

STEVEN SNOWDEN

DAMOCLES

PERCUSSION DUO

DAMOCLES

COMMISSIONED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

IN MEMORY OF THE LIVES AND GIFTS OF:
FRIGYES HIDAS, HUNGARY, 1928-2007
KAREL HUSA, CZECH REPUBLIC/USA, 1921-2016
KAMILLO LENDVAY, HUNGARY, 1928-2016

Instrumentation

7 Metal mixing bowls
11 Medium sized balloons
6 jars or cups of various sizes
1 microphone boom stand
1 pair of medium soft mallets
1 pair of chopsticks
1 pair of hot rods (rute)

Notation Key

The notation key consists of two staves, Perc. 1 and Perc. 2, each with a double bar line at the beginning. Perc. 1 is divided into four measures: 'Stomp on floor' (a vertical line with an 'x' at the bottom), 'Free water balloon' (a note on the first line), 'Hanging water balloons' (a note on the second line), and 'Balloon Drums' (a sequence of five notes ascending from the second to the fifth line). Perc. 2 is divided into two measures: 'Hanging water balloons' (a note on the first line) and 'Metal mixing bowls' (a sequence of five notes ascending from the first to the fifth line).

The Gear

*For more info on how to make and play these instruments, go to this website.
(###insert link###)*

Metal mixing bowls

When selecting metal mixing bowls, you should strive for maximum resonance and variety of pitch. I've found that cheap, flimsy bowls are best. You can usually find these in thrift stores for very little money, though you could ordering a cheap set online. If your smaller bowls move around too much when struck, a small piece of double sided tape on the bottom could be useful.

Balloon drums

To make these drums, you simply need to cut the neck off of a balloon and stretch it over the mouth of a jar or cup. In order to make rapid passages easier, you may want to consider putting something underneath the shorter jars so that they're all roughly the same height.

Water balloons

The term "water balloon" may be a little misleading. Only about 5-10% of the balloon should be filled with water and rest is air. That said, you should experiment to find the ratio that works best for you. I've found that medium sized balloons tend to work best (roughly 9-12 inches in diameter when inflated), but larger or smaller ones could work as well.

Hanging water balloons

In order to hang the water balloons from a boom stand or rack, I suggest wrapping the neck around the stand first and then tying the knot. Even though I don't specify which balloon to use at any given point in the score, I would suggest hanging four of them. That allows them to balance on the stand and gives you the option for timbral variety. Hanging them in this manner may seem precarious, but I left balloons hanging in my kitchen for 10 days with none of them dropping or popping. The same goes for striking them in performance. They're a lot less delicate than you might think. I hit these balloons with sticks and mallets hundreds of times without incident. Moreover, I think that's a really fun aspect of this piece. Most likely, your audience will assume that the balloons could pop at any moment even though that's highly unlikely. This will heighten the tension of your performance and make the piece more dramatic. That said, it's probably a good idea to strike the balloon with the shaft of your sticks rather than the tip. ...just in case

Free water balloon

The preparation for this balloon is the same as the hanging water balloons. Just tie the knot like you would for a regular balloon and you're good to go.

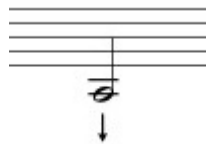
Performance techniques

Balloon drums - Single stroke buzz roll

Because the heads of the balloon drums are extremely flexible, rapid single stroke rolls are very easy. By applying just a little pressure after striking the head, you can produce a quick buzz that will also result in a subtle pitch bend upwards.



Free water balloon



Starting in measure 71, player one is instructed to strike the table with the free water balloon. I've found that the easiest way to do this is to pinch the neck of the balloon at the knot. With very little force, it will produce a pronounced crashing/splashing sound. At the end of the piece, player one drops the balloon on the floor, producing a similar sound in a more dramatic fashion. It may seem that these actions could easily pop the balloon.

However, after doing this hundreds of times I haven't broken a single one.

That said, I would encourage you to experiment on your own. I suspect that if it is dropped on a surface that isn't flat, it may not fair as well.

Metal Mixing bowls

The piece starts with the bowls rim-up so that they sound a bit like a small gong. The bowls need to be turned over sometime between measure 29 and 71. Ideally this would be done in the rests so that there isn't a pause in between sections. However, if that's not possible a little time can be taken before before the section that starts at measure 29.

Water bowl

In measures 4-6, player two pours water into the largest metal mixing bowl. (this bowl remains rim-up throughout the piece) This produces a dramatic pitch bend downward. I've found that this is best executed by holding the bowl in one hand near the rim and pouring the water from a pitcher or cup in the other hand. If the bowl is tilted so that water consistently hits the exposed flat part of the bowl, you should be able to achieve maximum resonance. The amount of water should be pre-measured so that you can get the best pitch bend effect in the next section of the piece.

In the section starting at measure 29, player two plays the water bowl with their fingers. Gripping the bowl with the heels of your hands and striking it on the bottom should produce the best results. Pitch bends are notated in a couple of ways. Lines above the part indicate pitch bend duration and direction. Starting in measure 41, a quick upward pitch bend is indicated by a curved line near the note head.



Amplification

Though this piece could potentially be performed in a small venue without amplification, I highly recommend it whenever possible. Because of the proximity effect, the sound of the hanging water balloons becomes quite powerful. Their sound is much like a large concert bass drum when struck from the side and like an oversized kick drum when struck from the bottom. This enhanced sound can be perceived acoustically, but only when the listener is less than a few feet away. I would suggest positioning the microphones around six inches above the balloons. If you're only using two hanging balloons this could be achieved with one microphone, but two would be more effective if you're using four hanging balloons. In addition to this, it would be good to angle them slightly towards the balloon drums in order to balance their sound with the metal mixing bowls.

DAMOCLES

COMMISSIONED BY
THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

Ritualistic ♩ = 56

STEVEN SNOWDEN

Hanging balloons
Strike underside with fingers

Percussion 1

Percussion 2

pp

slowly pour water into bowl
(see performance notes)

6

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

p

soft mallet
(always let ring)

11

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

mp

15

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

2

18

Rub finger on hanging balloons



Perc. 1

Perc. 2

22

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

24

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

25

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Hanging balloons strike underside with rute

27

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

29 Impish ♩ = 90

Perc. 1

mp

Perc. 2

Water bowl with fingers

mp

6

Flip over bowls before this section begins and/or during bars of rests before measure 41

35

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

41 (♩ = ♩)

Perc. 1

mf

Perc. 2

mf

48

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

54

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Musical score for Percussion 1 and Percussion 2, measures 54-60. Perc. 1 starts with a 3-measure triplet. Perc. 2 plays a steady eighth-note pattern with accents.

61

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Musical score for Percussion 1 and Percussion 2, measures 61-66. Perc. 1 has a 7-measure triplet in the second measure. Perc. 2 has a 6-measure triplet in the second measure.

67

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Musical score for Percussion 1 and Percussion 2, measures 67-70. Perc. 1 has dynamics *pp*, *mp*, and *p*. Perc. 2 has a 6-measure triplet and a 6-measure triplet, both marked *pp*.

71 Funky, Hostile ♩ = 110

Strike table with free water balloon

Perc. 1

Metal mixing bowls rim-up with rute

f

Perc. 2

stomp

f

74

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

77

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

79

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

81

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

83

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

86 Relentless ♩. = 146

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

ff Strike hanging balloon on side

90

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

94

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

98

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

102

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

107

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

112

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

fff

fff

118

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

121

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Pick up free water balloon by neck

Drop it on the floor

vd