

Evolution of the Concert Marimba

By Rebecca Kite

Delving into the history of percussion instruments is a little bit like researching your genealogy and family tree. As we grow up listening to our parents' and grandparents' favorite stories and looking through family photographs, our ideas and opinions of our ancestors are gradually formed. We can imagine relatives from the distant past by knowing only their names and sometimes intriguing and incomplete information.

As adults, when we start doing some actual research about those relatives and begin to discover more and more factual information, we find that the stories we heard, which formed our ideas, were often incomplete and varied wildly depending on each relative's point of view and personality.

As we dig deeper and deeper into the past, our ideas and assumptions are challenged and we discover that those ancient relatives were actually quite interesting. As we discover facts, we refine and correct our understanding of the past. We start to have more and more questions and want to learn more about them because they brought us to where we are today.

When researching and writing my biography of Keiko Abe (*Keiko Abe - A Virtuoso's Life*), I came to realize that, while I had uncovered a great deal of information about Abe's work with Yamaha in developing a new marimba design, I had only my own opinions and our shared "common knowledge" about the history of marimbas before 1970. And most importantly, I couldn't discuss Abe's changes in the marimba sound without describing and defining the existing marimba and exactly what was changed.

This was a big moment for me; I realized that instead of being almost finished writing my first draft, now I had to go find out what

the history of the marimba before 1970 really was! And, I needed facts, not the general "common knowledge"—unless there was factual research to back it up.

This was both good news and bad news; I was intrigued and interested but really didn't want another large and challenging research project. I set out to find answers, and this portion of my research turned into a three-month project, which would set the context for Abe's work.

This is also where things got really interesting. I found that there was a lot of ambiguity about the characteristics of the westernized



instruments called the marimba and the xylophone. Even more intriguing was the fact that from 1878 to 1930 there were more than 600 xylophone solos published in the United States and Europe and more than 15 different

Rebecca Kite
Research Lecture
Friday 10:00 A.M.

companies that manufactured the instruments (from Dr. James Strain's dissertation). These were such huge numbers that I wanted to know more about why this was.

This research journey led me down many different threads as I followed the stories back as far as I could. It made me question my assumptions. It gave me many "a-ha!" and a few "wow!" moments, and it gave me a much deeper understanding of the background of today's concert keyboard percussion instruments.

I will be giving a presentation at PASIC 2010 about all that I discovered in this journey. My slides and audio will tell the story of how our concert marimba came into being—both the instrument and its sound. This is a story that begins in pre-history and covers the globe. There were ancestors of today's marimba in Java, Vietnam, China, Japan, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, across almost the entire continent of Africa, Central and South America, Mexico, and the United States.

I invite you to come join the conversation with me about the concert marimba. Perhaps you'll be inspired to start researching the history of an aspect of percussion that intrigues you. I can't wait to read about what you find!

See you in Indianapolis!

Rebecca Kite is a well known marimba soloist, teacher, and author. Her performance may be heard on her albums *Across Time* and *Prism*. Her books include the *Anthology of Lute and Guitar Music for Marimba*, *Reading Mallet Percussion Music*, and *Keiko Abe - A Virtuoso's Life: Her Musical Career and the Evolution of the Concert Marimba*. Her website is www.RebeccaKite.com. PN

MARIMBA(duets)

by professor Donato Goyeneche

You may listen to all these pieces
if you visit

<http://www.rollproductions.com>

New works:

CONGO: 2 marimbas medium-difficult

FUNKY RHITHM :2marimbas medium- difficult

ORIENTALISMS: vibraphone and marimba medium- difficult

AIRES DEL SUR (trio): 2 marimbas and xylophone medium- difficult

If you want you can download the scores online, that is, immediately.

over 40 pieces are
at your disposal



SABIAN TRIANGLES

Available in 4" through 10" sizes and crafted from SABIAN B8 Bronze and SABIAN Hand Hammered B8 Bronze.

HAND HAMMERED B8 BRONZE

SABIAN Hand Hammered B8 Bronze models are rich in harmonics and overtones for a more complex sustain.

B8 BRONZE

SABIAN Pure Bronze models produce bright, shimmering sounds that sing with sustain, ideal for most band and orchestral repertoires.



Hear more at sabian.com

BECAUSE SOUND MATTERS