voicing through the computer.

Lansky returned to the medium of acoustic instruments in 1993 with *Hop*, a gift to the violin and marimba duo, Marimolin. *Hop* was one of his first compositions involving a percussion instrument, so he worked closely with Marimolin’s world-renowned marimbist, Nancy Zeltsman, throughout the composition process. Upon noticing that certain passages from *Hop* could stand alone as a solo, he adapted it along with two new movements for his 1998 commission for Zeltsman, *Three Moves for Marimba*. Looking back on his earlier computer days, Lansky remembered, “I wanted to be a filmmaker rather than a playwright. That is, I was interested in creating the finished product rather than in creating scripts for other people to execute.” Following the composition of *Hop*, Lansky increased his focus outside of the computer-synthesized tape genre to compose for acoustic instruments. Three years after the completion of *Threads*, he commented on the prospect of composing more computer music: “I hate to say this, but I think I’m done. Basically I’ve said what I’ve had to say. Here I am, 64, and I find myself at what feels like the beginning of a career. I’m interested in writing for real people at this point.”

1.2 *Threads*

When approached by the members of Sō Percussion, Paul Lansky was not eager to compose a piece for percussion ensemble. The composer and ensemble had already established a relationship through Sō Percussion’s performances at Princeton University, and the ensemble approached Lansky during intermission at a performance by the Elliot Feld Ballet. Feld choreographed Lansky’s computer piece *Idle Chatter Junior* that evening and as a result of the performance, the members of Sō Percussion requested that Lansky write a similar piece for

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4 McCarthy, “Biography.”
7 Ibid., 1.
acoustic percussion quartet. “I had never written for percussion before,” Lansky remembered thinking, “and [I] worried that I’d be alone on the island with only a loincloth.” The ensemble commented that his computer pieces *Idle Chatter Junior* and *Table’s Clear* were already very percussive in nature, and the ensemble offered to workshop the new piece with Lansky throughout the composition process.

Lansky initially wrote 12 short studies for Sō Percussion to play. Some of the studies were strictly keyboard pieces, some were drum pieces, and others used “noise-like” instruments. When asked about the instrumentation of these initial studies, Lansky explained, “I was just learning the differences between mallets, woods, metals, drums, etc. So I decided, first of all, that I wanted to play with all of them alone and in combinations.” Sō Percussion intended to travel with Lansky’s new piece, making touring instrumentation a primary consideration. This resulted in the choice of utilizing two vibraphones rather than a larger marimba, as well as foregoing an entire drumset and including only toms and a kick drum, instead. The members of Sō Percussion suggested instruments from their inventory and their current repertoire, such as flowerpots, bottles, slats, doumbek, and tuned metal pipes. Lansky also received vital information about percussion equipment, stage set-up, and choreography that is not always obvious to a composer, especially if they have never written a piece for percussion ensemble.

Lansky utilizes the word “choreography” quite often when describing his composition process for percussion. This is most likely a prominent factor for him because a player’s physical ability to execute rhythms and note combinations between instruments is not considered when composing computer music. Some musical aspects such as density, register, and sustain are very familiar to Lansky because they are concerns in both computer and acoustic composition, but he notes that “50% of the job in writing percussion music lies in choreography – actually figuring out how the players are going to move their arms and feet.”

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11 Ibid., 35.
12 Ibid.
The collaboration and workshop between Lansky and Sō Percussion resulted in *Threads*, a ten-movement work focusing on three general percussion sounds: metallic keyboards, “noise-like” instruments, and drums. Lansky chose these three categories because they highlight the broad spectrum of sounds created by percussion instruments. As the composition took shape, Lansky noticed that the three characteristic sounds aligned with the aria, recitative, and chorus movements found in baroque cantatas.\(^{13}\) The “baroque cantata” itself is a relatively broad category, but within the structure of this musical form, the arias typically contain a solo voice with tuneful melodies and balanced phrases while recitatives include declamatory text with little repetition. The sacred baroque cantata expands the form with the addition of chorus movements and a large ensemble of singers, resulting in this traditional movement sequence: prelude, chorus, recitative, aria, recitative, aria, chorus, and a final setting of the chorale.\(^{14}\)

Lansky titles the movements of *Threads* according to the characteristic sounds and stylistic relationship to baroque cantata form. Lansky describes his own movements as follows:

Arias and Preludes that focus on the metallic pitched sounds of vibraphones, glockenspiel and metallic pipes; Choruses in which drumming predominates; and Recitatives made largely from Cage-like “noise” instruments, bottles, flowerpots, crotales, etc.\(^{15}\)

The ten movements of *Threads* appear in this order: Prelude (Aria I), Recitative I, Chorus I, Aria II, Recitative II, Chorus II, Aria III, Recitative III, Chorus III, and Chorale Prelude (Aria IV). While Lansky’s repeating configuration of aria-recitative-chorus does not precisely match the traditional movement sequence, the characteristics and sounds of each *Threads* movement do align with the description of each baroque cantata movement.

Lansky’s writing is idiomatic yet challenging for the performers. He highlights the nature of percussion instruments and their many sounds, ranging from lyrical to forceful throughout one extensive work. After the completion and success of *Threads*, the majority of Lansky’s output consists of acoustic compositions, including many titles for percussion. As for his venture away from computer music and newfound focus on composing for acoustic

\(^{13}\) Anderson, “A Conversation,” 35.


instruments, Lansky explains, “It’s more interesting to get good at something than to be good at something.”

The following chapters examine salient musical elements within each individual movement and movement family of Threads. Each analysis contains an in-depth investigation of motives, themes, texture, articulation, phrasing, and other musical elements. Lansky utilizes these components to create unified movements throughout the course of the entire piece, despite different instrumentations and classifications. Other performance aspects such as implement and instrument choice are taken into consideration for each movement family – many of which aid in the accurate portrayal of common musical elements located throughout Threads. The ultimate goal of this treatise is to identify the subtle appearances of unifying elements in both alike and different movements, establishing cohesion in a piece of music consisting of three contrasting “threads.”

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CHAPTER TWO

PRELUDES AND ARIAS

2.1 Sounds Present in Movement Family

The preludes and arias from Paul Lansky’s *Threads* fulfill the composer’s desire to create movements of “lyrical and tender” percussion music. He achieves this by using a wide range of pitched metallic instruments that produce sounds reminiscent of the human voice. The vibraphones, glockenspiel, tuned metal pipes, and crotales provide a palette of similar, yet distinct sounds that are manipulated through articulation and varied implement choice. Lansky’s treatment of these metallic instruments requires great rhythmic precision from the performers. Certain passages require the execution of very specific unison rhythms with instruments that require maximum accuracy, while other sections contain intricate background figures that ultimately serve to support a primary voice in the ensemble. The first and last “prelude” movements also include light accompaniment from bongos and high toms. The drums are used to move the lyrical metallic instruments forward while contrasting the overall wash of pitched resonance from the vibraphones. Lansky’s use of the metallic instruments’ vocal characteristics and the flowing, sustained melodic lines highlight the sonic comparison with arias found in a baroque cantata.

2.2 Musical Analysis

2.2.1 Prelude (Aria I)

The first movement of *Threads*, Prelude (Aria I), can be divided into three sections: A-B-A’. Lansky introduces three musical “voices” at the beginning of the movement. The first is the sustained pitch B₃, produced by drawing a double bass bow on the end of a vibraphone bar with the damper pedal depressed. The resulting sound is warm and sustained, much like a human voice. A flowing collection of sixteenth notes, also centered on B₃, joins the sustained note in the lower register of the second vibraphone. The final voice is clear and focused, produced by a

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single note from both the glockenspiel and tuned metal pipes. Both parts contain the pitch B₃, but the tuned pipes sound an octave above the written pitch and the glockenspiel sounds two octaves above, effectively setting these sounds in a higher tessitura than the vibraphone voices. The music for the glockenspiel and tuned pipes contain instructions to play “sharp and clear,” further designating this as the primary voice.

With the arrival of the A’ section at measure 42, the texture and voices from the beginning of the movement return with slightly altered instrumentation. The vibraphone continues to sustain a note with a bass bow, but rather than sounding B₃ as it did at the beginning of the A section, the vibraphone reprises the last note of the A section: F-sharp₄. As the A’ section progresses, the bowed vibraphone eventually returns to the pitch center of this movement, B₃. The second vibraphone player continues to produce undulating sixteenth notes similar to those from the A section. The vibraphone is joined by more sixteenth notes in the high tom part, adding depth to the sound and reinforcing the pulse. The glockenspiel continues as the primary voice, but the bongos now answer the glockenspiel with two notes while the high toms occupy the tuned pipes player.

The B section of this movement contains four layered parts working in pairs to create primary and secondary voices. The high tom part is the first voice in this layering sequence with an ostinato consisting of a sixteenth note, an eighth note, and another sixteenth note.
Steady sixteenth notes in the bongo part join this ostinato and assume an accompanimental role similar to the second vibraphone from the A and A’ sections. The first vibraphone part (now played with mallets instead of a bow) contains intermittent statements of sixteenth notes with the right hand acting as a treble voice and the left hand acting as a bass voice. The right and left hand create scalar lines of contrary motion, moving in opposite directions throughout the course of each sixteenth-note statement. The second vibraphone part is the most soloistic voice in the B section; utilizing a single melodic line as well as rhythms and phrasing that contrast the activity from the other parts. Despite the soloistic characteristics of the second vibraphone part, Lansky places both vibraphone parts in the same register and assigns the same dynamic marking. Given the combination of intermittent statements from the first vibraphone part and the offbeat tendencies of the second part, these voices pair together and create a single voice that soars over the accompaniment. The constant sixteenth-note drum accompaniment is also created through part combination as the bongos fill the short rests left by the syncopated rhythms of the high toms.

In measure two, the primary voice establishes an important rhythmic motive beginning with a single, ringing glockenspiel note on beat one, answered by a similarly resonant note from the tuned pipes located on the fourth sixteenth-note partial of beat one.
Combining the attacks from both parts creates a motive consisting of two notes located three sixteenth notes apart. This rhythm can be easily notated and recognized in 3/4 meter as a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note.

![Figure 2.4 - Prelude (Aria I), composite rhythm from measure two](image)

This motive appears throughout Prelude (Aria I), but with different articulations, instrumentations, and repetitions.

The most striking use of the newly established rhythmic motive appears in the transition from the A section to the B section beginning in measure 19. All parts contain unison dotted eighth and sixteenth-note rhythms on beat one. Each player contributes a single dyad, resulting in an eight-voice chord containing the pitches B₃, D₄, E₄, F-sharp₄, A₄, and D₅. The pitches in each part remain stationary for measures 19 through 21 and are slightly re-voiced as the instrumentation and rhythm change moving to the B section. Due to the players’ control over the natural resonance of these metallic instruments, Lansky adds a staccato articulation on the sixteenth note at the end of the motive. The silence created after the staccato notes is very striking considering the constant resonance from bowed notes, sixteenth notes, and ringing primary voices found throughout the A section.

![Figure 2.5 - Prelude (Aria I), unison motive with articulation](image)
Lansky also draws upon and manipulates this rhythmic motive for the transition from the B section to the A’ section. The glockenspiel part presents the first four notes of a B-minor scale in a steady rhythm of dotted eighth notes. In 3/4 meter, this rhythm creates a hemiola of four notes for every three beats, simulating duple meter to the listener. The vibraphone joins the glockenspiel with the same notes and rhythm in canon on the third partial of the hemiola.

While this is not an exact use of the motive presented at the beginning of the movement, it is an expansion of the rhythm created by the glockenspiel and tuned pipes. The unison motive from the first transition (measures 19 through 21) returns at the conclusion of Prelude (Aria I) with five slightly re-voiced motive statements over five measures as the ensemble fades away.

A consistent rhythmic texture exists throughout Prelude (Aria I), but Lansky creates contrasting sounds within the bounds of this established texture. Most of this movement is driven by a rhythmic sixteenth-note ostinato in some form. The pulse is created by a lone vibraphone in the A section, a combination of vibraphone and toms in the A’ section, and by a combination of bongos and toms in the B section. With the vibraphone parts in the B section also heavily filled with sixteenth notes, the increased rhythmic activity from all players creates a much more saturated texture than the clearly divided three-part hierarchy of the A and A’ sections.

When the rhythmic texture does change, it occurs in the transition phrases between the larger sections driven by sixteenth notes. The transition between the A section and B section as well as the movement’s ending only contain the unison rhythmic motive and silence. The lack of undulating sixteenth notes results in a perceived absence of pulse, even though the performers must execute their parts strictly in time. Entering the B section, the pulse is re-established with a syncopated rhythmic figure in the high tom part. However, the rhythmic motive appears every
two beats instead of three, creating the feeling of 2/4 meter within 3/4. The transition between the B and A’ sections still contains a bowed vibraphone note and rippling sixteenth notes provided by the high tom part, but the four-against-three hemiola in the second vibraphone and glockenspiel disguises the actual meter, allowing the steady sixteenth notes to fit inside both the perceived and the actual pulse throughout the transition.

2.2.2 Aria II

The subsequent arias draw upon elements of Prelude (Aria I) and this relationship between movements is very clear from the outset of Aria II. The opening phrase utilizes the recognizable rhythmic motive of a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note from the first movement. All four players strike this rhythm in unison, dampening the sixteenth note to create two beats of silence in 3/4 meter. The first three measures are rhythmically the same as the first transition and the ending of Prelude (Aria I), but the meters in the fourth and fifth measure expand to 4/4 and 5/4, respectively. The motive remains on the downbeat of each measure, creating extended silence through metric expansion and additional rests. Lansky emphasizes the augmented silence with the instructions to “let silence ring” in the fifth measure.
Another difference between the phrase at the beginning of the fourth movement and similar phrases in the first movement is changing pitches within the rhythmic motives. The pitch material in unison statements of the rhythmic motive in Prelude (Aria I) (measures 19 through 21 and 55 through 59 of the first movement) is static from measure to measure, but the beginning of Aria II contains pitch changes from chord to chord. The pitches A₃, D₄, A₄, and D₅ are static throughout each chord, but other pitches move to neighbor tones. These chord changes, along with a slightly quicker tempo (64 versus 62 beats per minute) and a stronger dynamic level (mezzo forte versus piano), bring energy to the beginning of the fourth movement when compared to the subdued transition and ending of the first movement.

Lansky also borrows the recognizable undulating sixteenth notes from the first movement. While this string of notes is relegated to murmuring accompaniment for the glockenspiel and tuned pipes in Prelude (Aria I), the second vibraphone becomes the primary voice for three short phrases beginning in measure 6 of the fourth movement. Each vibraphone entrance begins on the same two pitches (B₃ followed by D₄) as the first movement, and the shorter phrases always end on D₄. One unison statement of the rhythmic motive is placed between each short phrase, allowing the vibraphone player to begin these passages from silence.

In certain movements of *Threads*, Lansky tends to focus on a musical device to create ideas and manipulate existing material. In this aria, Lansky utilizes various forms of canon, the most literal of which begins in measure 34. The first vibraphone part contains a stream of steady sixteenth notes similar to those at the beginning of this movement. The line stays within the range of A₃ and F-sharp₄, moving mostly by intervals of seconds or thirds. Lansky takes this tonally compact line and places it in the second vibraphone part one full beat after the first vibraphone begins.

![Figure 2.9 - Aria II, canon between vibraphone parts](image-url)
The close metric relationship of these lines creates a rather jumbled sound. However, some points of imitation stand out due to this close metric proximity. This canon is joined by the glockenspiel arpeggiating the pitch sequence D₄, A₄, D₅, A₄, D₄, A₃, D₄, and A₄, contrasting the close intervals of the vibraphone lines. The tuned pipes provide a melody of a lower moving line against the static pitch D₅, written in a rhythmic pattern of an eighth rest followed by four dotted eighth notes. This pattern is repeated three times over a span of four measures of 3/4 meter.

In addition to the strict canon described above, many rhythmic canons are scattered throughout Aria II. The first occurrence begins in measure six as the accompaniment for the second vibraphone part. The rhythm of the canon is notated in the score with varying note lengths and ties for the ease of reading the notation, but the rhythm can be simplified by describing each attack as three sixteenth notes apart with an eighth rest between the second and third notes.
This rhythmic canon is set at the distance of an eighth note, meaning that in measure 6, the metal pipes player begins on the second eighth-note partial of beat one, the glockenspiel player begins on beat two, and the first vibraphone player begins on the second eighth-note partial of beat two. The exact same canon (including pitches) appears in measure 9 and then in measure 14 with no rests in the rhythm pattern throughout four measures of 3/4 meter. In measure 21, the same rhythmic values are used, but the patterns are only present in two parts and separated by a sixteenth note, creating a syncopated composite rhythm.

To complete Aria II, Lansky uses the “long-short” articulation from the rhythmic motive at the beginning of the movement in order to create yet another rhythmic canon. The rhythmic structure for the canon at measure 41 is eight consecutive dotted eighth notes, and the player is to alternate between ringing and dampened attacks.
This rhythmic canon is also set at the distance of an eighth note where both performers play the canon on the pitch D₄. This creates a composite rhythm and multiple articulations that blend together on the same pitch.

The metallic movements of *Threads* cannot be analyzed with the traditional methods used for common practice compositions. There is no established major or minor key, but there are elements of Aria II that draw the listener’s ear towards a specific pitch class throughout the movement. The final rhythmic canon in both vibraphones is played on the pitch D₄. Almost every line of sixteenth notes in the vibraphone parts ends on the pitch D₄ – most notably, the first three entrances that allow D₄ to ring for up to two beats. Melodic notes move against D₅ in measures 38 through 40, and D₅ is also the final pitch sounded by the glockenspiel at the end of the movement. The pull of the pitch class D is so strong that even though the unison rhythm from measures 31 to 33 concludes with the pitches A₃, C-sharp₄, E₄, F-sharp₄, G₄, and A₄, the listener still hears D as “home” as the parts eventually return to pitch class D.

### 2.2.3 Aria III

Aria III takes some of the musical expectations of the prior metallic movements and alters them to present the listener with new, yet familiar content. The movement begins with a major element from Prelude (Aria I) that Lansky does not reprise in Aria II: the voice-like sustain of the pitch B₃ bowed by the first vibraphone player. Instead of entering with meandering sixteenth notes, the second vibraphone player utilizes a bow to sustain the pitch D₄. At this point, the glockenspiel and metal pipes enter in measure three with eighth notes alternating the sounding pitches C-sharp₆ and D₆. The eighth-note rhythm is significant because this is half the speed that Lansky uses with the vibraphones in prior arias. Also, almost every other line of flowing notes in Prelude (Aria I) and Aria II begin with the pitches B₃ and D₄. Aria III begins with sounding C-sharp₆ played against the sustained pitches B₃ and D₄, and then moves in and out of unison with the sustained pitch D₄ from the second vibraphone part. Lansky eventually inserts the familiar sound of sixteenth notes beginning with the pitches B₃ and D₄ in the second vibraphone part in measures 11, 27, and 52.

The third aria from *Threads* is the most ethereal of the metallic movements due to layering and aligning of voices, a simple rhythmic vocabulary, and the unobstructed resonance of the metallic instrumentation. Throughout Aria III, Lansky alternates between layers of voices...
moving at different rhythmic rates and clear, unison textures. This is the first instance in Lansky’s arias where all parts contain unison, repeated quarter notes. Lansky hints at this rhythmic trait in measures 9 and 10 of the glockenspiel and metallic pipe parts, but unison rhythm quarter notes are first presented at a piano dynamic level right after a large crescendo leading to measure 35.

These quarter notes are voiced in the pipes, glockenspiel, and second vibraphone part, and they slowly move up one degree of a B-minor scale one instrument at a time. Quarter note rhythms eventually end this phrase with the notated pitches F-sharp\(_3\) and F-sharp\(_4\) at measures 48 through 50. The same rhythm also appears with the unison sounding pitch F-sharp\(_6\) at the conclusion of the movement.

The contrasting sections of music each contain four layers of voices operating at different levels of rhythmic activity. The simplest layer in most cases is the bowed vibraphone, creating a sustained note on which the other voices may build. The most complex layer is the second vibraphone, reprising its role with undulating sixteenth notes. While this part is the most rhythmically active, Lansky marks this particular layer *sotto voce*, indicating its role as background material. The glockenspiel continues to play an eighth-note passage rooted in material from the beginning of the movement and the tuned pipes provide the primary voice with scalar quarter notes.
One passage from measure 27 through 34 is very similar, but contains a slightly different instrumentation where no bowed vibraphone is present. Instead, the first vibraphone player provides the steady sixteenth notes and the second vibraphone joins the glockenspiel with eighth notes.

The passage from measure 42 through 45 achieves the same texture discussed above, but through slightly different procedures. The first vibraphone part continues to bow a sustained note and the glockenspiel provides a quarter note pulse, but it is only on the repeated pitch F-sharp₄. The second vibraphone presents an eighth-note line that is considered the primary voice compared to the lack of rhythmic activity from the previously addressed voices. The missing link from this established texture is the now-familiar strand of steady sixteenth notes. However, the tuned pipes contain notes located on the second and fourth sixteenth-note partial of every beat.
This relationship creates a composite rhythm of constant sixteenth notes when combined with the eighth notes from the second vibraphone part. The pitch content of these parts further links them together as the pipes part “chases” the vibraphone eighth notes by repeating each pitch after it is played by the vibraphone. The only exception is in measure 45 when all of the pitches in the tuned pipes are transposed up one octave due to the range of the instrument.

![Figure 2.21 - Aria III, composite melody between Vibraphone and Tuned Pipes (sounding pitches)](image)

In measures 46 and 47 the vibraphone and glockenspiel have quarter note attacks with the pipes “answering” each note with an attack on the second eighth-note partial of each beat. The pitches $B_3$, $E_4$, and $F\#_4$ are present throughout these two measures, all of which resolve to $F\#_3$ and $F\#_4$ quarter notes.

One large section of music at measure 19 appears to have a unison quarter note rhythm with the exception of one voice. The first player is required to play vibraphone notes located on the second eighth-note partial of each beat in addition to quarter notes on the crotales. The crotales add a shimmer to the texture along with the second vibraphone, glockenspiel, and metal pipes. The first vibraphone player’s offbeat notes have a different character from the unison quarter notes presented in all other voices. These notes are all repeated on the pitch $F\#_4$, marked at a pianissimo dynamic level, labeled *sotto voce*, and the player is instructed to strike them with a soft mallet. All of these designations create a sustained sound with little attack, very similar to the bowed sound used earlier in the movement.

![Figure 2.22 - Aria III, First Vibraphone part including Crotales](image)
There are other instances where Lansky balances pitch movement in one voice against a static note in another voice, and the same performer plays both voices in opposing hands. Much like the passage at measure 19, the glockenspiel references motion against a static pitch in measures 53 and 54 with movement of C-sharp\textsubscript{4}, D\textsubscript{4}, and E\textsubscript{4} against B\textsubscript{4} in a steady eighth-note rhythm with all static notes located on the second eighth-note partial of each beat.

The second vibraphone takes this idea from the glockenspiel and the speed is doubled to sixteenth notes from measure 56 through 62. The notes on the beat and the third sixteenth-note partial (played by the left hand) move up the first five degrees of a B-minor scale against a higher repeated pitch (B\textsubscript{4}) in the right hand.

This passage is repeated four times with varying lengths and with brief scalar interruptions, but it commences with both voices settling on repeated sixteenth-note pitches B\textsubscript{3} and B\textsubscript{4}, respectively.

**2.2.4 Chorale Prelude (Aria IV)**

As in the other metallic movements of Threads, Lansky supplies rippling counterpoint in the form of steady sixteenth notes from the vibraphone. However, the approach in Chorale Prelude (Aria IV) is completely different than in any of the three previous aria movements. Rather than having one player (usually the second vibraphone) play steady sixteenth notes, both vibraphone parts present intricate syncopated rhythms that create steady sixteenth notes when performed together.
The syncopated rhythms in the first vibraphone part are beamed as groups totaling two eighth notes plus four eighth notes, and the opposite (four eighth notes plus two eighth notes) appears in the second vibraphone part. This rhythmic relationship creates dyads every three sixteenth notes, subtly continuing the hemiola of four dotted eighth notes in a measure of 3/4 meter. Lansky references the “four against three” hemiola in the glockenspiel part in measures 53 and 54 with notated E₄ occurring every three sixteenth notes.

Chorale Prelude (Aria IV) is classified as an “aria” movement because the instrumentation is similar to that of the previous movements. However, this movement is most clearly identifiable as a chorale prelude due to the actual chorale tune placed above the contrapuntal texture of the accompaniment. The tuned metal pipes present the first statement of the chorale melody beginning in measure eight. This instrumentation choice limited Lansky’s melody to contain pitches found between A₃ and A₅ of a D-major scale. The chorale is twelve measures long and consists of two six-measure sub-phrases in 3/4 meter. The melodic shape of the second sub-phrase resembles an inversion of the first, serving as an aural “answer” to the first sub-phrase’s “question.” The chorale tune is only stated in the pipes and glockenspiel to allow for clarity above the busy, interlocking accompaniment of the vibraphones. After a brief drum interlude from measures 20 through 22, the tuned pipes present the chorale again, this time joined by the glockenspiel sounding an octave higher and blending with the darker pipe sound.
The chorale melody does not appear in its entirety for the remainder of Chorale Prelude (Aria IV), but similar versions appear. The entrance of the pipes at measure 45 begins as if the chorale melody were transposed down a third, starting on written A₄ instead of C-sharp₅. However, the intervals between pitches in the second measure reveal that this is not a direct transposition of the first sub-phrase melody. In fact, the “transposed” sub-phrase melody turns out to be augmented to seven measures in length.

After the first sub-phrase and six measures of rest, the second “transposed” sub-phrase begins at measure 57. The inclusion of dyads in this passage further distances this melody from the original chorale tune. However, one more appearance of chorale-like material begins at measure 79 when the glockenspiel and metal pipes present a phrase similar to the first sub-phrase of the chorale melody. The first five notes are exactly the same as the chorale tune, but the remainder of the phrase moves toward the final notated pitch of B₃, which is the pitch center at the conclusion of the movement.

The only section of this movement where the vibraphones are not considered accompaniment is the opening passage. These measures are homorhythmic, and the first six consist of the same rhythm in 3/4 meter: a quarter note followed by a dotted quarter note and an
eighth note. Lansky uses a sequence of the pitches B₃, C₄ or C-sharp₄, D₄, and E₄ in the first vibraphone part and he draws from the pitches B₃, C₄ or C-sharp₄, D₄, and F-sharp₄ for the second vibraphone part. These pitches are inserted into the homorhythmic structure of the first four measures in almost sequential order. As the sequences progress, the range of pitches expands as the first vibraphone part moves as high as A₄ and as low as A₃ while the second vibraphone part travels as low as G₃.

The homorhythmic introduction and pitch expansion leads to the first statement of the chorale melody, and the vibraphones begin their rhythmic figuration and assume their accompanimental role for the remainder of the movement. However, the accompaniment does provide important transition material that is crucial to the progress of Chorale Prelude (Aria IV). In measure 40, both vibraphone lines travel away from their cyclical figuration and begin to move up the notes contained in a D-major scale in stepwise motion. This new direction of movement, accompanied by a crescendo, leads to the familiar figuration first established by the vibraphones in measure eight – now an octave higher and accompanied by the glockenspiel arpeggiating the pitch pattern B₃, F-sharp₄, B₄, and F-sharp₄.
The vibraphone parts also dictate the musical intensity of the movement throughout the crescendo leading towards measure 71. Here, the entire ensemble, including high toms and bongos, arrives at a forte dynamic level. At measure 72, a subito-piano dynamic level catches the listener by surprise in addition to the sudden lack of drums in the orchestration. The vibraphone parts are scored in a lower register and the pitches in each part are closer together than anywhere else in the movement.

![Figure 2.31 - Chorale Prelude (Aria IV), First and Second Vibraphone subito-piano dynamic level](image)

For two measures, every dyad is separated by one semi-tone between both vibraphone notes. In measure 74 and 75, the first vibraphone part expands one note higher and the second vibraphone part includes two lower notes, eventually moving to the original figuration from measure eight as the movement begins to conclude.

A distinctive feature of Chorale Prelude (Aria IV) is the inclusion of drums in the instrumentation. The only other metallic movement with the same instrumentation is Prelude (Aria I). The bongos are first used to establish an ostinato beginning at measure eight. The pattern is four beats long, meaning that the pattern will start on a different beat as it is repeated throughout the 3/4 meter.

![Figure 2.33 - Chorale Prelude (Aria IV), two repetitions of pattern for ostinato](image)
This pattern appears eight times (plus one extra beat to complete a measure) over the course of the chorale melody. After the tuned pipes complete the melody, that player switches to high toms and accompanies the bongo ostinato in canon on the third beat of measure 19. After the second complete statement of the chorale melody, three repetitions of the ostinato act as an interlude from measures 36 through measure 39.

The now familiar ostinato is slightly altered when presented in measures 58 through measure 61. The pattern changes from a length of four full beats to three-and-a-half beats. This is achieved by omitting the eighth rest at the beginning of the pattern.

![Figure 2.34 - Chorale Prelude (Aria IV), two repetitions of altered ostinato](image)

The new ostinato creates a feeling of rhythmic tension approaching measure 71, but it is removed suddenly to emphasize the piano dynamic level in measure 72. The original four-beat ostinato returns in the bongo part on beat one of measure 85. The high toms enter with the same pattern on beat two of the same measure, creating a canon that lasts for the remainder of the movement. The vibraphones maintain a rhythmically and harmonically steady rippling background throughout the conclusion of the piece, leaving the bongos and toms as the primary voice of interest as the movement fades away.

### 2.3 Performance Considerations

Many of the instruments required by the aria movements are available in most percussion inventories. Both vibraphones only require the standard three-octave range (F₃ through F₆) and the glockenspiel part fits within the bounds of an instrument with a two and a half octave range (notated G₃ through C₆). Both octaves of crotales (notated C₄ through C₅ and C₅ through C₆) appear briefly in Aria III and are a crucial timbre addition to the saturated vertical voicing of metallic instruments. However, the tuned metal pipes used throughout the arias do not fall into the category of “standard” percussion instruments. Lansky says that Adam Sliwinski of Sō Percussion suggested including pipes in the instrumentation because the ensemble was already touring and performing *the so-called laws of nature* by David Lang, which calls for the same
pipes. Threads calls for two octaves of pipes from A₃ through A₅ (notated), but Lansky only requires the notes used in a D-major scale. The performers must be prepared to construct the pipes, so Lansky includes information in the score about the materials used by Sō Percussion:

**Metal Pipes:** Sō Percussion’s metal-pipe instrument consists of aluminum pipes 3/4” in diameter. To tune with a manual pipe cutter, cut shorter lengths for higher pitches. Many different solutions are possible from different materials, so the group is encouraged to experiment. The resultant sound should ring and be metallic. It should have a sharper edge than a vibraphone. (As a very last resort, some sort of (electronic) keyboard could be used, but it should match the hard, metallic sound of pipes.)

While this note includes general guidelines for materials and a basic method for constructing the pipes, the specific lengths of pipe required to create Lansky’s notated pitches are not included in the score. With the popularity of Threads, more and more composers are utilizing tuned metal pipes in their compositions. In order to ensure proper pitches and construction, suggested materials and pipe lengths are now available on the internet and included in scores such as Brian Nozny’s Thief for solo marimba and tuned pipes. (Dimensions are located in Appendix D.)

In addition to the pitched metallic sounds in all of the aria movements, Prelude (Aria I) and Chorale Prelude (Aria IV) both require drum playing in the glockenspiel and tuned pipes parts. The glockenspiel part includes bongos, which usually act as an accompaniment for the metallic sounds happening at the same time. However, the performer is asked to play both glockenspiel and bongos throughout a single passage towards the end of the first movement, requiring a set-up that allows simultaneous access to both instruments.

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The tuned pipes part specifies “high toms” for passages located throughout Prelude (Aria I) and Chorale Prelude (Aria IV). These drums must be higher in pitch than the “low toms” in the second vibraphone part (not used in the aria movements), but they should be tuned lower than the bongos notated in the glockenspiel part. The players are instructed to strike the drums with “fingertips, at the rim” throughout both of these movements. In order for the toms to blend with the bongos played in their traditional manner, the toms should be slightly dampened to eliminate unwanted overtones or excess resonance. The high tom player should strike the drumheads with the tips of the fingers, rather than the finger pads, to avoid a thin sound and the risk of a “rim shot” where the finger creates a special effect sound by striking the drumhead and rim at the same time.

Implement choice is crucial throughout the aria movements due to the similar metallic sounds layered together. Lansky calls for “medium-soft mallets” in the vibraphone parts of Prelude (Aria I) and for “soft mallets” in the same parts of Aria III. While the vibraphones tend to play a supporting role for other voices that produce clearer, more articulate sounds, the active nature of the vibraphone parts requires a “medium-hard” or “hard” set of cord-wound vibraphone mallets. The mallets should have an articulation range that allows the player to achieve a warm sound when playing lightly through the constant strains of sixteenth notes, but that can be articulate when struck with a sharp, staccato attack for passages requiring a clear voice. Lansky includes instructions to “half pedal” and “feather pedal” throughout both vibraphone parts, indicating the desired level of clarity versus sustain. The other implements required to play the vibraphone parts are bows for the sustained notes in Prelude (Aria I) and Aria III. Bass bows work best due to the large surface area of the bow hair and the substantial distance between the hair and the stick, allowing the player to apply more pressure and produce greater volume when desired. Cello bows or smaller may be used, but are not ideal.

The glockenspiel and tuned pipes players also have specific implement instructions from Lansky throughout the score. In Prelude (Aria I), Aria II, and Aria III, the glockenspiel player is instructed to use “hard plastic mallets” and the pipes require “hard plastic or wood mallets,” except in Aria III where “hard plastic mallets” are specified. These instruments usually appear together in each movement, so it is best to use the same mallet or mallets that achieve a similar articulation and tone. The warm nature of the bowed vibraphone and soft dynamic levels in Prelude (Aria I) lends itself to a softer plastic mallet for pipes and glockenspiel instead of hard
plastic or wood. This allows for a warm sound and clear attack without the excess contact noise of hard plastic that can detract from the music. Aria II has a brighter tempo, higher overall voicing, and louder dynamic levels, so “hard plastic mallets” will work well throughout the movement. In an effort to unify the rhythmic canon between pipes, glockenspiel, and vibraphone, the first vibraphone player may use soft plastic mallets (never any material that will dent the vibraphone bars) to match the attack of the glockenspiel and tuned pipes from the beginning through measure 20.

In measure 21, the first vibraphone player should return to medium-hard or hard cord-wound mallets to match the second vibraphone player. The ethereal sound of Aria III calls for less brittle sounds in the glockenspiel and pipes once again, but the articulation must be clear over the sustain of the bowed vibraphone and steady sixteenth notes from the other vibraphone. The first vibraphone player should continue to use a medium-hard or hard cord mallet at measure 19, but the crotales require an unwound mallet at least as hard as the ones used by the glockenspiel and tuned pipes players. If anything, the crotale mallet may be “hard plastic” to emphasize the new timbre placed on top of the existing sonic palette. Lansky requests “hard plastic mallets” for the glockenspiel part of Chorale Prelude (Aria IV), which will allow the chorale tune to project over the accompaniment. For the initial statement of the chorale tune, Lansky specifies “hard yarn sticks” for the tuned pipes. In order for this to be effective, the mallets must have a very hard core that is tightly wrapped in yarn or cord. Another option is to utilize softer plastic or even
hard rubber mallets. These should suffice until measure 45, where the pipes are instructed to play “above Vibes. and Glock” and the universal dynamic level is mezzo forte. In order for the melody to cut through this dense accompaniment, the pipes should be struck with hard plastic mallets. The player may then continue to play with hard plastic mallets or return to their initial mallet selection for the final statement of the chorale tune at a piano dynamic level at measure 79.
CHAPTER THREE

RECITATIVES

3.1 Sounds Present in Movement Family

The recitative movements of Threads reside at the opposite end of the percussion spectrum from the preludes and arias. Lansky’s set-up consists of “Cage-like noise instruments”20 inspired by the iconic percussion compositions of John Cage. Some of these “noise instruments” may be found at hardware or grocery stores, such as four un-tuned glass bottles and four flowerpots – each set relatively pitched from lowest to highest. Lansky also categorizes a single set of instruments as “noise-makers,” including a cowbell, sleigh bells, finger cymbals, and “some junk metallic sound.” The remainder of the instrumentation consists of bongos, congas, low toms, high toms, temple blocks, cowbell, agogo bells, claves, crotales, and vibraphone. While some of these standard instruments create lyrical, singing music in the preludes and arias, Lansky’s treatment of these instruments in the recitatives produces music that is intentionally “noisy and detailed.”21 The use of odd subdivisions and overlapping rhythmic figures create sounds that seem random, yet require precise execution to create the desired effect. The concept of noise versus lyricism of the preludes and arias emphasizes the musical relationship between Lansky’s recitatives and movements with the same classification in a baroque cantata.

3.2 Musical Analysis

3.2.1 Recitative I

From the outset of Recitative I, pitched instruments appear in the instrumentation despite the movement’s intended “noise-like” characteristics. Vibraphone and crotales enter in the third measure and are used to create intermittent and sporadic sounds with instruments already utilized to create beautiful melodic phrases in the aria movements. The pitches contained in measures three through seven are organized in a rhythmic canon, first stated in the crotale part. The

20 Lansky, Threads, 2.
rhythmic pattern consists of two quarter notes and an eighth rest, which is repeated throughout five measures of 4/4 meter.

![Figure 3.1 – Recitative I, rhythm used for canon beginning in measure three](image)

The same pattern appears in the vibraphone part, but begins on beat two of measure three. The rhythmic pattern only changes once over the span of five measures when an eighth rest is omitted in measure six of the vibraphone part, resulting in four consecutive quarter notes.

The pitch content correlates between both melodic parts, even though no pitch center or melodic phrases are established. The crotale part contains the written pitch sequence B₅, C₅, A₅, and D₅, which is repeated twice in the rhythmic pattern described above. The vibraphone part contains the same written pitches but the order changes in pairs, resulting in the pitch sequence A₅, D₅, B₅, and C₅.

![Figure 3.2 - Recitative I, Vibraphone and Crotales rhythmic canon](image)

The pitches are all either a distance of seven semi-tones (a perfect fifth) or 11 semi-tones (a major seventh) apart. Some 11 semi-tone intervals are altered through octave transposition, resulting in distances of 1 semi-tone. This appears in measure five of the crotale part when D-sharp₅ is written instead of D-sharp₆, which is above the highest available crotale pitch. In measure six, Lansky transposes the metallic parts to different pitches while maintaining consistent intervals within each part.
Measures 9 through 13 contain a similar rhythmic canon in the metallic parts. The
crotale rhythm is the same in measure nine as it is in measure three, but an eighth-note rest in
measure nine alters the vibraphone canon from the rhythm found in measure three. The pitch
content is similar to the first phrase, but this time the crotale part contains the pitch sequence D₅,
E-flat₅, C₆, and F₅, repeated twice. The vibraphone contains C₆, F₅, D₆, and E-flat₅, maintaining
the relationship between pairs of pitch classes in both parts. In measure 12, the rhythm changes
to constant eighth notes in the crotale and vibraphone; only the vibraphone is offset by one
sixteenth note. The vibraphone notes on the second and fourth sixteenth-note partial of each beat
create a composite rhythm of steady sixteenth notes between the metallic instruments. The
crotales contain the pitch sequence D₅, G₅, C₅, A-flat₅, E-flat₅, E-natural₅, D-flat₅, and G-flat₅,
which is replicated by the vibraphone directly after each crotale note with some octave
displacement.

![Figure 3.3 - Recitative I, Vibraphone and Crotales, measure 12](image)

More pitched material utilizes rhythmic canon from measure 26 through 28, but this
rhythm is not constructed by repeating a short motive as before. The canonized rhythm is oddly
syncopated and does not display any discernable pattern.

![Figure 3.4 - Recitative I, rhythm for canon, measures 26 through 28](image)

The vibraphone follows the crotale at a distance of one eighth note while both parts alternate
between high and low pitches. The pitch content is very similar to the phrase from measures
three through seven, except each pair of pitches is repeated in measures 26 through 28. The
crotales contain the ordered pitches B₅, C₅, B₅, C₅, A₅, D₅, A₅, and D₅, while the vibraphone
contains A₅, D₅, A₅, D₅, B₅, C₅, B₅, and C₅. This expanded repetition of pitches solidifies the relationship of opposite pairs of pitches between metallic parts.

Lansky contrasts the metallic sounds throughout this movement with non-pitched instruments, and some passages are created in a similar fashion as the ones discussed above. In measures 18 through 20, the congas and flowerpots execute a passage comprised of another rhythmic canon. The pots have the lead line, beginning in measure 18 on the second sixteenth-note partial of beat one. The congas follow the flowerpot rhythm at a distance of one quarter note. The contour of the conga passage is similar to that of the flowerpots line even though Lansky only utilizes two drums along with four flowerpots.

The temple blocks player provides a steady sixteenth-note ostinato throughout this passage and the rhythms of the congas and flowerpots align with this subdivision except for two triplets. These triplets stand out against the steady sixteenth-note texture and act as notes that do not fit in the established texture – prime examples of Lansky’s “Cage-like” sound.

Not all of the non-pitched parts are created with rhythmic canon and contain similarly contoured lines. Lansky introduces a congas/bongos theme in measure six that initiates a unifying idea throughout Recitative I. This measure consists of a sextuplet, quintuplet, a grouping of four sixteenth notes, and another sextuplet. Eventually, each player executes this passage on their own group of graduated instruments: high toms, low toms, bongos/congas, or temple blocks. After the bongos/congas introduce this melodic phrase, the high toms repeat the pattern in measure seven.
Throughout measures 8 through 13, both voices join to repeat this measure. The contour of the line and the accent pattern are exactly the same in both parts. This theme begins to evolve as the low toms enter in measure 14. Once again, rhythms and contour are the same, but accents are added on beats one and two. The three voices repeat each measure three times, and every note on beat three and four of the third measure is accented as it leads to the fortissimo downbeat in measure 17.

A modified version of the sextuplet theme appears in the high tom part in measure 22, and it consists of one sextuplet followed by two quintuplets and another sextuplet. A new player enters in each subsequent measure with the same rhythm and accent pattern. However, the contour of the individual parts is completely different. Each voice swirls in a different direction while maintaining the same rhythm and accent pattern throughout each measure. The bongos and congas join the high toms in measure 23, followed by the low toms in measure 24, and all voices snap to a unison contour when the temple blocks enter in measure 25. In addition to the melodic unison, this particular measure consists of all sextuplets, a new accent pattern, and stronger dynamic levels.

Figure 3.7 - Recitative I, drum entrances, measures 23 and 24
Without melodic instruments used to provide a pitch center or cadential material, the music still requires a sense of direction and an ultimate goal. Lansky achieves this through juxtaposing phrases of “order” and “chaos” throughout Recitative I. The sustained sound of the conga roll at the beginning is Lansky’s first version of order. This acts as a pedal tone for the disjunct metallic sounds and the tom voice throughout the first five measures of this movement. The drum theme in measure six provides a departure from the order of the roll, and the entire ensemble slowly moves towards chaos. The drum melody is already chaotic with frequently shifting rhythms of sextuplets, quintuplets, and sixteenth notes. Instead of the consistent conga roll, the metallic sounds in measures 9 through 13 join the unstable drum theme. Eventually, three players occupy their drums and overtake the metallic parts with increased dynamic levels and accents. Once the drum chaos reaches maximum volume and intensity in measure 16, it gives way to a refreshing arrival of order in measure 17 with quiet, steady sixteenth notes from a single temple block.
Much like the initial conga roll, the temple block sixteenth notes are now the established order for the next portion of the movement. The second wave of chaos begins in measure 18 with simultaneous attacks from the crotales and vibraphone. The crotales part contains the notated pitch C₆ and the vibraphone contains B₅ for the first three attacks, but the instruments trade pitches back and forth on each subsequent attack, creating a constantly and subtly shifting timbre. Each attack happens at a distance of five sixteenth-note partials, creating a “four-against-five” hemiola.

The congas and flowerpots add to the chaos in measures 18 through 20 with the syncopated rhythmic canon discussed earlier in this chapter. There is a lack of metric inflection throughout these measures, leading the listener’s ear away from any established pulse.

All voices subside in measure 21 except for the constant sixteenth notes from the temple block. Once again, players enter with drums at the beginning of each measure, every entrance signaled by a ringing crotale note. The drum parts intensify with each new voice and all parts snap to a unison statement of sextuplets in measure 25. This assimilation of drum parts differs from the first wave of chaos because the ensuing textures are nothing alike. While the first wave resulted in quiet sixteenth notes in measure 17, measure 26 presents the most chaotic music in this movement. Metered thirty-second notes in the bongos/congas combine with syncopated rhythms from the crotales, vibraphone, and flowerpots to create a musical free-for-all amongst the four players.
The texture changes slightly in measure 29 when the flowerpots abandon syncopation and begin to execute steady rhythms. The crotales are given a dance-like rhythm containing alternating groups of one eighth note followed by one sixteenth note, repeating the pitch sequence B₅, C₅, B₄, and C₅. The vibraphone contains an augmented version of this rhythm; one dotted eighth note grouped with one dotted sixteenth note, utilizing the pitch sequence D₅, A₄, D₄, A₄, D₅, and A₅. Lansky notes in both of these parts: “don’t worry too much about alignment.”

The metallic voices fade out as the movement comes to a close. The thirty-second notes in the bongos/congas return to a roll on the lowest drum in measure 32 – the original representative of Lansky’s order at the beginning of this movement. The rhythm for the flowerpots becomes slower every measure, presenting entire measures of sixteenth notes, eighth-note triplets, eighth notes, dotted eighth notes, and quarter notes. The only remaining voices at the end of the movement.
movement are the conga roll and flowerpot quarter notes, representing the order of a sustained sound and simplicity of the pulse that was disguised throughout most of the movement.

3.2.2 Recitative II

Much like its predecessor, Recitative II relies heavily on the concept of order versus chaos to unify the movement. No drums or pitched metallic instruments appear in this movement at all. Recitative II picks up where the flowerpots in Recitative I left off, with steady quarter notes. These quarter notes represent order throughout the entire movement. Each quarter note statement utilizes the lowest-pitched instrument in each player’s graduated set. The register only changes in measure 36 when each remaining voice climbs to the highest-pitched instrument in each player’s set to signal the end of the movement. The low-pitched quarter notes appear so often that the rising pitch at the end of the movement creates a noticeably different sound.

Most of the chaotic statements throughout Recitative II utilize at least three players with different individual parts. In measure two, each player has a sequence of notes that changes subdivisions, including sixteenth notes, quintuplets, or sextuplets on each beat. The order of each individual part is very important because Lansky ensures that every beat contains one performer playing sixteenth notes, another playing quintuplets, and another playing sextuplets. Due to the frequent change in subdivisions, each beat has a different texture and a feeling of uncertainty and disarray.

![Figure 3.13 - Recitative II, chaos, measure three](image-url)
While this particular form of chaos is used throughout the movement, Lansky employs other rhythmic combinations to create similar effects towards the middle of the movement. In measures 12 and 13, Lansky ensures that all of the aforementioned subdivisions are present for each beat in addition to eighth-note triplets played on the “noise” instruments. Each voice plays the same subdivision over the two-measure span, creating a different sound than the shifting subdivisions from measure three.

Another version of Lansky’s chaos begins in measure 18. This time, the chaotic voices are in unison shifting subdivisions, rather than multiple subdivisions sounding at once. The temple blocks present a sextuplet, quintuplet, sextuplet, and four sixteenth notes in measure 18. The bottles join the temple blocks in measure 19 and present the same rhythm with a slightly altered contour, followed by the flowerpots in measure 20. The “noise” instruments present steady eighth-note triplets against the other three parts, adding to the chaos. This texture persists and crescendos through the end of measure 22.
Lansky returns to his original chaotic statement in measures 29 through 31, and the tuned bottles repeat their individual chaotic part in measures 35 and 36, only to fade away into the other parts’ quarter notes.

Even though an important aspect of this movement is order versus chaos, Lansky intertwines a melodic voice throughout Recitative II in the least likely part: the noise instruments. This group of instruments is unique in this ensemble because it is the only set of instruments not graduated from lowest to highest pitch and it does not contain versions of the same instrument. The noise instruments create a variety of different sounds, the cowbell short and blunt; the finger cymbal clear, high-pitched, and resonant; the sleigh bells brittle and crunchy; and the choice of junk metal is left up to the performer. The distinguishing melodic characteristic is the difference between the music for the noise instruments and the remainder of the ensemble. While the temple blocks, bottles, and flowerpots play quarter notes in measure six, the noise instruments play notes on the second eighth-note partial of each beat.

This same melodic rhythm continues as the other three instruments launch into the chaos discussed above in measure eight. With the ebb and flow of order versus chaos throughout this
movement, the melodic voice continues to appear with quarter note accompaniment in measures 16 and 17 as well as 32 through 34. The melodic nature of the noise instruments is very clear when accompanied by quarter notes, but this relationship changes as unstable material appears throughout the movement.

Throughout Recitative II, the noise instruments are assimilated into the chaotic accompaniment as it becomes less stable. Between measures 8 and 13, the rhythmic activity of the melodic line increases, utilizing offbeats, eighth notes, and eighth-note triplets. The steady triplets in measures 12 and 13 are a fully integrated as part of the chaotic texture of eighth-note triplets, sixteenth notes, quintuplets, and sextuplets. This occurs once again in measures 20 and 21 as the noise instruments play triplets against unison rhythms in the other three voices. With the other voices shifting between subdivisions, the noise instruments simultaneously represent the stability of constant rhythm and the chaos of unlike subdivisions grinding against one another.

Bordered by a chaotic event and an orderly event, respectively, measures 22 through 26 defy a label of purely order or chaos. Measures 22 and 23 contain a composite rhythm of steady sixteenth notes played on low-pitched instruments. This sound is similar to the quarter notes that begin Recitative II, but the rhythm is four times faster. While this composite rhythm moves
quickly, the individual parts are constructed using steady eighth-note rhythms. The tuned bottles and temple blocks parts contain constant eighth notes while the flowerpots and noise makers contain the same rhythm, but offset by a sixteenth note. This results in a steady string of sixteenth notes on static pitches.

![Figure 3.18 - Recitative II, measure 22](image)

The next measures expand the sonic possibilities of a composite rhythm created by four parts. In measures 24 through 26, each part contains a different rhythm consisting of eighth notes, sixteenth notes, or thirty-second notes. The noise instruments have eighth notes that are offset by one sixteenth note and the temple blocks play steady sixteenth notes. The bottles present repetitions of syncopated attacks located on the first, second, fourth, sixth, and eighth thirty-second note partials of each beat, while the flowerpots repeat dotted sixteenth and thirty-second notes as pairs.

![Figure 3.19 - Recitative II, measure 24](image)
When played at the same time, these figures produce a composite rhythm of constant thirty-second notes. This new composite sound is even more striking because each player moves from instrument to instrument, rather than repeating the rhythm on one instrument as in measures 22 and 23.

![Figure 3.20 - Recitative II, composite rhythm and pitches, measure 24](image)

This amount of notes only appears in chaotic sections of the movement, while the rhythmic alignment of all four voices only appears in the ordered sections. The sounds in measures 22 through 26 are unlike anything else heard in Recitative II. This unique section establishes ordered chaos and it is a distinctive apex in a movement grounded in two contrasting concepts.

### 3.2.3 Recitative III

The third and final recitative returns to a larger instrumentation, including pitched metallic instruments and low toms that are omitted from Recitative II. While the idea of order versus chaos is somewhat present in Recitative III, it is not the driving force of unification that it was in Recitative I and II. The prevailing texture throughout Recitative III consists of steady sixteenth notes produced by the flowerpots, cowbell/agogo/claves, and eventually the temple blocks (the same instruments that provided chaotic material in Recitative II). These stable rhythmic figures contrast the continuously shifting subdivisions of previous movements. Even though the constant stream of rhythmic flowerpot and cowbell/agogo/claves sounds produce a steady rhythm, the resulting aura may seem chaotic to the listener’s ear. Some brief moments of order are found through sudden silence in measures 21, 43, and 55. Each silent measure is written in 4/8 meter, contrasting the 6/8 meter found throughout the remainder of the movement. Following each brief silence, the sixteenth-note rhythm continues to propel the music. While the idea of order versus chaos is present, many other elements provide unity and drive for Recitative III.
Despite Lansky’s consistent use of sixteenth-note subdivision, he still manages to manipulate rhythms to provide variety and contrast in a non-tonal and mostly non-pitched movement. Two players produce the constant stream of sixteenth notes throughout most of Recitative III, one playing cowbell/agogo/claves and the other playing flowerpots. Both players execute steady eighth-note rhythms, but the flowerpots player is offset by one sixteenth note, resulting in a sixteenth-note composite rhythm.

![Figure 3.21 - Recitative III, Cowbell/Agogo/Claves and Flowerpots composite rhythm, measure one](image)

This figure is utilized throughout Recitative III, and each occurrence contains a slightly different pitch pattern in the individual parts. From the beginning to measure 20, the cowbell/agogo/claves and flowerpots produce an ascending group of four eighth notes repeated throughout the phrase. The flowerpot sequence is offset by one pitch, allowing each part to rise to its highest pitch while the other is at a lower point in the sequence.

![Figure 3.22 - Recitative III, Cowbell/Agogo/Claves and Flowerpots, measures one and two](image)

In measures 39 through 42, the flowerpots play steady eighth notes on the beat while the cowbell/agogo/claves are offset by one sixteenth note. The pots remain static on one pitch while the cowbell/agogo/claves move throughout the four-instrument collection.

![Figure 3.23 - Recitative III, Cowbell/Agogo/Claves and Flowerpots, measures 39 through 42](image)
The final sequence from measure 57 to the end adds the temple blocks to the instrumentation, playing steady eighth notes along with the cowbell/agogo/claves part. Some measures have the same pitch content for both instruments while others contain figures moving in contrary or unrelated motion. The offset rhythm of the flowerpots continues through this entire phrase and sometimes “chases” the other voice with similar pitch material while at other times contrasting the accompanying pitch movement completely.

![Figure 3.24 - Recitative III, Temple Blocks, Cowbell/Agogo/Claves, and Flowerpots](image)

Although it drives most of Recitative III, Lansky utilizes the “split” rhythm concept to create a contrasting rhythmic figure in measures 15 through 20. Here, the noise instruments and the temple blocks produce five measures of steady dotted eighth notes in 6/8 meter. The temple blocks begin on the downbeat while the noise instruments are offset by a dotted sixteenth note, creating eight evenly spaced notes over the span of one measure of 6/8 meter.

![Figure 3.25 - Recitative III, Temple Blocks and Noise Instruments, measures 15 through 20](image)

This figure sounds as if it were notated in 2/4 meter utilizing eighth and sixteenth notes, but the 6/8 meter allows Lansky to highlight the contrasting meters of the composite cowbell/agogo/claves and flowerpots rhythm against the duple rhythm of the temple blocks and noise instruments.
Contrasting figures are not the only interesting rhythmic moments in the movement – Lansky utilizes varying amounts of space as well. This already appeared in the silent measures of 4/8 meter at measures 21, 43, and 55. Along with the silence itself, the amount of quiet is unexpected in the context of 6/8 meter. Lansky also utilizes abnormally spaced attacks in the metallic voices beginning in measure 10. The crotale player strikes D5 on the fourth beat of the measure, followed by the same note on beat three of measure 11, beat two of measure 12, and beat one of measure 13. The vibraphone player attacks simultaneously with the crotale player, utilizing B-flat5 in measures 10 and 12, followed by A5 in measures 11 and 13. These oddly spaced attacks suggest 5/8 meter instead of 6/8 meter, allowing Lansky to manipulate the listener’s sense of pulse.

Measures 22 through 38 provide another opportunity for rhythmic manipulation. This passage begins with steady sixteenth notes in the flowerpots part; however, the notes appear in groups of three while moving up the range of the pots. The entrance of the cowbell/agogo/claves part emphasizes this grouping with dotted eighth notes attacking at the beginning of each group of three. This pairing leads the listener to hear the dotted eighth note as the pulse, rather than the dotted quarter note usually suggested by 6/8 meter.
Just as this feel settles over a few measures, the low toms enter on beat four of measure 25 with groupings of three eighth notes. This suggests a dotted quarter note pulse against the dotted eighth-note pulse from the existing parts. However, the vibraphone enters with a steady quarter note rhythm at the same time as the low toms. The vibraphone plays an ascending pattern of three pitches: F-sharp\(_3\), G\(_3\), and A\(_3\); then B-flat\(_3\), C\(_4\), and D-flat\(_4\); followed by F-sharp\(_3\), G-sharp\(_3\), and A\(_3\).

![Figure 3.29 - Recitative III, Vibraphone, measures 25 through 34](image)

The scalar motion of the three pitch groupings heavily suggests 3/4 meter. As each new pitch sequence is played, more sixteenth notes are added in the low toms and cowbell/agogo/claves parts. The three competing metric ideas crescendo to measure 34, only to suddenly drop out in measure 35.

![Figure 3.30 - Recitative III, crescendo phrase, measures 30 through 32](image)
All that remains are constant sixteenth notes on cowbell/agogo/claves and steady eighth notes on one flowerpot. The cowbell/agogo/claves drop out in measure 37 and the flowerpots continue with eighth notes until the return of the original theme in measure 39.

In addition to order versus chaos and rhythmic manipulation, Recitative III draws from other concepts used in the aria movements. Much like the preludes and arias, Lansky establishes musical voices at the beginning of Recitative III. The chatter-like sixteenth notes in the flowerpots and bottles contrast the metallic sounds from the vibraphone and crotales. The metallic sounds could be considered one resonant voice, but each part contains distinct differences. The crotales produce evenly spaced, ringing pitches arranged in descending sequences. The vibraphone notes create disjunct eighth-note pairs. The attack of each pair is rhythmically delayed by one eighth note and most of these note pairs are separated by at least one octave.
In measure six, the vibraphone sound changes to adhere to staccato markings. The vibraphone part contains steady eighth notes with an occasional eighth rest, while the crotales continue to play evenly spaced, resonant pitches. With these contrasting elements, the vibraphone adopts a melodic role while the crotales’ sustain supports the melody.

![Figure 3.33 - Recitative III, Crotales and staccato Vibraphone, measures six through nine](image)

The initial theme and a similar texture appear from measure 39 to 42, but are quickly interrupted by silence at measure 43. The sixteenth-note texture resumes following the silence but is no longer split between two players. The pots enter with alternating sixteenth notes on their lowest pitches in measure 44, followed by the cowbell/agogo/claves, and finally by the temple blocks on their lowest pitches. These parts create accompaniment for the staccato vibraphone that enters in measure 46 – this time without crotale accompaniment. The vibraphone melody is essentially the same as measures six though nine except that the pitches are separated by two octaves instead of one.

![Figure 3.34 - Recitative III, adding accompaniment to staccato Vibraphone](image)

Lansky is even clearer about musical voices when he labels parts *sotto voce*. The first appears in Recitative III in the low toms part in measure 25. The vibraphone and low toms enter
together in this measure, joining the high-pitched sounds of the cowbell/agogo/claves and flowerpots. The use of the vibraphone’s low register and the choice of low toms distinguish these voices from the accompaniment, but do not highlight a main or melodic voice. While the vibraphone contains pitched material, the low toms contain more notes and increased rhythmic activity throughout the passage. However, Lansky is very clear that the vibraphone is the main voice by labeling the low toms *sotto voce*. Despite the secondary designation, the low toms remain crucial to phrase leading to the fortissimo dynamic level in measure 34.

Lansky also establishes a similar, yet longer phrase in measure 56. The low toms establish a steady eighth-note rhythm until the temple blocks, cowbell/agogo/claves, and flowerpots join the texture in measure 57.

![Figure 3.35 - Recitative III, Low Toms entrance joined by full ensemble, measures 56 and 57](image)

The material from measure 56 to the downbeat of measure 76 is very similar to the earlier passage from measures 25 through 34. All voices present steady rhythms and crescendo until a sudden drop in dynamic level releases the intensity in measure 76. The cowbell/agogo/claves, flowerpots, and low toms continue a composite sixteenth-note rhythm in this passage, as well. However, the vibraphone player from measure 25 through 34 now plays a temple block passage that is similar to the cowbell/agogo/claves part. With no metallic voice, the low toms seem to be the most likely melodic candidate, but Lansky once again bestows the label of *sotto voce* upon the low toms. This solidifies the light and rapid sounds of the temple blocks, cowbell/agogo/claves, and flowerpots as the main voice for the remainder of the movement.
while the low toms gradually add more active rhythms throughout the crescendo to the downbeat of measure 76. Once measure 76 arrives, all voices drop to a piano dynamic level and the toms are silent for the remainder of the movement as the sixteenth-note composite voices eventually come to a unison halt.

3.3 Performance Considerations

The sound palette for the recitatives is more diverse than the metallic nature of the preludes and arias. In addition to the standard range vibraphones and both octaves of crotales, high toms, low toms, and a combined set of two congas and two bongos must fit into the set-up so that each player can execute parts that move from instrument to instrument. Also, smaller instruments such as temple blocks, four flowerpots, four bottles, cowbell/agogo/claves, and the “noise instruments” set of sleigh bells, cowbell, junk metal, and finger cymbal must all fit around the large instruments. Lansky makes a specific note for Player III regarding instrumentation choice for Recitative II and III.

4 Untuned Bottles: Bottles are recommended for movement 5, and Cowbell/Agogo/Claves are recommended for movement 8. Sō Percussion, however, switches these around, and this is also acceptable. The same instrumentation, however, should not be used in both movements.23

While these movements do not use all of the instruments required in Threads, the recitatives have the largest instrumentation of any movement group.

Due to the large instrumentation and constantly changing sounds, players must be prepared to utilize implements that can function on multiple instruments. This appears first in the crotale and temple block part of Recitative I. Lansky requests “hard plastic” for the first two-crotale phrases beginning in measure 3. After this, the player has steady sixteenth notes on one block in measure 17, which continue through measure 24. Beginning in measure 18, the same player is asked to play single crotale notes with one hand while maintaining the temple block pattern with the other hand.

23 Lansky, Threads, 3.
This means that the instruments must be located where the player can execute this passage, and that the player must have mallets that will create an appropriate sound on both instruments. While Lansky’s suggestion of “hard plastic” mallets may work on crotales, mallets of that density may damage the temple blocks – especially at the fortissimo dynamic level in measure 25. A soft or medium plastic mallet is probably the best choice to produce an articulate sound on the crotales, and will allow the temple blocks to not overpower the other instruments. Also, the vibraphone is asked to play with “hard mallets, to match crotales.” A hard cord mallet will not match the articulation of a soft or medium plastic mallet on crotales, so a matching soft or medium plastic mallet may be used on the vibraphone as well. It is very important that this mallet not be too hard or heavy in order to avoid vibraphone damage. These mallet choices will also work well for crotales/temple blocks and vibraphone in Recitative III, except for the vibraphone passage in measures 25 through 34, which favors medium-hard cord mallets.

Traditionally, performers play congas and bongos with the hands rather than sticks or mallets, and despite a lack of implement indication for the bongos or congas, hands produce the ideal sound for Recitative I. Although Lansky requests “wood timpani mallets or heavy drumsticks” on the high toms, the heavy mallets will not complement the sound of bongos/congas with hands in this chamber setting. A light drumstick or thick dowel covered in moleskin will produce an articulate sound on high and low toms, as well as blend and balance with hands on bongos/congas. Slightly muffled double-headed concert toms will produce a resonant and articulate sound that complements the hand drums, rather than covering them in the texture. The vibraphone and low tom player should be prepared to play each passage while holding a mallet and stick in each hand at the same time to navigate quick switches between vibraphone and low tom parts.
The final consideration for the recitatives is playing “found” instruments in a traditional percussion setting. These instruments, including the four un-tuned bottles, flowerpots, and grouping of sleigh bells, cowbell, junk metal, and a finger cymbal, must be mounted and struck with implements to produce an optimal percussive sound. While it is possible to mount flowerpots on traditional cymbal stands or rope, the quick rhythms and motion between the individual pots are better executed if the instruments are laid flat. The pots will still resonate if placed on a trap table with a layer of egg-crate foam between the flowerpots and table. This method will work for the untuned bottles and cowbell/agogo/claves, as well. There are not “traditional” implements used to strike flowerpots or bottles, but the desired sound can help dictate options. In Recitative II, the flowerpots and bottles work together with the temple blocks to create order versus chaos. These sounds should be light and percussive, requiring a medium plastic mallet for the pots and bottles. This will match the sound produced by the temple blocks and allow for a fuller sound than sticks or dowel rods. The flowerpots and bottles may also utilize very hard rubber mallets if a deeper sound is desired. The rubber is more dense than plastic and the additional weight will help increase the presence of each instrument. However, if the rubber is not hard enough, the instruments will lack the percussive attack that creates the light interplay between shifting subdivisions in each part.

Traditionally, each instrument in the “noise-maker” group is struck with a different implement, but Lansky requires the player to execute rhythms between the various instruments
with a single implement. The sleigh bell part calls for individualized attacks, rather than a traditional string of steady notes that requires two hands to execute.

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Figure 3.39 - Recitative II, individualized Sleigh Bells attacks

A manufactured set of sleigh bells does not allow for precise single attacks, so a capable instrument must substitute for traditional sleigh bells. More articulate sleigh bells may be constructed using a hand towel and children’s sleigh bell bracelets with Velcro attachment. Roll the towel into a cylinder and then wrap the bracelets around the towel. When the towel cylinder is struck on a table, it produces one short sleigh bell sound due to the smaller, less resonant bells on the bracelets. The towel allows silent contact with the table as opposed to traditional sleigh bells with a wooden handle. With one hand executing the sleigh bell part, the other hand remains to play cowbell, a piece of junk metal, and a finger cymbal. A metal triangle beater is an excellent option to strike these metallic instruments, and it produces a light, articulate sound in the same vein as the bottles and flowerpots. The choice of a “piece of junk metal” is left up to the performer, but it should fit within the sounds specified by Lansky. A relatively low-pitched cowbell contrasts the resonant finger cymbal, so a good junk option should exist between the sounds of these two instruments. A circular saw blade is semi-resonant, yet not as dull as the cowbell or as pure as the finger cymbal. The blade, along with the cowbell, may rest on egg crate foam while the finger cymbal can hang from a boom cymbal stand with a triangle clip and an aluminum accessory mounting bar.
CHAPTER FOUR

CHORUSES

4.1 Sounds Present in Movement Family

The chorus movements of Threads create the most forceful and aggressive music found in the entire piece due to the focus on drums. These movements contrast both the lyrical nature of the preludes and arias and the noisy character of the recitatives. Most of the players utilize drums in the other movement families, but in a much more subdued manner. A set of four high toms, four low toms, and a combined set of two bongos and two congas are the main instruments for three of the players, while the other performer utilizes a doumbek, timbales, and four wooden slats. Lansky describes these as “drumming” movements in which he utilizes thick textures and sudden impact points throughout.\(^{24}\) When asked about composing the choruses, Lansky noted, “I even had an image of these guys [Sō Percussion] beating drums with greased chests and shirts off!”\(^{25}\) In the latter chorus movements, Lansky begins to blur the lines between movement instrumentation and classification. He briefly incorporates the legato vibraphone sound in two choruses, bowed in one movement and struck with mallets in the other. Also, the flowerpots, noise instruments, cowbells, and temple blocks introduce noisy sounds into small portions of two choruses as well. Lansky’s stylistic designation of “chorus” is appropriate due to similar instruments sounding as a group and the use of a more aggressive and raucous sound than the noisy recitatives and the lyrical preludes and arias.

4.2 Musical Analysis

4.2.1 Chorus I

Lansky begins Chorus I with a striking and familiar rhythmic motive, the pairing of a dotted eighth note and a sixteenth note followed by silence. This is the same rhythm that quietly fades away to end Prelude (Aria I) on metallic instruments. The beginning of Chorus I contains five accented repetitions of this motive at a fortissimo dynamic level on drums. Lansky also

\(^{24}\) Lansky, Threads, 2.
changes the length of silence after each motivic statement. The $3/4$ meter remains constant while five eighth-note rests separate the first two rhythms, three eighth-note rests separate the second, third, and fourth rhythms, and two eighth-note rests separate the fourth and fifth rhythms.

![Figure 4.1 – Chorus I, opening passage](image)

This recognizable motive occurring at uneven metric intervals sets the tone for the remainder of Chorus I.

Lansky utilizes the dotted eighth and sixteenth-note motive to act as a recognizable figure for the listener’s ear. The melodic voices of the doumbek and high toms in measure 26 employ the motive in a five-beat melody. This phrase consists of three quarter notes, the dotted eighth and sixteenth-note motive, and a quarter rest. Each full beat is played on alternating low and high drums.

![Figure 4.2 – Chorus I, dotted eighth and sixteenth-note motive in melody](image)
The accompaniment of undulating sixteenth notes provides a subtle groove for the melody, but does not suggest specific meter or repetitive patterns. As this melody is played over and over, the low toms begin to weave rhythmic figures into the texture, occasionally joining the doumbek and high toms in a unison statement of the dotted eighth and sixteenth-note motive. By measure 31, all of the voices arrive at a fortissimo dynamic level on beat four. The doumbek and high toms punctuate this arrival with the dotted eighth and sixteenth-note rhythm accented on two simultaneous pitches each.

Lansky utilizes the motive in measures 32 and 33 to create two statements with distinctive metric feelings. Three motive pairs are placed together so that every note is an equal distance apart, resulting in six attacks that occur after every third sixteenth note. A quarter rest separates the first and second statement, and the phrase is repeated for the second statement in measure 33. The doumbek utilizes both pitches at once, but the toms play the first four attacks on lower drums followed by the last two on higher drums, creating an orchestration similar to the melody in measure 26.

![Figure 4.3 - Chorus I, motive in Doumbek and High Toms](image)

In addition to this hemiola created by Lansky, the accompanying parts gradually align with the motivic voices. The bongos and congas contain figures that align with the fourth, fifth, and sixth attacks in measure 32 and 33, while the low toms accentuate the motivic notes throughout measure 33.
Later in Chorus I, Lansky revives the same metric manipulation in a slightly different context. Measures 50 through 53 contain two groups of six evenly spaced fortissimo attacks separated by a quarter rest, but the written meter alternates between 3/4 and 2/4 instead of remaining in 5/4. In measure 50, the entire ensemble plays this unison rhythm without any accompaniment or suggestion of the actual pulse. Also, each attack alternates from low drums to high drums, masking the existing pulse and creating an even stronger feeling of a different meter.

![Figure 4.4 - Chorus I, unison motive, measures 50 through 53](image)

The phrase that precedes measure 50 contains only two players and decrescendos to a piano dynamic level, luring the listener towards the quiet dynamic level. Suddenly, the listener is assaulted with a barrage of attacks that seem to exist outside of the established pulse, yet are striking in their unity and precision.

Chorus I does not only contain rhythmic manipulation on such a grand scale. More subtle occurrences produce rhythms and phrases that sound commonplace, but are more complicated when viewed in the score. Measures 40 through 42, as well as 47 through 49, sound as if they contain some form of steady sixteenth notes from the congas/bongos and high toms.
Both phrases are preceded by constant sixteenth notes, allowing for a steady continuation of the composite rhythm throughout each phrase. However, when each part is played individually, a different feel exists within each part. The phrases at 40 through 42 and 47 through 49 are composed with identical measures that decrescendo from mezzo forte to piano dynamic levels. If an individual measure of the bongo/conga or high toms part is played alone, it suggests a 4/4 or 12/8 meter and pulse despite slightly different rhythms.

When played at the same time, these parts fill the gaps left by the each individual part’s rhythm to create constant sixteenth notes. When the listener hears these phrases performed, there is a hint of suggested 4/4 or 12/8 meter, but the individual rhythms blend to create the composite rhythm.

In addition to the passages above, Lansky utilizes more “split” rhythms to create composite rhythms throughout Chorus I. Beginning in measure 16, Lansky takes a simple passage of five eighth notes played on the doumbek’s pitches low-high-low-low-high and he manipulates it with other instruments in the ensemble.
After the initial statement, the low toms present the same pattern in measure 17 and 18 followed by the doumbek offset by one sixteenth note. This creates an echo effect that produces steady sixteenth notes between the two voices. Lansky manipulates this passage one last time by inverting the doumbek’s pitches to high-low-high-high-low, this time followed by the original low toms pattern at a distance of one sixteenth note.

All of these statements take place along with an accompanying stream of sixteenth notes from the congas. Eventually, the high toms are layered into the texture of measure 19. The increased complexity of each statement and layering of voices gives the non-pitched passage direction as it crescendos to the fortissimo attacks in measures 21 through 24.

Another passage in Chorus I is built upon a single statement split between multiple players and layered with new instruments. The low toms present seven eighth notes that move from the lowest drum to the highest and back down again.
This is accompanied by steady sixteenth-note figures from the bongos. In measure 36 and 37, the low toms repeat the ascending and descending eighth notes along with the high toms that enter one sixteenth note later. Once again, this creates a composite sixteenth-note rhythm from two individual eighth-note parts.

To add new texture in measure 37, Lansky introduces the doumbek with a sixteenth-note groove similar to the bongo part. After two repetitions of split eighth notes, Lansky actually notates the composite rhythm of steady sixteenth notes in each instrument in measure 38. With the composite rhythm located in both the low toms and high toms, Lansky offsets these rhythms by one sixteenth note. Unlike prior offset statements, measure 38 does not result in a new composite rhythm. However, the changes from drum to drum are delayed creating a blurred statement of the composite rhythms from measures 36 and 37.

Despite Chorus I’s instrumentation of drums and the pitch capacity limited to no more than four drums per person, Lansky coaxes melody out of these instruments throughout this movement. The first passage after the opening contains two types of melodic material: one is
legato and contains very linear phrases while the other is sparse and accent-based. The low toms provide the linear melodic material through a collection of sixteenth-note-based rhythms in measures 6 through 11. This is not the typical “undulating sixteenth notes” found throughout other movements of *Threads*; rather, it contains syncopated rhythms and accents combined with flowing sixteenth notes that give it a recognizable identity.

Figure 4.12 - Chorus I, Low Toms, measures six through nine

The sparse, accent-based melody appears in the other three voices: the doumbek, bongos/congas, and high toms. Beginning in measure six with the dotted eighth and sixteenth-note motive, this facet of the melody is more focused on rhythm than pitch content. Lansky requires players to move from drum to drum within their own part, but there is not a specific pitch sequence represented by all three voices at the same time.

Figure 4.13 - Chorus I, rhythmic reduction, measures 6 through 10

The rhythmic melody is fairly clear from measures 6 through 10, but individual parts begin to resemble the linear melody in measure nine. On the second eighth-note partial, the high toms begin to play the same part as the low toms. By measure 11, all players contribute sixteenth-note rhythms that lead to the arrival of a new phrase at measure 12.

The melodic recognition of the phrase from measure 6 to 11 should trigger the listener’s ear when the phrase is repeated at the end of Chorus I. Measures 57 through 62 contain the same accented and linear melodic material in the same voices with the same orchestration.
The only difference between this statement and the earlier statement is the final measure of the phrase. Measure 62 is notated with 7/8 meter to allow for a beat of silence before the closing measures of Chorus I, which are very similar to the passage from measures 12 through 15.

Lansky utilizes the concept of linear melody in measures 43 through 46 and measures 54 through 56. In the first statement, the bongos/congas present a figure that moves down the pitches of the drums. The next measure contains a phrase moving up the drums from the low toms. This sequence is essentially repeated to create a conversational phrase between the two instruments.

The phrase in measures 54 through 56 also trades linear passages, but this time it is between the bongos/congas and the high toms while the low toms provide accompaniment. Instead of moving in opposing directions, Lansky has these two melodic voices cascade down the drums, overlapping at points, more like a chase than a conversation.
With the prior melodic phrases surrounded by accompaniment with similar rhythms, a very clear melodic delineation exists in measure 26. This particular melody is mentioned earlier because it contains the dotted eighth and sixteenth-note motive that appears throughout this movement. The doumbek and high toms state the melody over the course of measures 26 through 31 while the bongos/congas build below the melody. The bongos/congas are marked *sotto voce* beginning at measure 26, specifically recognizing the melodic voices of the doumbek and high toms.

This particular melody sets a precedent for the remaining chorus movements with its pitch order of low-high-low-high. Lansky utilizes this idea in other chorus movements, sometimes in different instruments, time signatures, and orchestrations. The style of this melody also changes, shown in the unison statement from measure 50 through 53 of Chorus I.
4.2.2 Chorus II

Chorus II boasts a larger instrumentation than Chorus I and contains variety of sounds used throughout the movement. However, the music still focuses on Lansky’s idea of “drumming.” Much like the recitative movements, Chorus II relies on the concept of order versus chaos to generate musical cohesiveness in a non-pitched setting. In this movement, order is represented by simple unison attacks. The opening four measures provide a steady quarter note “call” from the doumbek and a “response” from the noise instruments, cowbell/agogo, and flowerpots. The response is located on the second eighth-note partial of each beat played by the doumbek.
This simple figure appears throughout the movement as the musical reprieve from the chaotic episodes found later in Chorus II. A similar figure appears in measures 30 through 35 where a call and response exists between the doumbek player and the three other players. However, this time the three players lead the call on low toms, congas, and high toms while the doumbek responds on the eighth-note partial following each drum attack.

![Figure 4.20 - Chorus II, ensemble call and Doumbek response](image)

![Figure 4.21 - Chorus II, ensemble call and Doumbek response (continued)](image)

After the initial call and response at the beginning of Chorus II, the doumbek player moves to wooden slats in measure five and Lansky employs the response rhythm from the noise instruments, cowbell/agogo, and flowerpots as the accompaniment. The steady, unison rhythm
of the accompaniment continues to symbolize order, and it is now joined by the melody of the wooden slats.

![Figure 4.22 - Chorus II, Wood Slats with ensemble reduction](image)

A similar phrase appears in measures 35 through 39 where the high toms continue the order pattern on the second eighth-note partial of each beat along with a bongos/congas melody. The instrumentation of this passage is much more subdued with the warm sound of drums replacing the sharp and brittle sounds of wooden slats and junk instruments.

![Figure 4.23 - Chorus II, Bongos/Congas with High Toms accompaniment](image)

Also, the phrase at measure 35 begins from silence with no referential pulse. The first attack of the high toms sounds as if it provides the pulse when high toms are actually playing the off beats. This creates a sense of order even though the listener may not perceive the music the way it exists on the page.

After establishing a clear introduction, Lansky slowly pushes each instrument towards a chaotic ensemble texture. This is achieved through layering passages at a fortissimo dynamic level that do not strictly adhere to the written 3/4 meter. The first layer of chaos is actually the wooden slats passage that acts as the melody in measure five. This part consists of a repeated
pattern that is four quarter notes in length, and if it were performed out of the context, it would most likely be written in 4/4 meter.

![hard wooden sticks]

**Figure 4.24 - Chorus II, Wood Slats pattern**

Following the slats are the bongos/congas in measure 10. This passage is two measures in length and is the only voice that naturally fits in 3/4 meter. These attacks are less frequent than the sixteenth notes of the wooden slats so the drum rhythms can stand out as the texture thickens.

![Figure 4.25 - Chorus II, Bongos/Congas pattern]

The next entrance is in the high toms, with a quarter note on the first beat of the pattern to rhythmically separate it from the existing texture. This particular pattern feels as if it is written in 11/16 meter, causing it to begin on a different sixteenth-note partial for every repetition.

![Figure 4.26 - Chorus II, High Toms pattern]

The low toms are the final voice to enter the texture in measure 18. This pattern contains slight variants in pitches between the lowest tom and the kick drum, but the general pattern remains the same through each repetition. The resulting feel is either two measures of 5/8 meter or one longer measure of 5/4 meter.
Lansky creates this four-voice chaos with each voice entering on the downbeat of a measure of 3/4 meter. However, the voices never align where all phrases begin on the same beat, resulting in four patterns suggesting different meters at the same time. The sudden ending of this passage on beat three of measure 23 leaves a brief silence after an accented unison attack.

Following the first wave of chaos is a much more subdued version of chaotic material. All voices are at a piano dynamic level and are built around the steady sixteenth notes from the conga player on beat five of measure 23. The other voices begin to add short rhythmic statements on top of the conga voice, all of which contain at least one sixteenth-note triplet. The low toms enter first in measure 24, followed by the high toms and doumbek in measure 25.

The passages appear more frequently in each voice until almost every eighth note in 5/8 meter contains a sixteenth-note triplet from the ensemble. The passage from measures 23 through 30 is not as chaotic as measures 10 through 23, but it does act as a bridge back to the rhythmic order of measure 30.
Lansky builds another, shorter chaotic passage beginning with the bongo/conga melody located in measure 36. This phrase can be notated in 7/16 meter and is repeated over and over as steady sixteenth notes.

![Figure 4.29 - Chorus II, Bongos/Congas Pattern](image)

One difference in this chaotic sequence is that not all voices enter on the downbeat of a measure. The high toms begin their chaotic pattern in 7/8 meter on the second eighth-note partial of beat two in measure 39.

![Figure 4.30 - Chorus II, High Toms Pattern](image)

The following entrance is the sparsest and possibly the most discombobulating of Lansky’s chaotic patterns. The doumbek enters on beat three of measure 40 and alternates between high and low note attacks every five sixteenth notes. This means that the doumbek plays four evenly spaced notes over the duration of five quarter notes in 3/4 meter.

![Figure 4.31 - Chorus II, Doumbek pattern](image)

Finally, a low toms figure resembling 7/8 meter enters in measure 42 to complete the chaos. This figure contains almost as many notes in one repetition as the entire doumbek part from measures 40 through 46.
All entrances are at a forte dynamic level and do not relent throughout the duration of the passage. Much like the previous chaotic phrase, the voices come to a sudden halt on the second eighth-note partial of beat two in measure 46. The only voice not present on the final attack is the doumbek because Lansky allows time for the player to move to the wooden slats for the next phrase. However, the pattern does align so that the doumbek player’s final note would be in unison with the remainder of the ensemble.

Both Chorus I and II begin with loud, unison statements, but Chorus I utilizes the dotted eighth and sixteenth-note motive that can be found throughout *Threads*. Even though it is not found at the beginning of Chorus II, Lansky finds opportunities to utilize the same motive throughout this movement. The first appearance of this motive is in the bongo and conga part in measure 10.

While the motive is tucked inside the growing chaos created by different patterns, this rhythm occurs at the beginning of each measure from 10 through 23. Lansky also manages to place the same rhythmic motive in the second chaotic build beginning in measure 39. Once again, the rhythm is presented in the second voice to enter, but this time it is in the high toms. The dotted eighth and sixteenth-note rhythm occurs even more often in this phrase and it stands out against the constant sixteenth notes of the bongos/congas.
This motive does not only appear inside thicker textures throughout Chorus II. Unison statements of this motive exist in measures 53 and 73. In both situations, the motive ends a similar phrase in the low toms, bongos/congas, and high toms. These drums produce steady quarter notes in 3/4 meter with an occasional sixteenth and dotted eighth-note rhythm while utilizing alternating high-low-high-low pitch patterns first used in Chorus I.

![Figure 4.35 - Chorus II, motive at end of quarter note melody](image)

The first of these statements from measures 47 through 53 contains a melodic line in the wooden slats similar to the one found in measures five through nine. While the accompanying figures are not exactly the same, the contents of this phrase display a blend of material from Chorus I and early in Chorus II. The second unison motive in measure 73 appears at the end of a similar phrase in the drums, but this time they are joined by the bowed vibraphone. The vibraphone sustain accompanies the drums, which take on the melodic role for this particular phrase.

A very distinct feature of Chorus II is the use of elements from previous movements, such as the sound of the bowed vibraphone. This is the first pitched material heard since the fourth movement (Aria II), and the first time a bowed vibraphone is utilized since Prelude (Aria I). Despite the absence of this sound, the sustained vibraphone directs the listener’s ear back to the first movement while drumming ideas from Chorus II continue. The first pitch sustained is D₄ and it enters in measure 59 during a reprise of the subdued chaos from earlier in this movement.
These ideas from Prelude (Aria I) and early Chorus II co-exist until the subdued chaos of the drums ends in measure 67. After one solo bowed vibraphone measure, the low toms, high toms, and bongos/congas contrast the vibraphone with fortissimo dynamic level quarter notes, also referencing material from earlier in Chorus II.

The vibraphone drops out in measure 72 and then sustains the pitch $B_3$ in measure 73. This is the first and last vibraphone pitch from Prelude (Aria I), and it still possesses some gravity as a
central pitch. As B₃ sustains, Lansky composes new material for the drums that is not found earlier in Chorus II. The bongos/congas are the lead voice in measure 74 and the low toms and high toms are directed to sound “under bongos.” This final passage resembles the accompanying drum figures found throughout Prelude (Aria I).

The bongos/congas provide a steady sixteenth-note rhythm, accompanied by syncopated figures in the toms and the vibraphone sustain. All rhythms align with the bongos/congas, so the idea of chaos is not conveyed through this passage. The vibraphone sustains through the end of the movement, creating a seamless transition into Aria III.

The use of the bowed vibraphone is not Lansky’s only attempt to blend sonic elements from other movements into Chorus II. The concept of order versus chaos primarily exists in the recitative movements and does not act as the driving force in any of the other chorus movements. However, Lansky does not create chaos the same way in Chorus II as he does in the recitatives. Canons of odd-metered rhythms constructed with the same subdivisions create chaos passages in Chorus II rather than the shifting subdivisions and simultaneous contrasting rhythms employed in the recitatives. The introduction to Chorus II also contains an element of the recitatives through instrumentation. The only drum used in the first nine measures is the doumbek. The

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remainder of the ensemble utilizes flowerpots, cowbells, agogo bell, and a piece of junk metal to execute their parts. This allows the sound of Recitative II to carry over into the beginning of Chorus II, just as the vibraphone previews the sounds and textures of Aria III.

4.2.3 Chorus III

The final chorus movement contains multiple thematic ideas, some original and others borrowed from previous movements of Threads. Chorus III begins with a theme composed in 5/8 meter that alternates between high and low pitches, much like phrases from earlier chorus movements. This theme contains a repeating pattern of two quarter notes followed by an eighth note, and begins at a slow tempo of quarter note equals 60 beats per minute.

![Figure 4.40 - Chorus III, Temple Blocks, measures one through four](image)

The introduction begins at a piano dynamic level, but Lansky does not intend for this phrase to remain slow and quiet. An accelerando to quarter note equals 100 beats per minute moves the music forward in addition to a crescendo beginning in measure five. Accompanying sixteenth-note rhythms also join the theme in measure five to add depth to the music. At measure 11, the ensemble reaches a forte dynamic level that lasts until the accelerando is complete at measure 15. At this point, the ensemble drops to a piano dynamic level and all voices enter together for the first time in Chorus III.

The material from measures 15 through 27 comes from the opening accelerando theme. The timbales outline the entire ensemble’s accent pattern and provide an alternating high-low pattern, similar to the introduction. While the rhythms are not exactly the same, the timbale rhythm utilizes portions of the 5/8 meter theme over a four-bar phrase.

![Figure 4.41 - Chorus III, Timbales melody, measures 15 through 18](image)
The low toms, bongos/congas, and high toms quietly embellish the open space left by the timbale rhythm and accent the same eighth-note partials as the timbales. Lansky immediately repeats these measures at 19 through 22 at a forte dynamic level to contrast the quiet first statement.

Figure 4.42 - Chorus III, forte dynamic level repeat, measures 19 through 22

This ensemble statement with timbale theme appears again at the end of Chorus III at measure 101. The timbale theme, drum accompaniment, and instrumentation are all the same except for the final measure notated in 7/8 meter to add space between four-bar phrases. The difference between the passage at measure 15 and the passage at measure 101 is the latter does not repeat at a forte dynamic level. In fact, Lansky marks each part “sempre piano” for the remainder of the piece. In order to change melodic sound, he substitutes a vibraphone melody for timbales in measure 114.

Figure 4.43 - Chorus III, Vibraphone melody
The vibraphone draws from different rhythmic combinations of quarter notes and eighth notes in 5/8 meter, similar to the rhythms of the introduction.

The use of rhythmic themes in 5/8 meter sets the tone for Chorus III, but a recognizable theme enters in measure 38, drawing from earlier choruses. Each prior chorus movement contains a theme with quarter notes and a variation on a dotted eighth and sixteenth note. The theme from Chorus I appears in 5/4 meter and includes three quarter notes, a dotted eighth and sixteenth note, and a quarter rest.

The theme from Chorus II reverses the pitch order from Chorus I and utilizes a sixteenth and dotted eighth-note pair, rather than a dotted eighth and sixteenth-note group. Also, the length of the Chorus II theme is not consistent throughout each statement.
The theme in Chorus III combines elements from both of the above passages. The low-high order from Chorus I is used while the written rhythm of two sixteenth notes sounds the same as the sixteenth and dotted eighth note from Chorus II. The Chorus III theme contains a total of seven eighth notes, though it actually appears across bar lines in 5/8 meter.

![Figure 4.47 - Chorus III, Doumbek quarter note theme in 5/8 meter](image)

Each voice presenting this melodic line gradually changes with more repetition. Rhythms become more active and pitch patterns change as the music crescendos towards measure 62. Eventually, the only voice performing this melody is an embellished version of the timbale part.

Lansky’s use of different thematic material allows the exploration of different orchestration styles throughout Chorus III. The rhythmic motives discussed above provide examples of melody and accompaniment orchestration. In the opening passage of the movement, Lansky moves the 5/8 meter theme from instrument to instrument. First, the temple blocks and flowerpots present the theme in high-pitched junk instruments. Once again, this blurs the instrumentation between the prior recitative and drum-filled chorus movements. Next, and active pattern on the low-pitched congas accompanies the theme.

![Figure 4.48 - Chorus III, Temple Blocks, Congas, and Flowerpots](image)
All voices crescendo to a forte dynamic level and Lansky moves the 5/8 meter theme to the low toms, introducing instruments more conducive to the chorus “thread.” The accompaniment expands over the range of congas and bongos, and the rhythm becomes steady sixteenth notes.

Figure 4.49 - Chorus III, Low Toms and Bongos/Congas

The resulting instrumentation at measure 15 leaves the high pitched and thin sounding timbales as the main voice, while the warmer sounding toms and bongos/congas accompany the melody.

Another example of a thematic idea presented with a new instrument is the move from timbales to vibraphone in measure 114. The vibraphone utilizes the first five notes of an A-minor scale in octave pairs for this improvisatory-sounding passage, but the entire section centers on the B dyad. Within the first five measures, the vibraphone only uses B₃, B₄, D₄, and D₅, with one use of A₃ and A₄. As the passage continues, the pitch content expands to all five pitch pairs and the accompanying drums give way to solo vibraphone beginning in measure 127.

Figure 4.50 - Chorus III, Vibraphone solo closing passage
After three passages where the vibraphone is left by itself, the entire ensemble ends together with the vibraphone landing on D₄ and D₅ in the final measure. With B acting as the central pitch class but D₄ and D₅ used as the final pitches, this movement feels incomplete. However, the next movement begins with the pitch B₃, so the final note of Chorus III essentially leads to the first note of Chorale Prelude (Aria IV).

Lansky does not restrict Chorus III to textures with one melodic voice and three accompanying parts. The eighth-note pickup to measure 28 through 30 contains a phrase where all voices create one musical idea on an equal plane.

The rhythms are almost unison through each voice, but the slight differences do not make one voice more important than the other. A very similar statement at a forte dynamic level follows this phrase at measure 31. Once again, no voice is more important than another until measure 35.

Other phrases evolve so that the voices function on an equal level, such as the one beginning in measure 87. The bongos/congas part contains a through-composed melodic line six measures in length. The phrase continues for five more measures, repeating the contents of the sixth measure.
The high toms voice actually creates a canon with the bongos/congas voice by starting the same phrase on the second sixteenth-note partial of beat three in measure 87. The low toms accompany the bongos/congas and high toms in measure 87 with dotted eighth notes, and the temple blocks join the ensemble in measure 90 with constant eighth notes. At this point, the texture is very thick and the accompanying parts suggest conflicting pulses. The low toms change to a rhythm comprised of alternating single eighth notes and sixteenth notes, which is then utilized in the bongos/congas in measure 92. The resulting canon between the bongos/congas and high toms separates the parts by one sixteenth note, creating a composite rhythm of steady sixteenth notes.

![Figure 4.53 - Chorus III, measures 90 through 91](image-url)

![Figure 4.54 - Chorus III, measures 92 through 93](image-url)

The texture is so saturated with musical information that no one part can be identified as the melodic voice. Even the voices in canon evolve and join the texture of the entire ensemble.
Chorus III utilizes 5/8 meter throughout, and this is the only movement of Threads to employ compound meter throughout a majority of the movement. The constant unevenness of 5/8 meter allows for a stable introduction of 6/8 meter in the middle of Chorus III. The interesting aspect of this 6/8 meter is that it feels more like fast 12/8 meter. The low toms play constant dotted eighth notes, creating four equally spaced attacks in each measure. This, coupled with groupings of three sixteenth notes in the melodic high toms part, draws the listener’s ear towards the pulse of the low toms.

The entrance of the temple blocks in measure 71 emphasize the broader pulse (every three eighth notes) usually associated with 6/8 meter. However, individual groupings of three sixteenth notes continue to suggest 12/8 meter pulse in the low toms.
The first measure that truly sounds as if it could be felt in 6/8 meter is measure 86. This is the first instance where the low toms are not playing dotted eighth notes. Rather, each voice is alternating sixteenth notes either in a high-low or low-high pattern. This emphasizes the eighth notes that make up the written pulse for a measure of 6/8 meter.
The low toms return to playing dotted eighth notes in measure 87, but the temple blocks enter with steady eighth notes in measure 90. This juxtaposition of fast 12/8 meter over actual 6/8 meter only comes to an end when all voices drop out except for the bongos/congas, which move back towards the return of the first full ensemble statement in 5/8 meter at measure 101.

4.3 Performance Considerations

With the chorus movements based around the idea of drumming, Lansky utilizes most of the drums in prior movement families. However, the timbales, kick drum, doumbek, and wood slats are exclusive to the chorus movements. The kick drum is a drum set bass drum operated with a foot pedal and grouped with the low toms; however, it is not used along with the low toms in the recitative movements. It is important that the placement of the foot pedal does not affect the player’s low toms set-up or require the player to stretch or reach to operate the drum. Utilizing a double bass drum pedal can allow the bass drum to sit further away from the performer while providing remote pedal access to strike the drum. The player can also place the bass drum directly behind their body and operate a single pedal with the heel instead of the ball of the foot.

The performer must mount the doumbek on a stand in order to facilitate quick switches between instruments.
Certain stands are made specifically to hold a doumbek, darabuka, or djembe, but and x-stand (used for electronic keyboards or trap tables) and bungee cord can also mount and secure a drum. One other consideration with the doumbek is Lansky’s desire for two simultaneous pitches, one high and one low.

The doumbek can provide an open tone as well as a bass tone, achieving a high and low pitch. However, when struck in two places at the same time, the doumbek head is not as responsive and will not create a full sound. To circumvent this problem, a larger drum such as a djembe can provide a low pitch along with the doumbek for a high pitch. Two drums allow for maximum sound when struck simultaneously and similar attack sounds for both the high and low pitch.

The wood slats are the only new instruments in the chorus movements not found in a standard percussion section. Chorus II requires four relatively pitched slats and Lansky describes them in his Instrumentation Key.

**Wood Slats:** Sō’s wood slats are made of walnut. They differ in width and length, but each is about 1” thick. The pitch is dull and undefined, creating a raw, aggressive sound (wood on wood) for the more intense movements. They are meant to contrast with the round, “orchestral” sound of the woodblocks or temple blocks.  

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The slats can rest on egg crate foam or some other mounting system so that they may resonate. Lansky specifies “hard wooden sticks” in the score for Chorus II, in addition to the “wood on wood” requirement from the passage above. The butt end of drumsticks or wooden timpani mallets should work to provide an appropriate sound. Another aspect of the wood slats part is the “learning curve” that Lansky describes as he gains experience as a percussion composer. The wood slats part calls for the player to strike two slats at once on multiple slats in rapid succession, and Sō Percussion’s Adam Sliwinski informed Lansky that figures of that nature are potentially difficult to execute. Lansky recalled the “lesson in choreographing arm motion” that was offered, but Sliwinski still attempted the part as Lansky intended and was successful in its performance. Lansky notes that other groups perform the wood slats part alternating between slats rather than striking them simultaneously.  

One other instrument consideration for the chorus movements is the tom instrumentation. The two tom parts in Threads contain the designation “high toms” and “low toms.” While this seems like a simple division, the parts don’t blend very well when one player uses four very small toms and the other utilizes four very large toms. If there is access to a set of eight graduated concert toms, one player can use toms one, three, five, and seven, while the other uses toms two, four, six, and eight. This allows one set to be higher than the other without producing two opposing sounds, especially when rhythms are split between both sets of toms.

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Figure 4.62 - Chorus I, Low Toms and High Toms split rhythm

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The only specific implement changes located in the chorus movements are in the tom parts of Chorus II. The section from measures 24 through 29, as well as all similar sections and then ending of the movement, call for the player to utilize fingers to strike the toms. 

This entire section contains a piano dynamic level, so the fingers on toms must speak loud enough to fill out the texture. However, when utilizing fingers on toms, the technique is not the same as other hand drums. In order for the notes to speak, the player must strike the drums forcefully with fingertips rather than the pads of the fingers, even at a piano dynamic level. Lansky assumes that the doumbek and bongos/congas players will utilize hands or fingers throughout the passage so the timbre of all instruments will blend. Lansky does not specify sticks or hands on bongos/congas and doumbek throughout any chorus movement, so other passages are left up to interpretation. Most likely, the performers will use hands on the hand drums and the toms should continue to use lighter sticks covered in moleskin, as described in earlier performance considerations.
CHAPTER FIVE

UNIFYING ELEMENTS OF THREADS

5.1 Sounds from Different Movement Families

*Threads* is divided into the three movement families with distinct sound qualities associated with each group. The three distinct sounds of metallic keyboards, “noise-like” instruments, and drums, as well as their associations with baroque cantata movements, exhibit some of Lansky’s compositional tendencies from earlier in his career. One of these ideas is described in Lansky’s biography in reference to his first work solely for computer-synthesized tape, *mild und leise* (1973): “timbre is used as a structural element (similar timbres tie together parts of a piece, much as a returning melody helps the listener with the structure of a classical piece).”

Even though this passage describes techniques utilized in a computer piece, Lansky intertwines timbres from different movement families throughout *Threads*. The appearances of different instruments and sounds makes *Threads* more than just a collection of ten movements, but rather a unified work with referential and related sound elements.

Some movements establish a pure instrumentation, such as Arias II and III only utilizing pitched metallic instruments, Recitative II only containing noise instruments, and Chorus I only including drums and wooden slats. The remaining movements intertwine elements from “unlike” sounds. Prelude (Aria I) and Chorale Prelude (Aria IV) both rely on pitched metallic instruments, but they contain passages with bongos and high toms, too. Prelude (Aria I) utilizes the drums, both parts played with fingertips, to establish a groove and propel the metallic voices forward. However, the bongos serve as a substitute for the tuned pipes in the closing melodic passage, briefly focusing on the drums in a predominantly metallic movement. Chorale Prelude (Aria IV) is propelled by a figuration created by both vibraphone voices. The chorale tune is presented in both the tuned pipes and the glockenspiel, but the bongos and high toms present an ostinato that acts as a non-pitched counter melody in certain passages. The same ostinato is used in both parts and is usually presented by a one player, except for one passage where the bongos

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29 McCarthy, “Biography,” *Paul Lansky*. 

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and high toms play at the same time. This recognizable pattern is not the focus of the movement, but it gives the drums a greater role than simply establishing a groove.

Recitative I and III utilize pitched metallic instruments and drums along with the “Cage-like noise instruments” described by Lansky. As discussed earlier, the pitched metallic instruments in these movements are not used “tonally” as they are in the aria movements. The crotales and vibraphone in Recitative I provide different musical colors and ethereal sounds outside of a key area or pitch center. In Recitative III, these voices have a more melodic function, but the pitches appear unrelated and the passages contain disjunct and erratic rhythms. Drums in both movements act as a bass voice and a driving force for passages by providing increased intensity and volume. The bongos and congas in Recitative I often appear in noise-like passages with the four un-tuned bottles part, but also join the high and low toms in drumming passages.

The appearance of “unlike” sounds in Chorus II and III is the best example of Lansky inserting instruments and textures from other movement families. Both movements are preceded by recitatives and followed by arias, and both movements reference the instrumentation of those movement families at the beginning and end of each movement, respectively. The introduction of Chorus II utilizes flowerpots, cowbell/agogo bell, and cowbell/junk metal in a rhythm that is similar to the “split” rhythm that appears in measures 22 and 23 of Recitative II. The beginning of Chorus III utilizes temple blocks and flowerpots. These instruments are slowly joined by congas and then taken over by the low toms. By the time the accelerando and crescendo are complete in measure 15, the entire ensemble is playing drums. The remainder of Chorus II is also primarily drum-based until the bowed vibraphone entrance in measure 59. This texture references the bowed vibraphone notes of Prelude (Aria I) and seamlessly joins Chorus II to Aria III without a break in sound. The ending of Chorus III utilizes the vibraphone in a 5/8 meter rhythm similar to those used at the beginning of the movement. However, notes are extended and elongated, foreshadowing the rhythm of the vibraphone introduction to Chorale Prelude (Aria IV).

5.2 Rhythmic Ideas

Another notable feature throughout Threads is Lansky’s use of rhythm. Despite this being his first percussion ensemble piece, Lansky already dealt with rhythmic subject matter in
his computer pieces focused on speech and everyday sounds. The rhythms utilized throughout Threads encompass many different meters and feels, and when asked about utilizing syncopation and groove Lansky responded, “I think that rhythmic grooves are one feature of my composing in general. I like to use rhythm to get a piece past the end of the runway and into the air.”

Throughout all of Threads, Lansky manipulates different rhythmic material in the same manner or he takes similar rhythmic material and places it in different contexts.

A common tool that Lansky uses throughout different movements and movement families is rhythmic canon. Multiple canons appear in Recitative I, with many phrases including short, repeated motives in the vibraphone and crotale, as well as a rhythm spanning three measures in the congas and flowerpots. The accompaniment throughout Aria II is created by rhythmic canons in two or three voices. The metal pipes, glockenspiel, and vibraphone create a cascading background by staggering pairs of dotted eighth and sixteenth-note rhythms. The ending of the movement utilizes the same rhythm in both vibraphones with short and long notes to vary the texture. The drum countermelody located in Chorale Prelude (Aria IV) only appears in the bongos and high toms and usually is only presented in one voice at a time. However, both voices enter in canon for four measures in the middle of the movement, creating a unique drum texture. The bongos/congas and high toms actually present a full canon in Chorus III with the exact replication of pitches and rhythms separated in the parts by five sixteenth-note partials.

Lansky utilizes a very specific type of rhythmic canon throughout Threads referred to by many percussionists as “split” parts, meaning that both players play the same rhythm and the two parts are separated by less than a beat. The resulting composite rhythm is usually twice as fast as the rhythm each individual player executes. In Recitative II and the introduction to Chorus II, players split quarter notes or eighth notes on static pitches, creating a composite rhythm that contains multiple timbres, but does not change pitch within the individual part. The combined passage between the bottles and flowerpots in Recitative III does contain pitch changes in each part, but the purpose of these parts is to create a constant collection of sixteenth notes that continues throughout most of the movement. A melodic split part is created with the noise instruments and temple blocks in measure 15. This composite rhythm consists of dotted sixteenth notes and presents the melody against the sixteenth notes of the bottles and flowerpots. Other melodic split parts are located in Recitative I where the crotale and vibraphone follow.

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similar pitch sequences, Chorus I when both high and low toms move up and down drum pitches, and Aria III where the pitches of the metal pipes follow the vibraphone. Some split parts consist of two note repeated patterns, such as the alternating eighth and sixteenth notes of the high toms in Chorus I. This is paired with alternating sixteenth and eighth notes in the bongos/congas, creating steady sixteenth notes when played at the same time. A similar rhythm appears in the bongos/congas, high toms, and low toms in Chorus III. Lansky then takes this rhythm and utilizes it in both vibraphone parts to create the figuration in Chorale Prelude (Aria IV).

These composition-based rhythmic ideas appear throughout Threads, but are not likely to be identified by the listener. However, one rhythmic idea that is memorable to the listener is the Lansky’s use of a motive comprised of a dotted eighth and sixteenth note followed by silence. This first appears as the melody in Prelude (Aria I) between the glockenspiel and metal pipes. The motive is solidified by unison metallic statements of the rhythm in the middle and at the conclusion of this movement. To contrast the subdued ending of Prelude (Aria I), Lansky begins Chorus I with loud statements of this motive on drums. The motive also makes its way into the quarter-note-based melodic phrase played by the doumbek and high toms at the end of each statement. The metallic voices state the motive in unison at the beginning of Aria II; however, this time it is louder than the end of Prelude (Aria I) yet softer than the aggressive beginning of Chorus I. This unison motive appears between legato phrases throughout the movement and acts as an arrival point where each voice plays together. The dotted eighth and sixteenth-note rhythm also appears briefly in Chorus II at the end of two drum phrases. These statements are similar to the arrival points present in Aria II.

5.3 Musical Voices

With a fresh approach to chamber percussion music, Lansky utilizes different methods to focus the listener’s attention throughout Threads. He divides and arranges parts into different musical voices to solidify orchestration, texture, and density, much like controlling the sounds in a computer composition. The clearest example of this is one melody that is woven throughout Threads. Lansky’s melody utilizes only a high and low pitch so that it can fit on any instrument in the ensemble’s set-up. The preview to this is the ending of Recitative I, where the flowerpots are left alone with a roll on the low conga. The pots play quarter notes alternating low-high to complete the movement. The first full melodic statement is located in the next movement,
Chorus I. The doumbek and high toms play quarter notes low-high-low followed by the dotted eighth and sixteenth-note motive on the high pitch followed by a quarter rest. This melody is repeated five times in this phrase and is the main voice over the accompanying bongos/congas and low toms. In Chorus II, the doumbek part contains high-low alternating attacks separated by five sixteenth-note partials and is followed by the low toms, high toms, and bongos/congas alternating quarter notes in the same pattern with occasional pairs of sixteenth and dotted eighth-note rhythms interspersed. The melodic material in Aria III is more complicated than the choruses because more notes are available and Lansky utilizes pitch material from earlier arias. However, the movement in Aria III is quarter-note-based and some glockenspiel passages alternate between two pitches, high and low. In Chorus III, the low-high quarter note melody is present once again, this time phrased in 9/8 meter yet written in 5/8 meter.

Lansky does not always divide voices into melody and accompaniment. As stated in earlier chapters, sometimes all of the ensemble voices work together to create one texture. In most of these situations in Threads, the texture can be categorized as order or chaos. Each recitative movement hinges on progress from stable rhythms to some form of unstable rhythm. The chaotic material is usually accompanied with a crescendo or a loud dynamic level that adds to the intensity of the music. The idea of order versus chaos can apply to Lansky’s other movement families, as well. Chorus II contains sections of repeated rhythms in each voice that are layered on top of one another at extremely loud dynamic levels. Each part contains a different implied meter, adding to the sensation of uncertainty and chaos. The chaos in Chorus III gradually builds as dynamic levels increase and rhythms become more and more active. Prelude (Aria) I and Aria II also contain moments that can be categorized as chaos. Both movements have passages where two or more voices perform rhythms with overlapping entrances and syncopated figures mixed with strings of steady sixteenth notes. The location of a melody or a main voice is not clear because Lansky intends for four voices to speak at once.

When Lansky chooses to employ separate voices in the ensemble, one type of voice is present throughout the entire piece: the layer of undulating sixteenth notes. This is the most active voice at the beginning of Prelude (Aria I) and it establishes a texture for the remaining arias. Sixteenth notes act as the melody throughout Aria II and they serve as a reference to the earlier movements in Aria III, despite a slightly different overall texture. Even Chorale Prelude (Aria IV) contains steady sixteenth notes, though they are split between both vibraphone parts.
Recitative I and II contain undulating rhythms with shifting subdivisions throughout. This is derived from the idea of steady sixteenth notes; only the rhythms are uneven and irregular due to building chaos throughout the recitatives. The split eighth notes between the flowerpots and cowbell/agogo/claves provide the sixteenth-note base for Recitative III and also act as the melodic voice when the low toms are marked *sotto voce*. Chorus I contains a melodic passage of sixteenth notes in the toms supported by the unison accent patterns of remaining voices, and then the bongos/congas produce a groove of sixteenth notes for both the quarter note melody and split figures between the toms. The “subdued chaos” containing sporadic sixteenth-note triplets in Chorus II is built around constant sixteenth notes from the bongos/congas, much like the returning quarter note melody in Chorus III.

In the program notes for *Threads*, Lansky labels each movement family as a different “thread.” The sequence of these movements ties them together and the formal designation of baroque cantata movements places a label on each sound created by the specific instrumentation. However, the smaller ideas that Lansky inserts into each movement provide a unifying experience that is subtler than the program notes state. The attention to detail from movement to movement, as well as the influence from all movement families, allows *Threads* to exist as a cohesive piece of music rather than ten movements simply exploring three contrasting sound palettes.
APPENDIX A

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Gordon Hicken
Schedule A

Mvt. 1
- mm. 1-4 full score
- mm. 15-21 full score
- mm. 24-25 high toms
- mm. 37-41 vibraphone and glockenspiel
- mm. 43-45 glockenspiel and bongos

Mvt. 2
- mm. 3-5 vibraphone and crotales
- mm. 6 bongos and congas
- mm. 12 vibraphone and crotales
- mm. 13-14 vibraphone/toms
- mm. 16-17 score
- mm. 18-20 pots and bongos/corongas
- mm. 18-21 vibraphone and crotales
- mm. 22-25 score
- mm. 25-26 vibraphone/toms
- mm. 26-28 rhythms
- mm. 29 vibraphone and crotales

Mvt. 3
- mm. 1-4 score
- mm. 5-11 low toms
- mm. 16-20 doumbek and low toms
- mm. 26 high toms and doumbek
- mm. 26-31 doumbek
- mm. 28-33 score
- mm. 35-39 low toms and high toms
- mm. 40-42 score
- mm. 43-46 bongos/congas and low toms
- mm. 50-53 score
- mm. 54-56 high toms and bongos/congas
- mm. 62-67 score

Mvt. 4
- mm. 1-5 full score
- mm. 6-8 tuned pipes/full score
- mm. 21-23 glockenspiel and tuned pipes
- mm. 34-40 vibraphones 1 and 2
- mm. 37-40 tuned pipes
- mm. 41-43 vibraphones 1 and 2
- mm. 1-4 vibraphone and tuned pipes
- mm. 6-9 vibraphone and tuned pipes
- mm. 10-13 crotales and vibraphone
- mm. 15-20 temple blocks and noise-makers
- mm. 22-24 bottles and pots
- mm. 25-34 vibraphone
- mm. 30-35 score
- mm. 39-42 bottles and pots
- mm. 44-50 score
- mm. 56-57 score
- mm. 57-58, pots, and temple blocks
- mm. 73-76 score

Mvt. 5
- mm. 1-2 score
- mm. 5-9 slats and accompaniment rhythm
- mm. 5-6 slats
- mm. 10-11 bongos/congas
- mm. 14-15 high toms
- mm. 18 low toms
- mm. 30-31 score
- mm. 34-36 bongos/congas and high toms
- mm. 36 bongos/congas
- mm. 39-40 high toms
- mm. 40-41 doumbek
- mm. 42-44 low toms
- mm. 47-53 score
- mm. 59-62 score
- mm. 69-73 score
- mm. 74-75 score

Mvt. 6
- mm. 1-2 score
- mm. 5-9 slats and accompaniment rhythm
- mm. 5-6 slats
- mm. 10-11 bongos/congas
- mm. 14-15 high toms
- mm. 18 low toms
- mm. 30-31 score
- mm. 34-36 bongos/congas and high toms
- mm. 36 bongos/congas
- mm. 39-40 high toms
- mm. 40-41 doumbek
- mm. 42-44 low toms
- mm. 47-53 score
- mm. 59-62 score
- mm. 69-73 score
- mm. 74-75 score

Mvt. 7
- mm. 1-14 full score
- mm. 19-22 vibraphone 1 and crotales
- mm. 35-41 full score
- mm. 42-45 vibraphone 2 and tuned pipes
- mm. 54-55 glockenspiel
- mm. 56-58 vibraphone 2

Mvt. 8
- mm. 1-2 bottles and pots
- mm. 1-4 vibraphone and crotales
- mm. 6-9 vibraphone and crotales
- mm. 10-13 crotales and vibraphone
- mm. 15-20 temple blocks and noise-makers
- mm. 22-24 bottles and pots
- mm. 25-34 vibraphone
- mm. 30-35 score
- mm. 39-42 bottles and pots
- mm. 44-50 score
- mm. 56-57 score
- mm. 57-58, pots, and temple blocks
- mm. 73-76 score

Mvt. 9
- mm. 1-2 temple blocks and pots
- mm. 5-6 low toms
- mm. 15-16 doumbek
- mm. 15-18 score
- mm. 23-24 score
- mm. 28-35 score
- mm. 38-41 score
- mm. 57-62 score
- mm. 63-66 low toms and high toms
- mm. 71-74 score
- mm. 87-98 bongos/congas and high toms
- mm. 90-91 score
- mm. 93-94 score
- mm. 114-117 vibraphone
- mm. 127-130 score

Mvt. 10
- mm. 1-7 vibraphones
- mm. 8-10 bongos
- mm. 8-10 vibraphones
- mm. 8-18 tuned pipes
- mm. 40-42 vibraphones
- mm. 45-51 tuned pipes
- mm. 64-66 bongos
- mm. 72-75 vibraphones

Mvt. 10
APPENDIX B

PROGRAM NOTES AND LANSKY BIOGRAPHY

Program Notes

Threads, written for So Percussion in 2005, is a half-hour-long “cantata” for percussion quartet in ten short movements. There are three “threads” that are interwoven in the piece: Arias and Preludes that focus on the metallic pitched sounds of vibraphones, glockenspiel and metallic pipes; Choruses in which drumming predominates; and Recitatives made largely from Cage-like “noise” instruments, bottles, flowerpots, crotales, etc. The aims of the different threads are to highlight the wide range of qualities that percussion instruments are capable of, from lyrical and tender to forceful and aggressive, and weave them into one continuous texture. The movements are performed without interruption.

—Paul Lansky

About Paul Lansky

Born in New York City in 1944, Paul Lansky’s early musical studies were at the High School of Music and Art in Manhattan. He subsequently attended Queens College, where he studied composition with George Perle and Hugo Weisgall and Princeton University, where he worked with Milton Babbitt, Earl Kim and others. Originally intending to pursue a career as a French horn player, he played with the Dorian Wind Quintet in 1966–67 before going on to Princeton University for graduate studies. He has been on the faculty at Princeton since 1969, where he is now William Shubael Conant Professor of Music.

Until the mid-1990s, the bulk of Lansky’s work was in computer music, and he has long been recognized as one of the pioneers in the field. In 2000 he received a lifetime-achievement award from the Society for Electronic Music in the U.S., and in 2002 he was the subject of a documentary made for the ARTE television network in Europe, My Cinema for the Ears, now available on DVD. Most of his work is available on Bridge Records (bridgerecords.com).

During the mid-1990s he began to turn more intensively toward the writing of instrumental music, composing works for performers such as Nancy Zeltsman and David Starobin. His trio for horn, violin and piano, Etudes and Parodies, written for William Purvis, was the winner of the 2005 International Horn Society Competition. In 2007, Bridge Records released the eleventh all-Lansky CD, Etudes and Parodies (his first solo instrumental CD) that includes a recording of the horn trio with Bill Purvis, Mihae Lee and Curtis Macomber, as well as Semi-Suite, for solo guitar, played by David Starobin, and a string quartet, Ricercare Plus, performed by the Brentano Quartet.

For more information on Paul Lansky’s repertoire as well as sound samples, articles etc., visit www.paullansky.org.
APPENDIX C

INSTRUMENT KEY

Instrument Key

Percussion I

Vibraphone

Timbales and Doumbek

Crotales

Temple Blocks (or Woodblocks*) and 4 Slats**

Percussion II

Vibraphone

Noise-makers

Low toms

Glockenspiel

Cowbell/Agogo/Claves and 4 Untuned Bottles***

Bongos/Congas

Percussion III

Metal Pipes****

Flowerpots

High Toms

* indicates new发音 possibilities
** indicates new textures
*** indicates new types of drumming
**** indicates new materials
## APPENDIX D

### METAL PIPE SIZES

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REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Gordon Hicken is currently an adjunct percussion instructor and the director of the Carolina Band Drumline at the University of South Carolina. Previously, he served on the faculties of Chipola College in Marianna, Florida, and Limestone College in Gaffney, South Carolina. He holds a Doctor of Music degree in percussion performance from The Florida State University, a Master of Music degree in percussion performance from the University of South Carolina, and a Bachelor of Music degree in music education from Furman University. His teachers include Dr. John W. Parks IV, Dr. Scott Herring, Dr. John Beckford, Prof. James Hall and Ron Schwartz.

As a performer, Hicken recently served as the principal percussionist with Sinfonia Gulf Coast in Destin, Florida, and has performed in the percussion sections of the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra, the Carolina Pops Orchestra, and the Toccoa Symphony Orchestra. He was a winner of the 2007 Furman Symphony Orchestra Concerto Competition and was a semi-finalist at the 2011 Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Modern Snare Drum Competition. He has been invited to perform Andy Akiho’s Stop Speaking for snare drum and digital playback at the 2013 Percussive Arts Society International Convention and he was part of a Midwest tour and performance at PASIC as a member of the Florida State University Percussion Ensemble in 2011. Hicken has also performed with large ensembles at the American Bandmasters Association National Convention, South Carolina Day of Percussion, and South Carolina Music Educators Association Conference.

Active as a teacher, adjudicator, and clinician, Hicken arranges music for marching and concert percussion ensembles throughout the Southeast. He is active in public schools, guest conducting percussion ensembles as well as teaching symphonic band camps, marching percussion clinics, and private lessons. He has also been invited to present a session at the 2014 Florida Music Educators Association Professional Development Convention in Tampa, Florida. Hicken is a member of the Percussive Arts Society, the National Association for Music Education, Pi Kappa Lambda National Music Honor Society, and he is a Percussion Educator for Innovative Percussion Inc. sticks and mallets.