THE SNARE DRUM AS A SOLO CONCERT INSTRUMENT: AN IN DEPTH STUDY OF WORKS BY MILTON BABBITT, JOHN CAGE, DAN SENN, AND STUART SAUNDERS SMITH, TOGETHER WITH THREE RECITALS OF SELECTED WORKS BY KEIKO ABE, DANIEL LEVITAN, ASKELL MASSON, KARLHEINZ STOCKHAUSEN, AND OTHERS

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This dissertation discusses the potential of the snare drum as a solo concert instrument. Four pieces from a collection entitled The Noble Snare are used for demonstration (“Homily” by Milton Babbitt, “Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum” by John Cage, “Peeping Tom” by Dan Senn, and “The Noble Snare” by Stuart Saunders Smith). In the absence of many traditional musical devices (i.e. melody and harmony), alternative means of expression are used by the composer. Each piece is discussed with regard to its distinctive compositional approach and inherent performance issues.

Information is also given pertaining to the background of the Noble Snare series. This includes: the inspiration for the project, editorial issues, and its influence on snare drum performance. Much of this research was completed through interviews by with author with Sylvia Smith, publisher of The Noble Snare and owner of Smith Publications.
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by

Jason Colby Baker
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Sylvia Smith of Smith Publications for providing many of the resources consulted during the creation of this paper. Her time and effort are greatly appreciated.

Musical examples from the following compositions were used in the body of this dissertation.

*Beaten Paths* by Milton Babbitt

“Homily” by Milton Babbitt (in *The Noble Snare*).

“The Noble Snare” by Stuart Saunders Smith (in *The Noble Snare*).

“Peeping Tom” by Dan Senn (in *The Noble Snare*).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Significance

While the snare drum has long served an important role in the orchestra and band percussion section, it has been given relatively little attention as a solo concert instrument. Early influence came for solo passages in orchestral works such as Nielsen’s *Clarinet Concerto* and *Symphony #5*, Prokofiev’s *Lieutenant Kije Suite*, Shostakovich’s *Symphony #10*, and Ravel’s *Bolero*. The first solo compositions for the snare drum appeared in the mid-twentieth century with pieces such as Michael Colgrass’s *Six Unaccompanied Solos for Snare Drum* (1955) and Warren Benson’s *Three Dances for Solo Snare Drum* (1961). This was followed by much activity in the following decades, with pieces by composers such as Bob Becker and Askell Masson. A major advance in this medium occurred with the publication of four volumes of solos, entitled *The Noble Snare* (1988-90). This series resulted from the commissioning efforts of Sylvia Smith, owner of Smith Publications/Sonic Art Editions. These books included pieces written by many prominent twentieth century composers such as Milton Babbitt, John Cage, Dan Senn, and Stuart Saunders Smith.

Although many of the composers chosen for the *Noble Snare* project had experience in percussion scoring, relatively few were actual performing percussionists. While many collections of snare pieces previously existed, virtually all were written by percussionists. Performer composers created a highly idiomatic, technically concentrated approach to composition. Many previous works for solo snare drum were written as educational etudes. Sylvia Smith’s goal was to “elevate” the snare drum to the status of
other solo concert instruments through the creation of a body of performance literature.

Smith states:

I think of an etude as an exercise or piece centered around a particular technical challenge, and that their reason for existence is to assist the performer in making a series of technical advances. An etude begs the question: a technical advance toward what? The reason a performer works with etudes is for some reason other than the etude. A composition is complete in itself. Compositions move ahead of etudes. So if you want change in music, you start with composition. The rest will follow.¹

The intent of *The Noble Snare* as a body of performance literature has been celebrated by two solo snare drum showcase concerts in New York (1988) and Ohio (1998) as well as the performance of many of the compositions on solo recitals throughout the world. The two showcase concerts are described later in Chapter 3.

**Explanation of Method**

An inherent problem with solo snare drum music is the mono-timbral nature of the instrument. The lack of traditional compositional elements such as melody and harmony has hindered the snare drum’s acceptance in the concert hall. This issue would lead the composers of *The Noble Snare* to use a variety of innovative compositional techniques. Through a survey of all of the pieces, I have identified four common approaches to composing for the snare drum. These are: 1) traditional techniques (the use of traditional drum sticks, no preparation of the instrument, traditional notation), 2) various implements (the use of nontraditional mallets/sticks, no preparation of the instrument, traditional notation), 3) aleatoric (indeterminacy, chance operations, nontraditional notation), 4) mixed media (the use of outside performance elements such

¹ Sylvia Smith, interview by author, 28 June 2004, electronic mail.
as spoken word, electronics, etc.). The selected works to be explored in this paper are as follows:

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While many pieces of *The Noble Snare* draw from several of these categories, I have selected the above compositions as they use make exclusive use of the respective techniques. Significant performance issues will also be considered. In addition, an in depth discussion will illustrate the background of the project and editorial issues. These topics will help to define the capacity and potential of the snare drum as a solo concert instrument.
CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND OF THE NOBLE SNARE

Inspiration for the Project

The idea for a collection of snare drum solos was initiated by a relationship between Sylvia Smith of Smith Publications/Sonic Art Editions and the Noble and Cooley Drum Company. Founded in 1854, the Noble and Cooley Drum Company was responsible for manufacturing many of the drums used by the Union Army during the Civil War. However, much of their business since that time had been based on the manufacturing and sale of toy drums. Around 1985, Noble and Cooley decided to create a line of concert snare drums. While attending the Percussive Arts International Convention in 1986, Stuart Saunders Smith (composer, percussionist, and husband of Sylvia Smith) saw the new line of drums and approached the company regarding an endorsement. Sylvia Smith states, “Making serious drums was something new to them and I think they didn’t know quite how to make use of an endorsement.” An endorsement did not materialize, but Noble and Cooley promised to make a drum for Mr. Smith.

That summer the Smiths visited the Noble and Cooley factory in Granville, Massachusetts. Sylvia Smith states how the visit provided much of the inspiration for a commissioning effort for solo snare drum music:

It is hard to explain it, but the idea for the Noble Snare commissions came from this visit. We first came into the front showroom where they displayed the toy drums, which was still their main product. Off to the side were display cases of the old Civil War drums they had made – drums that had been used in battle. They were silent there on the shelves, like guardians of an ancient knowledge. I had the very strong feeling that the drums wanted to speak, that they

1 Sylvia Smith, interview by author, 28 June 2004, electronic mail.
were asking to be played in a different way. So all the while we were being shown around the factory, I was thinking about making a collection of snare drum solos – real pieces that would allow the drums to speak as they had never been allowed to speak before. By the end of the tour I had it planned out in my mind. I would commission leading composers to write for solo snare drum and collect them into a book of snare drum solos.²

Since the commissioning and publishing would be costly and time consuming, Mrs. Smith approached Jay Jones, President of Noble and Cooley, with the idea. In exchange for helping to fund the books, Smith Publications would promote the drums by including a picture of one on the cover, as well as a written endorsement of the Noble and Cooley instruments in the introduction of the books. Part of the company’s name was also used in the title of the project.

The Commissioning Process

The selection of composers for The Noble Snare was largely based on two criteria: 1) composers that could bring a new perspective to the snare drum as a serious solo concert instrument, and 2) composers that could contribute to the project through stylistic diversity. Mrs. Smith also made a point of asking many composers that had no performing experience as percussionists. This would alleviate many of the idiomatic biases often seen when performers compose music for their own instrument. Mrs. Smith states, “When you ask percussionists to compose for percussion, you usually get a piece full of drum ‘licks’ and gestures that are hardly different from their learning (educational) pieces.”³

John Cage was the first composer to respond. His one-word reply: “Gladly”.

Several notable composers, however, declined the offer. Karlheinz Stockhausen was one.

² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
Smith states, “I think he didn’t really understand what it was. I didn’t expect him to participate since he had his own self-publishing company. But I asked anyway.”

Elliot Carter also declined. He was very interested in the project and wanted to participate, but was unable due to other commissions and deadlines. With the completion of all four volumes, thirty-three composers accepted commissions.

Figure 2. List of Composers and Compositions by Volume.

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<td>“Vertical Taps for Morty”</td>
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<td>Barney Childs</td>
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<td>John Welsh</td>
<td>“scaps of echos…”</td>
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<td>John Cage</td>
<td>“Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allen Otte</td>
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<td>Thomas DeLio</td>
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<td>Alvin Lucier</td>
<td>“Music for Snare Drum, Pure Wave Oscillator, and One or More Reflective Surfaces”</td>
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4 Ibid.
Larry Austin   “Snare Drum Cycles”
Robert Ashley   “Basic 10”
William Ortiz   “Rapeo”
Pauline Oliveros “The Single Stroke Roll Meditation”

Editorial Issues

After the pieces were submitted, Stuart Saunders Smith was brought in to edit and proof-read the manuscripts. To emphasize the nature of each solo as an individual artistic work, a different copyist was hired to engrave each piece. In some cases, pieces were left in the composers’ original hand. This was done, largely, to eliminate any semblance of the project to that of an etude book.

The original criteria for the project stated that each piece had to be no more than two-pages, written on 8½ x11 size paper. Jean-Charles Francois responded with a piece (Fragments II) consisting of thirteen large-sized pages. Although it did not meet the parameters for The Noble Snare, Mrs. Smith felt that it was an exceptional piece and decided to publish it separately.

Specific considerations were also taken when designing the covers of the books. Sylvia Smith states:

I designed and made the covers by hand. I drew the black line around the photographs of the drum using a pen and ruler, to set off the photos. I did all the lettering with transfer lettering, not with a computer. If your eye is sensitized to such details you can see that the lettering is spaced slightly differently than how a computer would space them. My eye is trained to notice such details of publishing workmanship that are all but a thing of the past now. I look at my Noble Snare covers and I am happy with them. And I had the books printed on specially ordered acid-free paper so they will last and last and last.5

5 Ibid.
CHAPTER 3

CONCERTS INSPIRED BY THE NOBLE SNARE

The publication of The Noble Snare inspired the programming of two snare drum
show case concerts: a 1988 performance in New York City and a 1998 performance at
the University of Akron. Both concerts presented premiers of many of the works
contained in the Noble Snare series. Many prominent orchestral and avant garde
musicians, such as Gordon Gottlieb and Michael Udow, participated in these
performances. These two events are significant in that they further promoted the pieces
and composers of The Noble Snare and presented the first-known snare drum solo
programs in a concert hall setting.

The 1988 Concert

The first all-snare drum concert was presented on Monday, October 3, 1988 at the
Marymount Manhattan Theater in New York City. The title of program was
“GAGEEGO presents The Noble Snare”. GAGEEGO was a new music group based in
New York, featuring members Tom Goldstein, Tasmin Fitzgerald, and David Macbride.
Goldstein had been a percussion student of Stuart Saunders Smith at the Hartt School of
Music in Hartford, Connecticut and would often ask Smith for advice on concert
programming. As The Noble Snare was in preparation, Smith recommended that the
group put on a concert of snare drum pieces. Goldstein agreed and the concert was
planned.

The performers included many percussionists from the New York and New
England area, as well as several out-of-state friends of GAGEEGO (such as members of
the Percussion Group Cincinnati: Allen Otte, James Culley, and Benjamin Toth). Each
piece was performed on a different drum, giving each its own distinctive sound. In all, seventeen pieces (constituting the first two volumes of the series) received their premiers. The program was as follows:

The concert was reviewed by Allan Kozinn in *The New York Times*. In his article, “An Evening of Drums”, he gives an outsider’s perspective on the event.

For snare drum enthusiasts, this was the place to be, and there was much animated discussion of sound and technique during the intermission. For listeners who normally focus less sharply than snare drum fans on the ends of sticks and skins, the evening offered momentary bursts of illumination and stretches of tedium.\(^1\)

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<td>Michael LaRosa</td>
<td>Barry Centanni</td>
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<tr>
<td>Just Seven for Drum</td>
<td>Herbert Brun</td>
<td>James Culley</td>
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<td>“scraps of echo…”</td>
<td>John P. Welsh</td>
<td>John Kennedy</td>
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<td>March Peace</td>
<td>William Brooks</td>
<td>Gordon Gottlieb</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inside-Out with a Secret P.S.</td>
<td>Michael Udow</td>
<td>Michael Udow</td>
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<tr>
<td>What the Snare Drum Tells Me</td>
<td>Allen Otte</td>
<td>Allen Otte</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classically Snared</td>
<td>Alexander Lepak</td>
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<td>Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum</td>
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<td>Palindromes</td>
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**INTERMISSION**

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<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Transparent Wave</td>
<td>Thomas DeLio</td>
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<td>Homily</td>
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<td>David Smith</td>
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<td>Jongo</td>
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<td>Kevin Norton</td>
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<td>The Noble Snare</td>
<td>Stuart Saunders Smith</td>
<td>Tom Goldstein</td>
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</table>
The 1998 Concert

The second event of snare drum music took place during the SNARED festival, presented March 1-2, 1988 in Guzzetta Hall at the University of Akron, in Akron, Ohio. This was part of a larger festival of percussion concerts, lectures, and workshops – with the snare drum component taking place on the first day. The event was co-sponsored by the Sylvia Smith Archives, which are held at the university library. Established in 1992, one of the conditions of the agreement between Smith and the university stipulated that events would periodically be held based on the holdings of the archive and the activities of Smith Publications/Sonic Art Editions. The first event was a concert of the Links series of vibraphone pieces by Stuart Saunders Smith.

The third and fourth volumes of The Noble Snare had been published by the time the SNARED festival was held. Many of these compositions received their premieres, including several snare drum solos not included in the collection. The festival was coordinated by Dr. Larry Snider, Director of Percussion at the University of Akron. It attracted a large audience and several notable composers were in attendance (Askell Masson from Iceland, Jean-Charles Francois from France, and David Macbride from Connecticut). The concert order is given below. The names of specific performers were not included in the program; however, Sylvia Smith states that she performed “Amazonia Dreaming”, Mark Maynor performed “Kerberos”, and Jean-Charles Francois performed Fragments II. She could not remember the other players, believing most of them to be university students.
Figure 4. SNARED Concert Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Composer</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amazonia Dreaming</td>
<td>Annea Lockwood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vertical Taps for Morty</td>
<td>Udo Kasements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homily</td>
<td>Milton Babbitt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different Strokes</td>
<td>John Bergamo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrape Rim Skin</td>
<td>Salvatore Martirano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise 26</td>
<td>Christian Wolff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerberos</td>
<td>Sydney Hodkinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What the Snare Drum Tells Me</td>
<td>Allen Otte</td>
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INTERMISSION

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fragments II</td>
<td>Jean-Charles Francois</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rhythm Strip</td>
<td>Askell Masson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic 10</td>
<td>Robert Ashley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just Seven for Drum</td>
<td>Herbert Brun</td>
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<tr>
<td>March Peace</td>
<td>William Brooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blazer</td>
<td>Barney Childs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone or Together</td>
<td>Eugene Novotney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet</td>
<td>David Macbride</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* world premiere
CHAPTER 4

TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES: STUART SAUNDERS SMITH’S “THE NOBLE SNARE”

While many of the pieces in the collection explore composition for the snare drum through unconventional methods, several composers approach the instrument without the use of extended playing techniques. These pieces are written with the player using traditional drumsticks and without additional preparation to the instrument. The solos that are contained in this category are: “Palindromes” (Ben Johnston), “Noble Endeavor” (Michael LaRosa), “Classically Snared” (Alexander Lepak), “Red Snapper” (Charles Boone), “Jongo” (Siegfried Fink), “Inside-Out with a Secret P.S.” (Michael Udow), “Blazer” (Barney Childs), “Scraps of Echo” (John Welsh), “Burst” (John Jeffrey Gibbens), “Read Your Assoff” (Tom Pierson), “Snare Drum Cycles” (Larry Austin), and “The Noble Snare” (Stuart Saunders Smith). “The Noble Snare”, bearing the same name as the anthology in which it is contained, will be discussed with regard to these traditional compositional techniques and the philosophy of the composer.

Background and Philosophy

The composition “The Noble Snare” is based on Mr. Smith’s philosophy of “doing more with less”. This is seen in many of his other compositions and serves as a response to much of the contemporary percussion literature – where many pieces are composed around a variety of instruments, often performed with various combinations of striking implements. To accommodate this, instruments are usually performed in a “console-like” setup. Smith responds to this idea by stating:

The very concept of the percussion console seems to negate its own reason for existence. Timbral variety is enhanced by treating discrete instruments as discrete entities, each with enormous color
potential within themselves. And fast changes between gross timbral differences make timbral subtleties very difficult to perceive. Also, the act of rapidly moving from one instrument to another interferes with the percussionist’s capacity to physically accommodate oneself to any single instrument, resulting in an averaging process where the performer chooses strokes and mallets that work fairly well for all the instruments, but lack sufficient subtlety to make each instrument speak with its own potentially rich voice.¹

This leads Smith to state the importance of composition for single percussion instruments – many of which are not often considered for solo performance.

The future of the development of percussion literature, both solo literature and percussion ensemble literature, is in doing more with less. Since a smaller array of instruments highlights touch differences and touch differences means enriching timbral differences, our concerts should utilize fewer instruments, and smaller set-ups. An evening of snare drum solos. An evening of triangle, woodblock, and cymbal chamber music. An evening of unaccompanied vibraphone. An evening of solo drumset.²

Examples of this in Smith’s compositions are seen in pieces such as Blue Too for solo drumset (1981-83) and the Links series of vibraphone pieces (1974-94).

Analysis

Mr. Smith states, “I do not compose with ideas or pre-compositional formats. Sounds are alive and very intelligent. If the composer listens intently to the sounds, they will tell the composer what to do. I do not push the sounds around like an academic bouncer. The sounds lead; I follow. The piece emerges.”³

The construction of “The Noble Snare” can, however, be discussed with regard to certain compositional parameters. The piece consists of a through-composed, five part form that features several distinctive rhythmic and timbral devices. The five sections are

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² Ibid.
³ Stuart Saunders Smith, interview by author, 28 June 2004, electronic mail.
divided by double bar lines (measures 1-32, 33-50, 51-85, 86-98, and 100-104). Each section consists of several shorter phrases, often distinguished by rhythm and timbre. The rhythmic devices consist of: 1) additive rhythms (defined by the combination of duple and triple subdivisions) being played throughout shifting meters, and 2) the superimposition of tempos through triplet, quintuplet, and septuplet rhythmic subdivisions – the composer refers to these as “micro-temporal rhythmic structures”. He states, “‘The Noble Snare’ alternates between quasi-groove sections, like the opening, and micro-temporal rhythmic structures. I wanted a wave effect from one temporal world to another, but not in a too-obvious way.” These “micro-temporal rhythmic structures” can also be seen in several of Smith’s pieces, including Hawk (1991) for solo oboe.

The timbral devices are largely determined by a variety of means by which the drum is struck. This is what Smith refers to as “touch differences”. These consist of: 1) accents of various strengths, 2) grace notes, 3) “stick clicks” (hitting the drumsticks together), and 4) rolls (to be performed “orchestral style” – as dictated by the composer). Smith also designates two different roll timbres to be used. Unaccented rolls with a dot below the note head should be “played as extremely short buzz rolls”. For rolls that begin with an accents, Smith states, “Such a roll should sound like a single stroke followed immediately by a roll.”

The “touch differences” made by the performer are furthered by the designations of certain stickings. In passages where note heads are written both on and below the line, the bottom note is to be played by the left hand and the top is to be played by the right. This applies mostly to the performance of extended grace notes. When rhythms are

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4 Ibid.
notated entirely on one line, “conventional sticking” (sticking at the discretion of the performer) is to be used. An example from the composer’s performance notes is given below.


![Example notation]

Used by permission of Smith Publications, 2617 Gwyndale Ave., Baltimore, MD 21207.

The first section (measures 1-32), seen in Example 2, can be divided into five short gestures. Measures 1-9 consist of additive rhythms highlighted by accents throughout various shifting compound meters. The designation of forte (accented notes) and piano (unaccented notes) creates a highly pointillistic sound, where musical content exists in a primarily staccato nature. Measures 10-18 are marked by a shift in tempo, the application of various rhythmic subdivisions, more dynamic variety, rolls, and short grace note embellishments. Measure 19 contains no sounding notes, but two quarter notes of silence. This is significant as this “silence motif” occurs throughout the piece. Measures 20-25 return to the “pointillistic” dynamic contrasts of the first nine measures of the piece. The rhythms are contained entirely in septuplet subdivisions. The only exception to these dynamic and rhythmic aspects is a half note quintuplet, which ends the section by tapering to a pianissimo dynamic. Measures 26-32 are characterized by a dynamic “arch” form. This begins with a pianissimo dynamic at measure 26, crescendo to fortissimo at measure 29, and diminuendo back to pianissimo by measure 32. It is also marked by the greatest density of subdivisions so far in the piece and the first appearance of extended grace notes (measure 27).
The second section (measures 33-50, Example 3) also consists of five short gestures. The first is that of measured silence (measure 33), previously seen in the first section. A three bar gesture occurs from measures 34-36 – entirely in septuplet subdivisions, with a decrescendo from *forte* to *triple piano*. Measured silence is again given at measure 37. “Pointillistic” dynamics (as seen in the opening of the piece) appear in the next passage (measures 38-43). This is done with a *forte/piano* relationship in measures 38-40, augmented to a *fortissimo/pianissimo* relationship in measures 41-43.
Shifting duple, triplet, quintuplet, and septuplet subdivisions are used throughout. The texture of the last passage in this section (measures 44-50) is highlighted by the introduction of single grace notes and various dynamic treatments of increasingly dense rhythmic subdivisions. The section ends with a quick, three note decrescendo from *forte* to *triple piano*, coinciding with a *poco ritardando*.


![Example 3](image)

Used by permission of Smith Publications.

The third section of the piece (measures 51-85) is the longest and contains the most compositional diversity. Measure 51 begins with two quarter notes of silence, followed by accented quintuplet and septuplet rhythms. The accent patterns use the same
additive rhythmic techniques seen earlier in the piece. This is followed by a passage marked *senza misura*. The material consists of brief statements of expanding length, based on the accent patterns presented in measure 51. The *senza misura* passage in Example 4 concludes with various accent and sticking patterns in a crescendo from *piano* to *triple forte*.


![Example 4](image)

Used by permission of Smith Publications

The next passage in this section (measures 53-64, Example 5) is characterized by the interpolation of many of the *senza misura* figures with metered duplet, triplet, quintuplet, and septuplet rhythms.

Silence occurs in measure 65-66. This is followed by the introduction of a new timbre in measures 67-81, the “stick click”. Notated with an “x” note-head, this sound is used throughout the various dynamic changes in the passage. A metric modulation occurs at measure 72, giving the additive rhythms of the rest of the material the tempo of the preceding septuplet subdivisions. This is also affected by an accelerando and molto ritardando in the final three measures. The next four measures (82-85) consist of two measures of silence (with a return to the previous tempo) and two measures of rolls and stick clicks, played within quintuplet and septuplet subdivisions. This is the last use of stick clicks in the piece.

The fourth section of the piece (seen in Example 6) consists of two passages. The first is a short, three measure gesture (measures 86-88) comprised mainly of roll figures being played within duplet, triplet, quintuplet, and septuplet subdivisions. After two
quarter notes of silence, the second passage begins at measure 89. This is characterized by rhythmic motion, embellished by rolls and grace notes, ending with a crescendo to a fortissimo dynamic level at measure 98. This is followed by two quarter notes of silence in measure 99.


The final section of the piece (seen in Example 7) is divided into four gestures, all separated by fermatas. These contrast the preceding sections as the decompression of rhythms, dynamics, and tempo occurs. The first gesture consists of material similar to that found in measure 51, featuring additive rhythms through accent placement. A diminuendo to triple piano is given. The second gesture contains a sixteenth note and quarter note given at a mezzo piano dynamic. The third gesture consists of two measures containing accented rolls, two quarter notes of silence, and an accented quarter note. This occurs with pianissimo and piano dynamics and a ritardando in the second measure. The final gesture contains three grace notes and a quarter note.
Example 7. “The Noble Snare”, measures 100-104

Performance Considerations

The main performance problem in Mr. Smith’s work is the execution of extended grace notes when placed before metered rhythms. Such examples occur in measures 53-64. The composer states, “Such measures will often take longer than the notated time signature. A conflict between what is asked for and what is possible can bear expressive fruit.”\(^6\) One possible approach to this issue is to apply a slight rubato to these passages. The clarity of the phrase could be aided by playing the grace note figures softer than the metered rhythms.

Mr. Smith claims that this piece was inspired by his early training in jazz drumming. This can account for the shifting between various “groove” sections. The combination of these phrases with those of a “micro-temporal” nature gives the piece its defining musical characteristics. While the sonic resources of “traditional” snare drum composition can appear rather limited, Mr. Smith has addressed the musical language of the instrument through the synthesis of two different styles (“groove” and “micro-temporal”), heightened by the timbral diversity of “touch differences”. When I asked him, during an interview, what performance practice considerations should be taken when performing his piece, he offered the following:

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After “The Noble Snare” is completely part of your being, imagine you are Dave Tough, Chick Webb, Elvin Jones, Philly Joe Jones, Al Dawson, Buddy Rich, or any of your favorites – become him. Then play as if your life depends on it. And, Mr. Baker, your life does depend on it every time you make music. The Universe began with a big bang and when you are playing, you are that bang. This is why percussionists are the holiest of musicians.7

7 Stuart Saunders Smith, interview with author, 28 June 2004, electronic mail.
CHAPTER 5

THE USE OF VARIOUS IMPLEMENTS: MILTON BABBIT’S
“HOMILY”

The application of various implements within a snare drum composition is a technique that is used extensively throughout *The Noble Snare*. These implements include: conventional snare drum sticks, soft mallets, brushes, and fingers. The compositions which utilize this technique are: “What the Snare Drum Tells Me” (Allen Otte), “Just Seven for Drum” (Herbert Brun), “Transparent Wave” (Thomas DeLio), “Kerberos” (Sydney Hodkinson), “Laredo” (Kyle Gann), “Exercise 26” and “Exercise 27” (Christian Wolff), “A Minute of News” (Eugene Novotney), “2 for 1” (Ralph Shapey), “Rapeo” (William Ortiz), “Different Strokes” (John Bergamo), and “Homily” (Milton Babbitt). While all of these pieces present unique compositional issues, “Homily” will be discussed with regard to its approach to rhythmic and multi-timbral structure as affected by the use of various percussive implements.

Analysis

“Homily” is comprised of nine through-composed sections. Each is characterized by the use of different percussive implements. The timbre is further affected by the designations of “snares on” and “snares off” in certain sections. Although unrelated in terms of motivic content, the reoccurrence of these elements tend to create aural similarities between many of the sections. The rhythms within each section alternate between duplet, triplet, quintuplet, and septuplet subdivisions. This creates phrase structures based on augmentation and diminution, giving the affect of compression and decompression of time. Metric considerations reinforce this with constantly shifting time signatures. Each note of the piece is meticulously assigned its own dynamic marking,
creating a highly controlled, “pointillistic” sound. These elements of the composition can be seen in the following score example.

Example 8. *Homily*, measures 1-15

![Score Example](image)

The first section of “Homily” consists of measures 1-15. Here, the performer uses two yarn mallets. The designation of “snares off” is given (which will remain in place for the first three sections of the piece). The use of various rhythmic subdivisions also creates smaller phrase structures within each section of the piece. This occurs in the first section of the piece as follows.

Figure 5. Rhythmic Subdivisions in “Homily”, Section 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Subdivision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>duplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>triplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-10</td>
<td>duplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>quintuplet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measures 16-32 make up the second section. Here, the implements change to drumstick (played by the “strong hand”) and yarn mallet (played by the “weak hand”).
These designations are given by the composer in lieu of “right hand” and “left hand”.

The use of these implements is notated in the score with the drumstick corresponding to an upstem and the yarn mallet corresponding to a downstem. An example of notation from this section is given below.

Example 9. “Homily”, measures 16-33

![Example notation from "Homily" measures 16-33]

The form of this section consists of alternating triplet and quintuplet-based phrase structures.

Figure 6. Rhythmic Subdivisions in “Homily”, Section 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Subdivision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-22</td>
<td>triplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-24</td>
<td>quintuplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-28</td>
<td>triplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29-32</td>
<td>quintuplet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third section of the piece (measures 33-45) is performed with snare drum sticks in both hands. This allows the second section to be seen as a “transition”, moving from the first section (all yarn mallets) to the third (all drumsticks). A fermata appears at measure 45. This also coincides with the first notated roll of the piece. The rhythmic content of this section is unique in that it consists of almost entirely duple-based rhythms.
The first appearance of septuplet rhythms occurs in the last two measures of the section (44-45).

Two major timbral changes mark the beginning of the fourth section (measures 46-62). These are the designation of “snares on” (to be maintained throughout the next three sections) and the use of wire brushes in both hands. The dynamic range is piano to mezzo forte, making this the softest section of the piece. This is also the only section that incorporates all four of the rhythmic subdivisions.

Figure 7. Rhythmic Subdivisions in “Homily”, Section 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Subdivision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46-48</td>
<td>duplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49-51</td>
<td>quintuplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52-55</td>
<td>triplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-59</td>
<td>septuplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-62</td>
<td>quintuplet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This section ends with a fermata at measure 62. Similar to measure 45, this also coincides with a sustained sound. Here, the composer uses the designation “stir” – a technique that involves sliding the width of the brush across the drum head, creating a sustained sound.

The fifth section of the piece consists of measures 63-81. Here, the “strong hand” switches to a “soft mallet”. The other hand remains with a wire brush. The dynamic treatment of each hand is also of importance. Throughout the section, the soft mallet only performs at two dynamic levels: fortissimo (m.63-76) and forte (m.77-81). The wire brush performs in shorter dynamic segments: forte (m.64-68), pianissimo (m.69-72), mezzo piano (73-76), and alternating between piano and mezzo piano (m.77-81).
Sounding as two separate voices, the polyphony of these two hands is furthered by the contrast of the active rhythmic nature of the brush to the slower pacing of the mallet.

The rhythmic structure of the fifth section alternates between triplet and quintuplet subdivisions, concluding with duplet rhythms.

Figure 8. Rhythmic Subdivisions in “Homily”, Section 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>63-68</td>
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<td>69-70</td>
<td>quintuplet</td>
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<tr>
<td>71-75</td>
<td>triplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>quintuplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-81</td>
<td>duplet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measures 82-101 constitute the sixth section of the piece. Here, both hands switch to drumsticks. The last measure of the section contains a fermata and a notated roll – these elements are the same as those in the third section. The only exception is that the fermata now appears over an eighth note. Like sections four and five, this section is made up of five shorter structures delineated by rhythmic subdivisions.

Figure 9. Rhythmic Subdivisions in “Homily”, Section 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>82-83</td>
<td>quintuplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-88</td>
<td>triplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89-92</td>
<td>duplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93-98</td>
<td>triplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99-101</td>
<td>duplet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The implements do not change for the seventh section (measures 102-120). The timbre is affected by the designation of “snares off”, giving an aural similarity to the first three sections of the piece. This section is comprised of three rhythmic subdivisions.
Figure 10. Rhythmic Subdivisions in “Homily”, Section 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Subdivision</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>102-106</td>
<td>quintuplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107-109</td>
<td>septuplet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110-120</td>
<td>triplet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measures 110-116 feature the largest amount of rhythmic space and use of a single *fortissimo* dynamic. This is followed by a slight increase in rhythm and shift to *piano* and *mezzo piano* dynamics.

Example 10. “Homily”, measures 102-120

The eighth section (measures 121-135) holds a similarity with the opening of the piece, returning to yarn mallets in both hands. It begins with a 1/8 measure of silence, the only “empty” measure in the entire piece. This can be thought of primarily as a musical
device (as opposed to logistical) since none of the previous implement changes coincide with measured silence. Four smaller structures of rhythmic subdivisions make up this section.

Figure 11. Rhythmic Subdivisions in “Homily”, Section 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Subdivision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>122-124</td>
<td>triplets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125</td>
<td>quintuplets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126-129</td>
<td>duplets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130-135</td>
<td>triplets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The timbre of the ninth section of the piece (measures 136-142) is affected by the switch to drumsticks in both hands and the return to a “snares on” designation. This short final section consists of entirely duple rhythms, performed with a sustained “roll” technique. Therefore, this is the only passage in the piece where dynamics are not assigned to specific notes – but rather to longer durations, contrasting with the “pointillistic” nature of previous sections. This occurs with the dynamics forte and piano (measures 136-138) and the dynamics fortissimo and pianissimo (measures 139-142). Here, the two hands (and their respective implements) do not appear separate in function, but conclude the piece by serving the same end.
Example 11. “Homily”, measures 136-142

```
\begin{music}
\begin{measures}3\end{measures}
\end{music}
```

“Homily” shares many similarities with Babbitt’s marimba solo *Beaten Paths* (1988). With regard to rhythm, phrases are delineated by duplet, triplet, quintuplet, and septuplet subdivisions and shifting time signatures are employed throughout. As with the snare drum piece, a variety of mallets are also used (medium rubber, hard rubber, soft cord, soft yarn, and medium yarn). Dynamic markings are also assigned to specific notes, creating the previously mentioned “pointillistic” sound. Both pieces last between three and four minutes. A score example from *Beaten Paths* is given below.

Example 12. *Beaten Paths*, measures 61-63

```
\begin{music}
\begin{measures}61\end{measures}
\end{music}
```

The juxtaposition of the extreme ranges of the marimba gives *Beaten Paths* a somewhat polyphonic sound. The upper register (right hand) portrays one voice while
the lower register (left hand) portrays the other. This can be directly related to the role of each implement (and its respective hand) in “Homily”. While the snare drum does not hold a range of pitches, Babbitt uses other means to create to separate voices. These include the use of various implements and dynamic extremities (reinforced by their placement with regard to a “strong” and “weak” hand). In his liner notes for the premier recording by Peter Jarvis, Joseph Dubiel refers to this as “multilinearity”, which Babbitt attempts through “the realm of dynamics, often underscored by use of two different beaters at once.”¹ These factors give the sound of a two-voice piece written for a solo instrument.

Performance Issues

The analysis of “Homily” gives rise to several performance issues. The first is the logistics regarding implement changes. To facilitate this, the various implements should be placed on a horizontal music stand that is covered with a black towel. The towel will prevent any excess noise while the choice of color is intended to keep this from being an overtly visual element during performance. The implements should be placed directly in front of the snare drum, just below the stand holding the music. This will keep the implements at the same distance from each hand.

While the performer should make every attempt to maintain the tempo of the piece while changing implements, many instances occur where less than adequate time is given for such transitions. Although Babbitt does not address this obvious problem in the performance notes for “Homily”, guidance could possibly be sought in the notes for Beaten Paths. Here, he states, “The performer should feel free to take whatever time is

necessary to change mallets, while attempting to maintain the metrical orientation.”

This could also be applicable to the snare drum piece as it contains much of the same dense rhythmic structures as *Beaten Paths*.

In two instances, extended pauses are unavoidable. These occur at the “rolled” fermatas (measures 45 and 101). Here, the performer must discontinue the two-handed sustain, change mallets, then either engage or disengage the snares. However, since the change from “snares off” to “snares on” (and its reverse) marks a major timbral change in the piece, such a pause may help to highlight these elements with regard to the form of the work. Although a similar instance appears at the fermata in measure 62, no extended pause is warranted as a “stir” sustain can be performed with one hand, allowing the other to change to a soft mallet.

Another performance issue involves notation. Since the snare drum does not possess a natural sustain, Babbitt’s use of ties throughout the piece raises several questions. This issue is addressed in letters between the composer and Stuart Saunders Smith during the editorial process.

Smith: How are the ties to be interpreted? How does the drummer articulate your durational precision? How should we think of your ties?

Babbitt: The durations, in general, were merely to involve flurries of rests, and the associated suggestion of great durational precision. I think of this work in terms of pizzicato, also, I used the ties to avoid the visual clutter of rests.

Smith: In the sections performed with brushes, the ties could be articulated by scraping across the surface of the drum for the appropriate duration. Would you approve of this playing technique.

Babbitt: I like your suggestion of scraping with the brushes, where

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appropriate and possible.³

The final set of performance considerations pertains to the “multilinear”, polyphonic aspects of “Homily”. In the sections where each hand performs with a different implement (2,4,5,7), the notation is very clear as to which hand performs which material. In sections where both hands hold identical implements (1,3,6,8,9), the performance notes state “Stroke location and hand assignment are left to the judgment of the performer.”⁴ While no specific stickings are given in these sections, the dynamic contour follows that of those that are notated with stickings (sharply contrasting “loud to soft”). Therefore, the choice of sticking in these non-specific sections should be approached as those where the sticking is notated: louder dynamics performed with the “strong” hand, softer dynamics with the “weak” hand.

Dynamic effect can be reinforced by the choice of stroke location on the drumhead. This could be done with the “strong” hand playing in the center of the drum head and the “weak” hand playing towards the edge of the drumhead. The inherent sound of each area will enhance the dynamic contrasts as well as emphasizing the “multilinear”, polyphonic aspects of the piece.

In conclusion, the musical results of “Homily” are that of a polyphonic work for snare drum. This is achieved through the juxtaposition of timbres, brought about through the use of various striking implements and dynamic extremities.

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⁴ Ibid.
CHAPTER 6
ALEATORIC TECHNIQUES: JOHN CAGE’S “COMPOSED IMPROVISATION FOR SNARE DRUM”

Several pieces in *The Noble Snare* involve aleatoric techniques. This includes the use of indeterminacy, chance operations, and non-conventional notation. These elements can be seen in the following pieces: “Vertical Taps for Morty” (Udo Kasements), “Amazonia Dreaming” (Annea Lockwood), “Basic 10” (Robert Ashley), “The Single Stroke Roll Meditation” (Pauline Oliveros), “Music for Snare Drum, Pure Wave Oscillator and One or More Reflective Surfaces” (Alvin Lucier), and “Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum” (John Cage). Cage’s piece will be discussed with regard to this compositional approach and its ramifications on the performer.

Background

There are two main compositional elements involved in “Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum”: chance and indeterminacy. Although these terms are often used interchangeably, each has its own definition and role within the piece. Chance refers to “the use of some sort of random procedure in the act of composition.” An example of this is Cage’s piece *27’10.554″ for a Percussionist* (1956) where the composer used numbers from the *I-Ching* to randomly select the points in time where sounds would be played. Indeterminacy refers to “the ability of a piece to be performed in substantially different ways – that is, the work exists in such a form that the performer is given a number of unique ways to play it.”2 An example of this is Cage’s piece *One* for solo piano (1987) and *One* for solo percussionist (1990). Here, the performer is given

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2 Ibid.
the exact pitches and dynamics to be played, but is allowed to execute them during any point within a given amount of time.

Form and Content Analysis

“Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum” uses both chance and indeterminacy. Cage gives the parameters of form, timbre, and rhythm – but leaves the actual assignment of these elements within the piece up to chance operations determined by the performer. This is similar to techniques seen in earlier pieces, such as Child of Tree (1975), where the composer states, “The improvisation is the performance. The rest of the work is done ahead of time.” This creates a score that can be performed in countless different ways, depending on the performer and the results of the chance operations.

The score is given entirely in verbal instructions. Cage states that any decisions to be made in determining any aspect of the piece should be done by way of chance operations. He recommends that the performer “use a hat…put all possible answers of a single question in it, each on a separate piece of paper, and then, not seeing which one you have, take one out.”

The piece consists of a three-part form. The length of each section is determined through two operations:

1. Specify two of the following points in time with the exception of the last one (8'00")

   \[
   \begin{align*}
   15'' & 1'15'' & 2'15'' & 3'15'' & 4'15'' & 5'15'' & 6'15'' & 7'15'' \\
   30'' & 1'30'' & 2'30'' & 3'30'' & 4'30'' & 5'30'' & 6'30'' & 7'30'' \\
   45'' & 1'45'' & 2'45'' & 3'45'' & 4'45'' & 5'45'' & 6'45'' & 7'45'' \\
   1'00'' & 2'00'' & 3'00'' & 4'00'' & 5'00'' & 6'00'' & 7'00'' & 8'00''
   \end{align*}
   \]

5 Ibid.
For the purposes of demonstration, 3'00” and 4’30” have been selected.

2. Specify two more points, one between the two previously specified points and one between the second specified point and the penultimate point (7'45’’). 

For the purposes of demonstration, 3’30” and 5’45” have been selected. Cage then instructs how these points will be used to construct the formal parameters of each section.

Section 1 occurs from 0’00” to 3’00”
Section 2 begins at any point from 3’00” to 4’30” and ends at any point from 3’30” to 5’45 (the specific points will be determined by means of a chance operation). For demonstration, beginning and ending points 3’45” and 5’30” were determined. This will create a 45” silence between the first two sections and a 15” silence between the last two sections.
Section 3 occurs from 5’45” to 8’00”

Cage then specifies how the content of each section is to be determined through the following two procedures:

1. There will be 1-8 events (chance determined) in each. 

For the purposes of demonstration, the first section will have six events, the second will have seven, and the third will have three. By dividing the number of seconds in each section by the respective number of events in each, a timing for each event can be determined. This would create a result where events are evenly spaced throughout a given section. If disproportionate event-happenings are desired by the performer appropriate means of calculations should be figured for such results.

2. Each event will have not more or not less than 1-64 icti. 

Cage clarifies this with an example, stating, “‘Not more than 37’ is an acceptance of any number 1 to 37.” Therefore, “not less than 37” indicates the acceptance of any number from 37-64. In order to perform the chance operation, the performer must use two hats:

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid. 
8 Ibid.
1) one with the numbers 1-64 on separate pieces of paper, 2) one containing two different choices, “not more than” and “not less than”, to be used with each number selection. The composer also indicates if “such latitude is not useful for the purposes of improvisation, a single number can be specified by chance operations.”\textsuperscript{10} While it may be tempting to assign specific rhythms to each event (based on the number icti), I believe that the lack of definite rhythms furthers the idea of indeterminacy as “the ability of a piece to be performed in substantially different ways.”\textsuperscript{11} Chance operations were performed and the following example can be given (in collaboration with the previously determined formal elements).

Figure 12. “Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum”, designation of events and icti

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION 1</th>
<th>EVENTS (30&quot; each):</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEGINS AT:</td>
<td>00&quot;</td>
<td>30&quot;</td>
<td>60&quot;</td>
<td>90&quot;</td>
<td>120&quot;</td>
<td>150&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICTI RANGE:</td>
<td>nmt 25</td>
<td>nlt 12</td>
<td>nlt 50</td>
<td>nmt 32</td>
<td>nlt 27</td>
<td>nmt 58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPECIFIC ICTI (if desired):</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(45 seconds of silence – 3’00” to 3’45”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION 2</th>
<th>EVENTS (15&quot; each):</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEGINS AT:</td>
<td>225&quot;</td>
<td>240&quot;</td>
<td>255&quot;</td>
<td>270&quot;</td>
<td>285&quot;</td>
<td>300&quot;</td>
<td>315&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICTI RANGE:</td>
<td>nlt 32</td>
<td>nlt 8</td>
<td>nlt 12</td>
<td>nmt 21</td>
<td>nlt 7</td>
<td>nmt 45</td>
<td>nmt 29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPECIFIC ICTI (if desired):</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(15 seconds of silence – 5’30” to 5’45”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION 3</th>
<th>EVENTS (45&quot; each):</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEGINS AT:</td>
<td>345&quot;</td>
<td>390&quot;</td>
<td>435&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICTI RANGE:</td>
<td>nlt 62</td>
<td>nlt 42</td>
<td>nmt 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPECIFIC ICTI (if desired):</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Timbral Elements**

The timbral elements of “Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum” are based on implement selection and drum preparation. Regarding implement selection, Cage states

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
that, “Each event is to be characterized by the two beaters used. These are either the same or different”. These include conventional implements (sticks, mallets, etc) and the use of hands. For the assignment of implements to each event, the following set of options is to be used with each implement being given a number 1-8, “H” designates a hand, and “/ , /” designates “no hands, no beaters (a jet of air perhaps)”.

Figure 13. “Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum”, implement chart

| 1,1 | 1,2 | 1,3 | 1,4 | 1,5 | 1,6 | 1,7 | 1,8 |
| 2,2 | 2,3 | 2,4 | 2,5 | 2,6 | 2,7 | 2,8 | H,1 |
| 3,3 | 3,4 | 3,5 | 3,6 | 3,7 | 3,8 | H,3 | H,2 |
| 4,4 | 4,5 | 4,6 | 4,7 | 4,8 | H,6 | H,5 | H,4 |
| 5,5 | 5,6 | 5,7 | 5,8 | H,1 | H,H | H,8 | H,7 |
| 6,6 | 6,7 | 6,8 | H,6 | H,5 | H,4 | H,3 | H,2 |
| 7,7 | 7,8 | H,3 | H,2 | H,1 | H,H | H,8 | H,7 |
| 8,8 | / , / | H,H | H,8 | H,7 | H,6 | H,5 | H,4 |

Options should be drawn from a hat (like previous chance operations) when considering each event. The only requirement, Cage states, is that “a single conventional rim-shot (“fffz”) is to be part of each performance. It is to be played with a pair of snare drum sticks, not a chance determined pair”. The specific section in which this is to take place should be determined through a chance operation. To ensure its involvement in the piece, this should be done before assigning implements to the other sections. For the purposes of demonstration the following implements have been given the numbers 1-8 (also determined through chance).

Figure 14. “Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum”, implement assignment

1. wood drum stick
2. soft yarn mallet
3. wire brush
4. soft rubber ball on a stick
5. felt timpani mallet
6. hard plastic mallet

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7. wooden timpani stick
8. hard yarn mallet

After performing the appropriate chance operations, the assignment of implements to each event can be given.

**Figure 15. “Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum”, implement assignment within events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION 1</th>
<th>EVENTS (30&quot; each):</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COMBINATION SELECTED:</td>
<td>H,1</td>
<td>5,8</td>
<td>4,7</td>
<td>3,7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTUAL IMPLEMENTS:</td>
<td>hand</td>
<td>felt timp. mallet</td>
<td>rubber ball</td>
<td>wire brush</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wood drum stick</td>
<td>hard yarn</td>
<td>wood timp. mallet</td>
<td>wood timp. mallet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wood drum stick</td>
<td>soft yarn</td>
<td>soft rubber ball</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION 2</td>
<td>EVENTS (15&quot; each):</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMBINATION SELECTED:</td>
<td>5,6</td>
<td>2,3</td>
<td>2,8</td>
<td>5,7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTUAL IMPLEMENTS:</td>
<td>felt timp. mallet</td>
<td>soft yarn</td>
<td>soft yarn</td>
<td>felt timp. mallet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hard plastic</td>
<td>wire brush</td>
<td>hard yarn</td>
<td>wood timp. mallet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>H,2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3,3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hand</td>
<td>wire brush</td>
<td>hand</td>
<td>soft rubber ball</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECTION 3</td>
<td>EVENTS (45&quot; each):</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMBINATION SELECTED:</td>
<td>1,1</td>
<td>3,6</td>
<td>H,3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACTUAL IMPLEMENTS:</td>
<td>wood drum stick</td>
<td>wire brush</td>
<td>hand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wood drum stick</td>
<td>hard plastic</td>
<td>wire brush</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cage also discusses three additional timbral considerations regarding “preparation” of the drum. The first is the use of the snares of the drum. A designation of “snares on” or “snares off” will be given for each of the three large sections. The second consideration is the placement of any additional materials on the surface of the drum (e.g. cloth, paper, plastic, coins, etc.) - hence affecting the nature of the sound when the instrument is struck. The third is the determination of which part of the drum will be
struck during each event (the side, rim, edge of the drum head, etc). Cage seems to imply that these last two considerations are not mandatory. Any choices regarding these three issues are to be made through chance operations. This can be done by putting pieces of paper with words such as “snares on”, “snares off”, “plastic covering”, “paper covering”, “side of drum”, and “center of drum head” on pieces of paper – drawing them as the nature of each section is determined.

Aside from the insistence on an “fffz” rim-shot at some point in the piece, Cage makes no other mention of dynamics. However, he does leave the provision that “any questions that arise are to be answered by means of chance operations”. As applied to dynamic considerations, pieces of paper with various dynamic designations (pp, p, mp, mf, f, ff, etc.) could be placed into a hat and drawn to determine the general volume of each event.

A Realized Performance Example

Drawing from the previously given demonstration models and the chance operations performed with regard to Cage’s instructions regarding form, content, timbre, and dynamics, the following realization can be given. For this performance, a specific number of icti have been designated for each event.

Figure 16. “Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum”, A Realized Performance Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION 1 (SNARES ON)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EVENTS (30” each):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEGIN AT:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>00” 30” 60” 90” 120”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUMBER OF ICTI:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 19 60 27 40 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPLEMENTS:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hand wood stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>felt timp. mallet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rubber ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wire brush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wood stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DYNAMIC:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p ff mf pp f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREPARATION:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>none cloth none paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLAYING AREA:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>edge center edge side</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| (45 seconds of silence – 3’00” to 3’45”)

40
SECTION 2 (SNARES OFF)

EVENTS (15" each):
BEGINS AT: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   225” 240” 255” 270” 285” 300” 315”
NUMBER OF ICTI: 33 15 23 5 52 10 4
IMPLEMENTS:
   felt timp. mallet    soft yarn          soft yarn    felt timp. mallet         hand          wire brush          hand
                   plastic mallet     wire brush        hard yarn   wood timp. mallet     soft yarn      wire brush      rubber ball
DYNAMIC:          mf                      f                       p                   ff                           mp                 mf                   pp
PREPARATION:      cloth                 none               plastic             none                      none             paper               none
PLAYING AREA:     edge                center              center              rim                        edge             center               side

** (15 seconds of silence – 5’30” to 5’45”)

SECTION 3 (SNARES ON)

EVENTS (45" each):
BEGINS AT: 1 2 3
   345” 390” 435”
NUMBER OF ICTI: 63 47 30
IMPLEMENTS:  wood stick         wire brush            hand
             wood stick       plastic mallet     wire brush
DYNAMIC:     ff (rim shot)             mf                     mp
PREPARATION: cloth                   none                 paper
PLAYING AREA: center                edge               center

Performance Considerations

Regarding the timing of specific events, the performer is advised to use a stop-watch during performance. This is an idea taken from the performance notes of *Child of Tree*. A digital time keeping device may be more desirable as it does not make any sound. A large, carpeted tray should be placed next to the snare drum – containing both implements and “preparations” (paper, plastic, cloth, etc.). These should be laid out in the order of the events in which they are used, as to aid in smoother logistics.

The chance determinations of section/event length may create a rendition that makes parts of the piece logistically unplayable. Cage offers the following solution:

If events cannot be performed in the allotted time, record all events of that part at 15”/sec and playback at 7 ½ “/sec, repeating this process as many times as necessary. Begin the playing of the record (if of the first part) at 0’00”; if of the second part so that it falls properly with the flexible time bracket with respect to both beginning and end; if of the third part so that it concludes at 8’00”. Use chance operations to determine the amplitude of...
the playback. However, let them act within the field of audibility.\textsuperscript{12}

The composer also states that, if a longer piece is desired, several renditions can be prepared and played back-to-back.

Although the techniques of “chance” and “indeterminacy” are used in many of John Cage’s works, their application within this piece is crucial in the development of solo snare drum repertoire. In lieu of traditional musical devices, such as melody and harmony, the snare drum is often reliant on other means (such as drum preparation, implement choice, and other extended techniques) to achieve a musical language. “Composed Improvisation for Snare Drum” addresses this by creating a framework that allows the performer to explore all possible approaches to the instrument.

CHAPTER 7
THE COMBINATION OF SNARE DRUM AND MIXED MEDIA:
DAN SENN’S “PEEPING TOM”

Several pieces in The Noble Snare feature the combination of snare drum and other forms of media – often incorporating the use of voice. This is a practical compositional option “as vocal resources of the percussionist are available; unlike those of the wind player.”\(^1\) Within this medium, four different approaches are used. “March Peace” (William Brooks) and “Kerberos” (Sydney Hodkinson) use spoken text and snare drum figures as separate elements, often in counterpoint with each other. “Amazonia Dreaming” (Annea Lockwood) uses the voice to create non-textual sounds, acting merely as a timbral device. “Vertical Taps for Morty” (Udo Kasements) involves the reading of a poem prior to the performance of a snare drum piece. “Peeping Tom”, by Dan Senn, presents another approach to composing for snare drum and voice. Here, a text is spoken in unison with snare drum rhythms. The snare drum part is continuous while the text appears in a “cut up” fashion – placed sporadically throughout the piece. The order of the text is not altered, and the placement of spoken lines within the piece serves to determine phrase structures.

Overview

The snare drum part is to be performed with wire brushes throughout, serving as a timbral element as well as aiding in the balance between voice and drum. Vocal rhythms are designated by text written above snare drum rhythms that are enclosed in a box. The performer must speak the words in unison with the snare drum rhythms. Although no

specific vocal inflections are notated, the composer gives additional directions as to the
performance of the text. If a word itself is enclosed in a box above the snare drum part,
then it should be “sung”. The manner in which it is sung is left open to the performer.
Some words are written in all capital letters. Although not discussed in the composer’s
performance notes, it can be thought that capitalization implies the accenting of the
particular word. Example 13 illustrates these aspects of the piece.

Example 13. “Peeping Tom”, measures 40-58

Background

The text of the piece is taken from an entry in Senn’s personal journal. He refers
to it as a “life observation”. Regarding his inspiration, the composer states that his
former composition teacher, Herbert Brun, “once mentioned in a lecture that some
expressive music made him feel like a ‘peeping tom.’”² The text reads as follows.

Figure 17. Text of “Peeping Tom”

As a kid I was rapt by one-way mirrors.
Not because I was a voyeur.
Though indeed I was.
But because of an idea.
I knew that light bounced off mirrors.
So it seemed possible to trap light with a sphere
surfaced with this one-way mirror stuff.
A cheap source of light!

² Dan Senn, interview by the author, 9 April 2004, electronic mail.
The sphere would collect light until it blew up or some of it was let out. A friend of mine has a brain like that. And to keep it, his brain, from exploding, he expresses himself. He writes music. And he does this by transcribing the sounds he hears inside his head. And when I hear his music I feel like a voyeur again.\(^3\)

In setting the text to music, the composer’s improvised text rhythms resulted in the assignment of fixed rhythms to various word groupings. He states, “By the time I wrote “Peeping Tom” I had quite internalized the speech rhythms of the piece just as they are presented in the score…improvisations tend to become fixed with repetition.”\(^4\) The speech rhythms influenced the creation of the percussion part. After assigning specific rhythms to word groupings within the text, the rhythms themselves were played in various combinations on the drum to fill in the spaces where the text part is not present.

Analysis

“Peeping Tom” is made up of a large two-part form. The first section consists of measures 1-112, the second being measures 114-224. Measure 113, which is to be repeated nine times, serves as a transition between the two sections. These formal designations are dictated largely by tempo and dynamics.

The opening tempo of the piece is given as quarter note equals forty-eight. The opening dynamic is piano. The composer’s performance notes indicate that the piece should “accel. to quarter note equals sixty and increase volume to forte by measure ninety.”\(^5\) The heightened tempo and dynamic level remains in place until a fermata at measure 111, followed by a decrescendo in the following measure. Measure 113, the

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\(^3\) Dan Senn, “Peeping Tom” (Baltimore: Smith Publications, 1988).
\(^4\) Dan Senn, interview by author, 9 April 2004, electronic mail.
\(^5\) Dan Senn, Performance Notes for “Peeping Tom” (Baltimore: Smith Publications, 1988).
transition, ritards *poco a poco* throughout the course of its nine repetitions. This brings
the piece back to the original tempo and dynamic marking at measure 114 (quarter note
equals forty-eight and *piano*). The transition is also significant in that it is the longest
period in the piece without spoken text.

The two large sections of the piece can each be subdivided into several smaller
sections, based on text-rhythm relationships. Each sentence within the text corresponds to
a rhythmic phrase. The use of a 1/4 time signature allows each measure to contain only
one figure. This permits the composer to easily expand and contract phrase lengths.

The first rhythmic phrase of the piece occurs in measures 1-8. Although the text
entrances are staggered throughout the following lines, each corresponds with a rhythm
that is stated in the first eight measures of the piece. Mr. Senn refers to this as “resetting”
the phrase. This technique is used extensively throughout the piece. For example, the
second text statement (“I was rapt”) is stated in unison with the rhythm used in the
second measure of the piece – although the text statement does not occur until the ninth
measure. The third text statement (“by”) is stated in unison with the rhythm used in the
third measure of the piece. Once the text is spoken, the solo drum continues from where
the text-rhythm left off in the opening phrase. Arrows show the origins of speech
rhythms within the first eight measures in the example below.

Example 14. “Peeping Tom”, measures 1-19

Used by permission of Smith Publications
A new rhythmic phrase occurs in measures 20-26. This material is used to support the next three lines of text (“NOT because I was a voyeur. Though indeed I was. BUT because of an idea”). These vocal entrances correspond with the “resetting” of rhythms from the phrase.

Example 15. “Peeping Tom”, measures 20-26

![Example 15](image.png)

This technique continues with a rhythmic phrase between measures 56 and 70. The material interacts with two lines of text (“I knew that light bounced off mirrors. So it seemed possible to trap light within a sphere”) through measure 87.

Example 16. “Peeping Tom”, measures 67-87

![Example 16](image.png)
The next sentence ("A cheap source of light") is set to rhythms found in measures 88-89. Since the sentence is stated without fragmentation, no “resetting” is involved. The final rhythmic phrase of the first half of the piece is stated in measures 94-98 (with a pick-up note from measure 93). It is then subject to “resetting” through the treatment of the text “The sphere would collect light until it blew up or some of it was let out”.

Example 17. “Peeping Tom”, measures 94-112

This material is followed by the “transition” in measure 113. Serving to return the piece to its original tempo and dynamic through its nine repetitions, the rhythm is an exact quotation of material that first appears in measures 89-90.

Example 18. “Peeping Tom”, measure 113

The first phrase of the second half of the piece occurs from measures 114-122. Variations on this phrase take place from measures 123-146. The text “A friend of mine has a brain like that. And to keep it, his brain, from exploding…” is used. The second sentence is concluded in the following phrase.
The next rhythmic phrase occurs from measures 144-149. Its only textual association is with the remainder of the previous sentence (“…he expresses himself”). This section continues with the use of material from measures 154-155, associated with the text “He writes music” in measures 158-159. This is interpolated with quotations of previous rhythms, not adhering to any apparent systemization, extending to measure 165.

Rhythms used with the next line of text (“And he does this by transcribing the sounds he hears inside his head”) also break away from previous phrase designs by not matching text rhythms with those stated in a composite rhythmic phrase.
Example 21. “Peeping Tom”, measures 166-181

The composer returns to the systemized technique of “phrase resetting” in the final forty-two measures of the piece. An initial rhythmic phrase is stated in measures 182-188 and is subjected to variations from measure 189 to the end of the piece. This coincides with the text “He copes this way. And when I hear his music I feel like a voyeur again”.

Example 22. “Peeping Tom”, measures 182-224

Performance Considerations

The analysis of rhythmic usage in relation to text places interpretative demands on the performer. Since Mr. Senn states that speech rhythms determined the percussive
rhythms, the snare drum must reflect the nuances of the spoken line. This is especially important when the respective rhythms are performed on the snare drum alone. The performer must, therefore, understand the inflection and syllabic weight of the spoken line and apply such considerations to the rhythm when it initially appears without text. A sticking for each rhythm should be chosen that effectively communicates the vocal nuances of the accompanying text. This will create a connection between the drum and voice as the drum will “foreshadow” the text.

Instrument choice must also be taken into consideration. A small snare drum could be preferable to larger one. This would eliminate any excess drum resonance, allowing the voice to be heard more clearly. A coated batter head must be used on the snare drum. This will allow the wire brushes to create an audible sound during passages that require a “swish” type roll. The width of the brushes should be adjusted so that rhythms can be accurately articulated, but not sound overly percussive.

Dan Senn refers to “Peeping Tom” as “a small theatre piece and therefore the text should be deeply internalized, just as a good actor prepares lines for a performance.”6 This would imply that the performer should have the piece memorized enough so that dramatic elements can be effectively communicated to the audience. Internalization of the text will also help the performer to not speak directly into a music stand. This will help the dynamic balance of vocal and snare drum elements. The resulting musical affect of “Peeping Tom” is a snare drum solo that engages the audience and challenges many pre-conceptions of snare drum composition.

6 Dan Senn, interview by author, 9 April 2004, electronic mail
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

The solo snare drum presents unique challenges to composers due to the absence of many of the traditional musical devices available on other solo instruments. Therefore, composers must generate new types of musical language. The examination of the preceding works clearly demonstrate four diverse compositional approaches to this medium: 1) focus on traditional elements, with timbre being affected by various dynamic touches and embellishments, 2) the use of various striking implements to imply a sense of polyphony, 3) the exploration of aleatoric structures in attempt to create an entirely new musical language for each performance, and 4) the creation of an artistic work through the combination of the snare drum and other media (i.e. voice).

The four volumes of *The Noble Snare* have had a profound effect on the performance of solo snare drum music. In a genre that was almost previously non-existent, Sylvia Smith states, “It is clear from watching the sales and performance logs that *The Noble Snare* has become the foundation of contemporary snare drum literature for the entire Western world. Orders repeatedly come from Japan, Australia, Sweden, Germany, England, the Netherlands, France, and now Eastern Europe, as well as the United States.”¹ Several of the pieces in *The Noble Snare* will be used on the International Snare Drum Competition, scheduled for November 2004 in Paris. These include “Peeping Tom” (Dan Senn), “A Minute of News” (Eugene Novotney), and “Kerberos” (Sydney Hodkinson). Works such as Milton Babbitt’s “Homily” have been

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¹ Sylvia Smith, interview by author, 28 June 2004, electronic mail.
commercially recorded. Many non-commercial recordings from recitals and concerts are held at the Smith Archives at the University of Akron.

While the snare drum has often not been regarded for its capacity as a solo instrument, the works of the composers involved in *The Noble Snare* are revolutionary in that they attempt to create a unique musical language that did not previously exist. Indeed, the efforts of Sylvia Smith are also revolutionary in the commissioning of a body literature that had very little precedent. Through the discussion of the preceding compositions, performance issues, and the historical background of the commissioning project, insight can be gained into the potential of the snare drum as a solo concert instrument.
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