

12-1-2015

## A Performer's Guide to Dean Gronemeier's Nature Alley

Lonny James Benoit  
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.34917/8220084>

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A PERFORMER'S GUIDE TO DEAN GRONEMEIER'S  
*NATURE ALLEY*

By

Lonny James Benoit

Bachelor of Music  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
1999

Master of Music  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
2001

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

Doctor of Musical Arts

School of Music  
College of Fine Arts  
The Graduate College

University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
December 2015

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## Doctoral Project Approval

The Graduate College  
The University of Nevada, Las Vegas

November 6, 2015

This doctoral project prepared by

Lonny James Benoit

entitled

A Performer's Guide to Dean Gronemeier's *Nature Alley*

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts  
School of Music

Dean Gronemeier, D.M.A., J.D.  
*Examination Committee Chair*

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D.  
*Graduate College Interim Dean*

Timothy Jones, D.M.A.  
*Examination Committee Member*

Anthony LaBounty, M.S.  
*Examination Committee Member*

Janis McKay, D.M.A.  
*Examination Committee Member*

Michael Tylo, M.F.A.  
*Graduate College Faculty Representative*

## ABSTRACT

A Performer's Guide to Dean Gronemeier's *Nature Alley*

by

Lonny James Benoit  
Dr. Dean Gronemeier, Examination Committee Chair  
Professor of Music  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

This document is a resource designed to aid performers in preparation of Dean Gronemeier's *Nature Alley*, an advanced four-mallet solo for marimba. A biographical sketch of Dean Gronemeier, general overview of the composition, and the seven main themes of *Nature Alley* are presented within this document. Specific attention will be given to the musical and technical considerations associated with each of the seven themes.

Dedicated to  
Amie, Lexington, and Porter.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF DEAN GRONEMEIER .....	1
CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW OF <i>NATURE ALLEY</i> .....	7
CHAPTER 3: THE “CAR CRASH” THEME .....	19
MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	22
TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	24
CHAPTER 4: THE “UNCLE VINCE PART 1” THEME .....	26
MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	30
TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	31
CHAPTER 5: THE “UNCLE VINCE PART 2” THEME .....	34
MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	38
TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	38
CHAPTER 6: THE “STEERING WHEEL” THEME.....	42
MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	47
TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	47
CHAPTER 7: THE “UNFAIR” THEME .....	51
CHAPTER 8: THE “SICK” THEME .....	53
MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	56
TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	56

CHAPTER 9: THE “BUSY BODIES” THEME .....	57
MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	60
TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	60
CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSION .....	62
APPENDIX I: ERRATA SHEET FOR BAKER .....	64
PUBLICATIONS EDITION OF <i>NATURE ALLEY</i>	
APPENDIX II: LIST OF COMPOSITIONS BY DEAN GRONEMEIER .....	67
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	70
CURRICULUM VITAE .....	72



## LIST OF MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example 2.2. “Car Crash” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 1 – 4) .....	10
Example 2.3. “Uncle Vince Part 1” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 13 – 20) ...	10
Example 2.4. “Uncle Vince Part 2” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms.33 – 34) ....	11
Example 2.5. “Steering Wheel” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 37 – 40) .....	11
Example 2.6. “Unfair” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 124 – 131).....	11
Example 2.7. “Sick” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 255 – 265) .....	12
Example 2.8. “Busy Bodies” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 294 – 297).....	12
Example 2.9. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 61 – 69) .....	15
Example 2.10. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 371 – 374) .....	16
Example 2.11. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 192 – 201) .....	16
Example 2.12. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 202 – 211) .....	18
Example 3.1. “Car Crash” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 1 – 12).....	19
Example 3.2. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 232 – 239) .....	21
Example 3.3. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 104 – 111) .....	22
Example 3.4. Ranges of Examples 3.1 and 3.2.....	23
Example 3.5. Exercise for developing interval control and effective mallet shifting. ...	25
Example 4.1. “Uncle Vince Part 1” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 13-20) .....	26
Example 4.2. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 140 – 163) .....	27
Example 4.3. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 192 – 211) .....	29
Example 4.4. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 392 – 411) .....	30

Example 4.5. Christopher Deane, <i>Etude for a Quiet Hall</i> (line 1) .....	32
Example 5.1. “Uncle Vince Part 2” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 33 – 36) ...	34
Example 5.2. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 55 – 60) .....	35
Example 5.3. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 212 – 218) .....	35
Example 5.4. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 329 – 338) .....	36
Example 5.5. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 339 – 357) .....	36
Example 5.6. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 371 – 377) .....	37
Example 5.7. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 412 – 415) .....	37
Example 5.8. Guided tossing motion exercise.....	41
Example 6.1. “Steering Wheel” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 37 – 40) .....	42
Example 6.2. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 61 – 68) .....	43
Example 6.3. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 94 – 103) .....	43
Example 6.4. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 104 – 111) .....	44
Example 6.5. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 112 – 123) .....	45
Example 6.6. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 219 – 226) .....	45
Example 6.7. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 378 - 380) .....	46
Example 6.8. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 384 – 391) .....	46
Example 6.9. Triple lateral stroke exercise #1 .....	48
Example 6.10. Triple lateral stroke exercise #2.....	49
Example 6.11. Triple lateral troke exercise #3 .....	49
Example 7.1. “Unfair” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 124 – 131).....	51
Example 8.1. “Sick” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 254 – 267).....	54
Example 8.2. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 268 – 278) .....	54

Example 8.3. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 279 – 287) .....	55
Example 8.4. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 288 – 293) .....	55
Example 9.1. “Busy Bodies” theme: Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 294 – 302).....	57
Example 9.2. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 303 – 313) .....	58
Example 9.3. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 314 – 328) .....	59
Example 9.4. Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 358 – 362) .....	60
Example 9.5. 4-note and 3-note subdivisions of the “Busy Bodies” theme .....	60
Gronemeier, <i>Nature Alley</i> (ms. 288 – 293)	
Example 9.6. Direction of double and triple lateral strokes .....	61

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. The formal structure of <i>Nature Alley</i> .....	13
Table 2. Statements of the “Unfair” theme .....	52

## LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 5.1. Photograph of inside mallet root position .....	39
Photograph 5.2. Photograph if inside mallet altered position .....	40
Photograph 6.1. Thumb placement of the “locking” technique.....	50

## CHAPTER 1

### A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF DEAN GRONEMEIER

Dean Gronemeier is a percussionist and composer noted for his dynamic performances, challenging and idiomatic compositions, and is an internationally renowned pedagogue. For Gronemeier, the influence of a Midwest blue-collar upbringing, along with strong family support, provided a firm foundation for his musical aspirations. During the course of his musical training, Gronemeier discovered that musical composition was a creative outlet that allowed him to express his emotions and share his life story. He published several works for marimba and established himself as one of the innovators of 20<sup>th</sup> century concert marimba technique.

Born on May 24, 1963, in Elgin, Illinois, Dean Gronemeier was exposed to the world of music almost immediately by his father Harvey Gronemeier, a hard-working man by day and an avid drummer by night. As young children, Dean and his older brother Paul would watch their father rehearse his ragtime/honky-tonk band in their family home in Roselle, Illinois, a western suburb of Chicago. While Paul was mesmerized by the honky-tonk style playing of the pianist, his younger sibling was captivated by his father's drum-set performances. As Dean recalled, "[his] father was quite the brush player!"<sup>1</sup> As he grew older, Dean became more intrigued with music and participated in the elementary school band. His first choice of instrument was the trumpet, however due to financial limitations he began playing drums as they were readily

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<sup>1</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 6, 2015.

available. Dean's parents were unwaveringly supportive of his pursuit of music throughout his middle school and high school years. They endorsed Dean's interest in music and attended all of his percussion performances at concerts and solo competitions. It was during these formative years that Harvey began teaching Dean the mechanics of drumset. Because Harvey could not read musical notation, he taught his son to "play from the heart."<sup>2</sup> Dean also learned and mastered rudimental snare drumming along with other standard percussion instruments as a member of the Lake Park High School Band from 1977-1981.

One of Gronemeier's early inspirational percussion memories comes from high school when famed percussionist Haskell Harr observed his performance at the Illinois High School State Solo and Ensemble Contest in a downtown Chicago hotel. Following the performance, Mr. Harr told Gronemeier he was "phenomenal."<sup>3</sup> Throughout high school, Gronemeier continued to excel both musically and academically and was awarded class valedictorian at his high school graduation in June 1981.

While Harvey encouraged him to pursue his passion for music, his mother Loretta yearned for him to explore a career in mathematics, his other forte. In the fall of 1981, Gronemeier enrolled at Concordia Lutheran Teachers College, now Concordia University, as a math major with intentions of one day becoming an actuarial scientist. He quickly found that this course of study was not well suited for him and chose to change his major to music. After one year of study with Dave O'Fallon at Concordia College, Gronemeier opted to transfer to Northern Illinois University (NIU) in DeKalb, Illinois.

The transition to NIU was difficult for Gronemeier as the School of Music initially denied him admittance due to his lack of keyboard percussion proficiency skills. Under the

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<sup>2</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 6, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Careful guidance and patience of Professor Rich Holly, Gronemeier devotedly honed his keyboard percussion skills and was admitted into the NIU School of Music in August 1982. While Professor Holly was his principal percussion teacher and mentor during his NIU years, Gronemeier also studied percussion with Professor Robert Chappel and Professor Alan O'Connor. A dedicated student of percussion at NIU, he practiced diligently and became a well-rounded musician. He had a particular affection for the timbral quality of the marimba, possibly foreshadowing his drive to become a world-class marimbist.

A major life-altering event occurred while Gronemeier attended NIU. On November 11, 1983, his father suffered a massive coronary pulmination, leading to his sudden and unexpected death. Harvey and Dean had shared a very strong father/son bond, and consequently, the elder Gronemeier's untimely passing left his son devastated. However, the work ethic instilled through his father's influence provided a motivation that greatly benefitted him, particularly during this period of his life. This work ethic has become a trademark familiar to all who have worked with Dean Gronemeier.

Prior to the completion of his Bachelor of Arts degree in the spring of 1985, Professor Rich Holly encouraged Dean to enroll in the graduate music program at the University of Arizona, where he would study with Professor Gary Cook. Professor Cook selected Dean to be his graduate assistant. Cook encouraged Dean to expand his musical boundaries and compose for the marimba. Upon completion of the Master of Music (MM) degree in Percussion Performance in December of 1987, Dean completed his Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) degree in Percussion Performance also at the University of Arizona, in May 1991.

Prior to completing his DMA at The University of Arizona, Gronemeier accepted an appointment as a full-time Lecturer in Percussion at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas

(UNLV) in the fall semester of 1989. Through persistence and diligent contributions in percussion teaching, research, and performance at UNLV, he was promoted to a tenure-track Assistant Professor position in 1991, Associate Professor with Tenure in 1995, and full Professor in 1999. Gronemeier also held the position of Visiting Lecturer at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in México City, México (1997-98), and served as a consultant in the creation of the Master of Marimba degree at the Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas in Chiapas, México. He developed a close relationship with acclaimed marimbist, and founder of the world-renown ensemble Marimba Nandayapa, Zeferino Nandayapa (1931 – 2010) and family while teaching in Mexico. In the spring of 1996, Gronemeier was granted a sabbatical from UNLV to study the career of Nandayapa.

During his tenure at UNLV, Gronemeier began concertizing as a solo marimbist. He performed concert tours throughout the world, including the United States, Mexico, Australia, Brazil, Chile, and the United Kingdom. Highlight performances include a showcase concert at the 1995 Percussive Arts Society International Convention in Phoenix, AZ, and feature performances at the Primera Semana Internacional de Percusiones (1996) and Segunda Semana Internacional de Percusiones (1997) in Mexico City. Gronemeier published two scholarly articles, “Six-Mallet Independence: A New Twist on an Old Idea” and “An Evolution of Keyboard Percussion Pedagogy,” published in the Percussive Arts Society’s *Percussive Notes*.<sup>4,5</sup> He has also published 11 works for percussion, all of which are listed in Appendix II, and released the solo marimba album titled *Nature Alley*.

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<sup>4</sup> Dean Gronemeier, “Six-Mallet Independence: A New Twist on an Old Idea,” *Percussive Notes* 34, no. 6 (December 1996): 41-46, accessed September 2, 2015, <http://publications.pas.org/archive/dec96/articles/9612.41-46.pdf#search=dean%20gronemeier>.

<sup>5</sup> Dean Gronemeier, “An Evolution of Keyboard Percussion Pedagogy,” *Percussive Notes* 31, no. 2 (December 1992): 19 – 24, accessed September 2, 2015, <http://publications.pas.org/archive/pnv31n2/articles/pnv31n2.19-24.pdf#search=dean%20gronemeier>.

Gronemeier has developed professional relationships and received endorsements with several music instrument manufacturers, music accessory corporations, and music publishers over the course of his musical career. His numerous performance tours, master classes and clinics were made possible, in part, by the generous support of several corporations. In 1992, Gronemeier was signed as a Yamaha performing artist and has since performed exclusively on the Yamaha 4900 4.5 octave marimba. Many of his most significant works were composed while using this instrument. The timbral characteristics, resonance, note spacing, and durability of the Yamaha 4900 inspired him to explore the lower octaves of the instrument, an area/range often considered too delicate for intense styles such as his. Gronemeier has been an artist/educator/clinician for SABIAN cymbals since 1999. He has served on the company's educational advisory board and assisted SABIAN's Spanish language marketing campaigns. Gronemeier's relationship with Chicago-based Mike Balter Inc. began in the mid-1990's. He collaborated with Mike Balter and developed the "Shadow Series" marimba mallets, an articulate mallet series well suited for Gronemeier's aggressive style of performance. His music has been published by M. Baker Publications (Lewis, NY), Grone Publications (Las Vegas, NV), and Woodbar Music Press (Waterford, MI).

Gronemeier again felt the desire to challenge himself both academically and professionally. In August 1998, he began studies in the William S. Boyd School of Law at UNLV. While pursuing his law education, Gronemeier remained fully committed to his teaching responsibilities within the UNLV Department of Music. He completed his law studies earning the Juris Doctor in December 2001. After passing the Nevada State Bar Exam in 2002, he founded Quality Budget Legal, Inc., a law firm in Las Vegas, Nevada. Gronemeier served as the Associate Dean of the College of Fine Arts at UNLV from 2003-2012 and was the Acting Dean



in 2013. He was simultaneously a successful lawyer, administrator, teacher, and performer for several years. In August 2014, Gronemeier retired from administrative duties and returned to teaching in the UNLV percussion area full-time. He continues his law practice.

## CHAPTER 2

### OVERVIEW OF *NATURE ALLEY*

The title *Nature Alley* represents the new nature, which is constantly changing and adjusting to the needs of mankind. For the case at hand regarding an automobile, created by man, and formed to function as a necessary and viable part of modern society, the automobile has therefore become part of nature, modern day if you will, as it is an element upon which we depend to naturally perform functionally in day to day living.

But along with the advantages of this new element of nature comes its necessary evils, those that perhaps exist for no other reason than to balance the universe. Otherwise stated, insomuch as society benefits tremendously from the advantages of the automobile, it is obligated to accept its inherent negative forces, such as pollution, insurance costs, dangers, injuries, and even death. Yes, of course we all know to some extent: “We live by the sword and we die by the sword.”

So as man creates the new things that serve to facilitate life’s necessities, he creates a new and expanding nature. These elements of modern nature, whether created by God or invented by man, coexist and govern our daily tasks and routines normally and equally, or even naturally.

Therefore, the automobile that took Uncle Vince’s life was indeed a part of our nature, invented by man and naturally used by our society. The actual event itself was simply one of life’s many alleys, or nature’s alleys. This is why we have *Nature Alley*.<sup>1</sup>

Composed in 1987, Dean Gronemeier’s *Nature Alley* is an advanced four-mallet solo for marimba. *Nature Alley*, Gronemeier’s first published work for solo marimba, quickly became recognized as part of the standard literature for solo marimba and continues to be included on

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<sup>1</sup> Dean Gronemeier, emailed to Lonny Benoit, October 26, 2015.

university/college suggested repertoire lists.<sup>2</sup> His compositional style is that of a percussionist-composer, a faction of composers who compose from a performer's perspective rather than that of the trained composer. One attribute of the percussionist-composer is the creation of music focusing on performance techniques specific to the instrument for which the music is being composed. For example, a specific performance technique for marimba may have been developed or mastered by the composer and serves as the impetus of developing thematic material or as the centerpiece of an entire composition. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, a group of young percussionist-composers, including Dean Gronemeier, Michael Burritt, and Mark Ford emerged. These individuals were young college educators and considered among the world's finest concertizing marimbists. This group of individuals began composing works for solo marimba that were technically challenging to the performer while accessible to the listening audience. Their compositional output was substantial and ushered in higher standards for keyboard percussion literature.

Professor Gary Cook wrote,

I recall well when Dean Gronemeier was working on *Nature Alley*. He was passionate about exploring ways to express his inner most emotions in all his writing, and especially about his Uncle's passing in the car accident. He accomplished this by producing extraordinary music such as *Nature Alley*. Although not a "trained" composer (like Gordon Stout and others), and perhaps recognized as a "percussionist composer," I believe Gronemeier was able to present a deeply personal statement that *anyone* can relate to as they hear this great music. In that, I believe it far transcends the "percussionist composer" label. Gronemeier created a piece of music that has not only become a staple of the literature, but a piece that is accessible to any audience; which we always can use more of in percussion literature and in the world! While we were completing a teaching residency in Santiago, Chile, Gronemeier performed *Nature Alley*. After he introduced the piece, in his excellent Spanish, and performed it, the audience approval erupted,

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<sup>2</sup> *Nature Alley* has been included on the applied lesson syllabi of the University of Kentucky Percussion Area (Professor James Campbell, Director of Percussion Studies).  
[http://finearts.uky.edu/sites/default/files/pictures/linked\\_files/7.%20Repertoire.doc](http://finearts.uky.edu/sites/default/files/pictures/linked_files/7.%20Repertoire.doc).

proving for me that music is not so much "a universal language" as it is "a universal need." When great music like *Nature Alley*, which has depth, is sincere and inspired music, is played with understanding and virtuosity, it is, indeed, as I believe Nietzsche said, "food for the soul."<sup>3</sup>

When surveying Gronemeier's compositions, one must be aware that all of his works are programmatic.<sup>4</sup> (Refer to Appendix II for a list of Gronemeier's works.) The program of *Nature Alley* is a reflection of Gronemeier's thoughts and emotions surrounding the tragic death of the composer's Uncle Vince.

*Nature Alley* is dedicated to the memory of the composer's late Uncle Vince who died in a fatal car accident in August 1987. The themes of this piece represent the composer's various thoughts and emotions based on what he heard and read about the accident. Through these themes Gronemeier tries to re-enact the tragic event and its ramifications.

Example 2.1 – Program Notes from Baker Publications (1992) edition of *Nature Alley*.

The structure of *Nature Alley* is based loosely on the formal structure of theme and variations (table 1).<sup>5</sup> In all, seven themes are presented in this composition: "Car Crash," "Uncle Vince Part 1," "Uncle Vince Part 2," "Unfair," "Sick," "Steering Wheel," and "Busy Bodies" (examples 2.2 – 2.8). Each theme, to be discussed fully in subsequent chapters, has a unique musical identity and is technically and musically demanding.

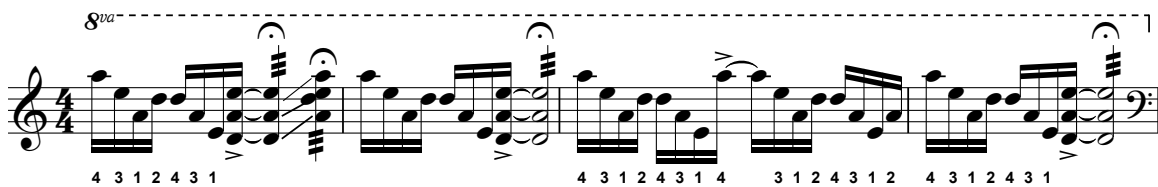
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<sup>3</sup> Gary Cook, emailed to Lonny Benoit, November 1, 2015.

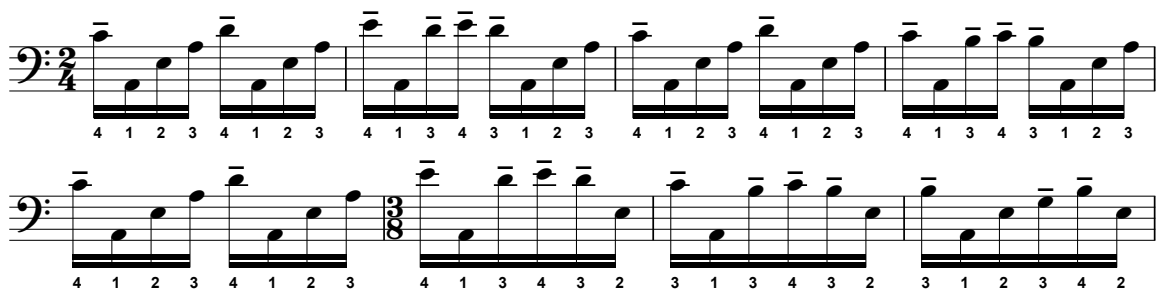
<sup>4</sup> Program music – Music that attempts to express or depict one or more non-musical ideas, images of events. The composer usually indicates the "program (the subject or subjects being evoked) by a suggestive title or preface, which may be quite vague or may be specific and detailed. *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (1986), s.v. "Program Music."

<sup>5</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, July 26, 2015.

Gronemeier's treatment of thematic material in *Nature Alley* is reminiscent of Wagner's use of the leitmotif and Berlioz's *idée fixe*.<sup>6,7</sup> As the composer reflected on his emotions surrounding the death of Uncle Vince, he chose to state a theme in its original form and later transform the theme rhythmically and melodically to express his evolving emotions.<sup>8</sup> Gronemeier also combines several themes as the piece progresses. These processes are the primary way the composition is musically developed.



Example 2.2. “Car Crash” theme: Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 1 – 4)

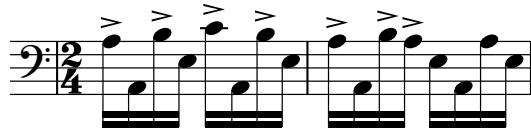


Example 2.3. “Uncle Vince Part 1” theme: Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 13 – 20)

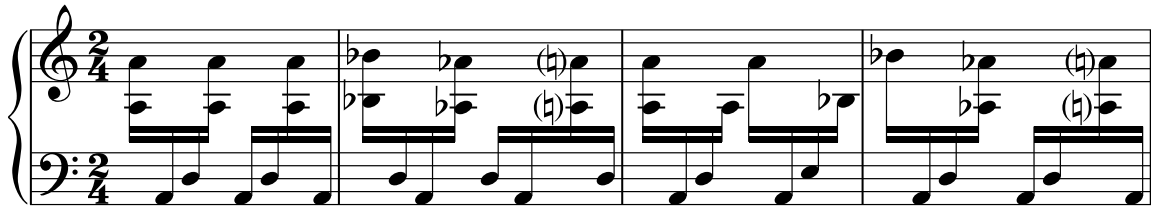
<sup>6</sup> Leitmotif – a musical fragment, related to some aspect of the drama, that recurs in the course of an opera. The term was coined by F. W. Jähns in his study of Carl Maria Von Weber (1871): it gained greater currency after Baron Hans Paul von Wolzogen used the concept as a means of elucidating Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Wagner achieved through the leitmotif a synthesis of two important 19<sup>th</sup> century compositional techniques – thematic recollection or reminiscence and thematic transformation. *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (1986), s.v. “Leitmotif, Leitmotiv.”

<sup>7</sup> *Idée fixe* – Berlioz's term for the recurring musical idea linking several movements of his *Symphonie Fantastique* and associated in its program with the image of the beloved. *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (1986), s.v. “*Idée fixe*.”

<sup>8</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 6, 2015.



Example 2.4. “Uncle Vince Part 2” theme: Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 33 – 34)



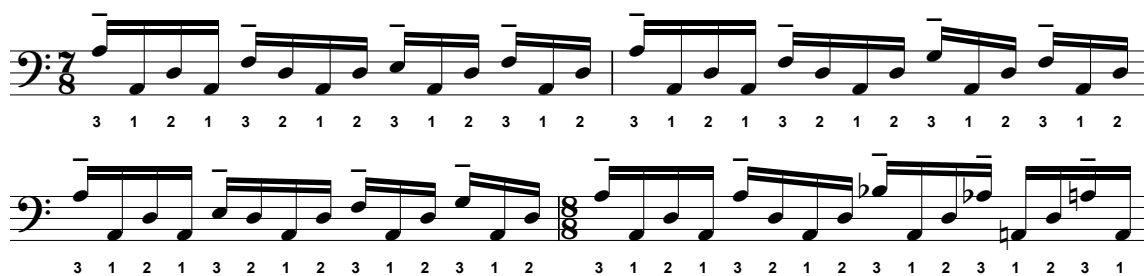
Example 2.5. “Steering Wheel” theme: Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 37 – 40)



Example 2.6. “Unfair” theme: Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 124 – 131)



Example 2.7. “Sick” theme: Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 255 – 265)



Example 2.8. “Busy Bodies” theme: Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 294 – 297)

Measure Number	Section	Thematic material
1 – 12	A	*Car Crash
13 – 93	B	*Uncle Vince Part 1 – ms. 13 – 20 *Uncle Vince Part 2 – ms. 33 – 34 *Steering Wheel – ms. 37 – 40
94 – 103	Transition	Car Crash & Steering Wheel combined
104 – 123	C	Car Crash & Steering Wheel combined
124 – 139	Transition	*Unfair
140 – 191	B <sup>1</sup>	Uncle Vince Part 1
192 – 226	B <sup>2</sup>	Uncle Vince Part 1 – ms. 194 – 201 Uncle Vince Part 1 & Unfair combined – ms. 202 – 211 Uncle Vince Part 2 – ms. 212 – 218 Unfair & Steering Wheel combined – ms. 219 - 226
227 – 231	Transition	Car Crash
232 – 253	A <sup>1</sup>	Car Crash
254 – 287	D	*Sick Theme
288 – 293	Transition	Sick (Unfair combined in ms. 292 – 293)
294 – 328	E	*Busy Bodies
329 – 338	Transition	Uncle Vince Part 2
339 – 357	B <sup>4</sup>	Uncle Vince Part 2
358 – 370	Transition	Unfair & Busy Bodies combined
371 – 383	B <sup>5</sup>	Uncle Vince Part 2 & Unfair combined – ms. 371 – 377 Steering Wheel & Unfair combined – ms. 378 – 380 Uncle Vince Part 2 & Unfair combined – ms.381 - 383
384 – 391	Transition	Steering Wheel
392 – 415	B <sup>6</sup>	Uncle Vince Part 1- ms. 392 – 400 Uncle Vince Part 1 – ms. – 401 – 409

Table 1. The formal structure of *Nature Alley*. The asterisk indicates the initial presentation of the theme.



*Nature Alley* is firmly rooted in the key of A-natural minor. The chosen key of A is used to accommodate the range of the instrument and idiomatically facilitate the technical demands of the work. The minor quality reflects Gronemeier's emotions regarding the sudden loss of Uncle Vince. At the time *Nature Alley* was composed, the standard range of the marimba was 4.3 octaves (A2 – C6). Gronemeier wanted to utilize the lowest notes of the instrument, hence the choice of A-natural minor. Several technically challenging phrases of the composition would simply not be possible to perform in keys requiring the frequent utilization of the upper and lower playing manuals of the instrument.

This minor tonality represents the composer's overwhelming sense of emotional pain and suffering at the loss of Uncle Vince. As the composition develops, Gronemeier introduces the A-Phrygian mode and later A-Locrian mode. According to Gronemeier, "I chose to utilize the modes in this specific order because they become increasingly minor and reflected my growing sadness and anger over the death of Uncle Vince."<sup>9</sup> The first use of A-Phrygian occurs in the initial statement of the Steering Wheel theme in measures 37 – 40 (example 2.5). The A-Locrian mode is first presented in a variation of the "Steering Wheel" in measures 61 – 69 (example 2.9) and expresses the composer's indignation with the steering wheel crushing Uncle Vince's torso.

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<sup>9</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 6, 2015.



Example 2.9. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 61 – 69)

The relatively simple harmonic content of this piece is a reflection of the composer's parsimonious lifestyle and his relationship with Uncle Vince.<sup>10</sup> The Gronemeier family admired and adored their family friend Uncle Vince.<sup>11</sup> Although Uncle Vince was not a true relative of the Gronemeier family, he was very generous to them and treated Dean as if he were his own son.<sup>12</sup> Uncle Vince did not shower Dean with material gifts; instead Vince took him to a Chicago Blackhawks hockey game and/or other activities.<sup>13</sup> The simple relationship between Dean and Uncle Vince is clearly represented in the simple harmonic structure of *Nature Alley*.

As stated, Gronemeier's choice of A-minor as the tonal center allowed him to utilize difficult performance techniques in *Nature Alley*. Examples 2.10 and 2.11 demonstrate difficult passages that would be relatively impossible to perform idiomatically in keys requiring playing on both the upper and lower manuals of the marimba.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 13, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 6, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> When comparing the layout of the marimba to a piano, the upper manual refers to the "black keys" of the marimba while the lower manual refers to the "white keys" of the marimba.



Example 2.10. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 371 – 374)

When surveying example 2.10, the left hand passage (notated in bass clef) immediately stands out. The quick alternating double vertical strokes, from the intervals of an octave to major 3<sup>rd</sup>, require the performer to quickly change intervals in a guided tossing motion, (to be expounded upon further in Chapter 5).<sup>15</sup> The tempo of this passage, ♩. = 60, is deceptively fast. If this passage were composed in a key signature requiring shifting from upper to lower manuals of the instrument, physical bodily contortion problems would result due to the demanding technical motions required to effectively perform said passage.



Example 2.11. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 192 – 201)

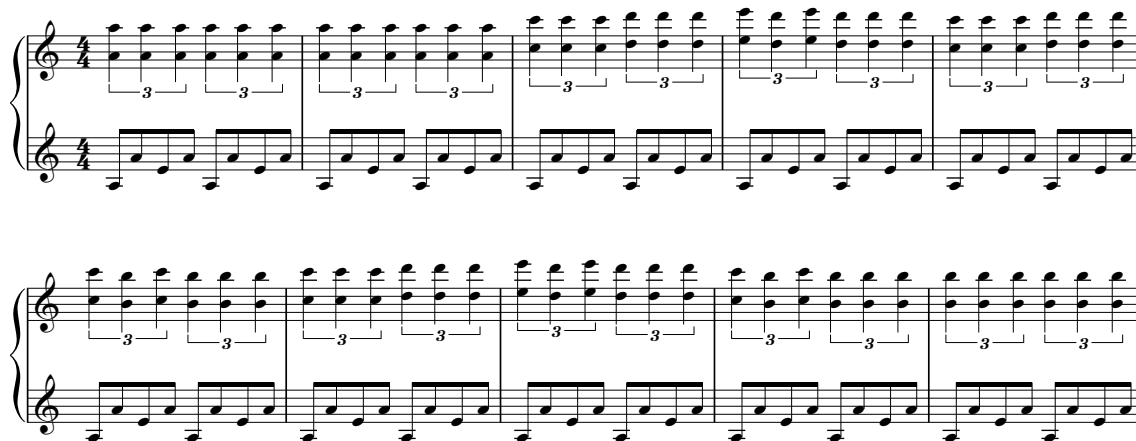
<sup>15</sup> Dean Gronemeier, “Advanced Marimba Techniques: An Analysis with Musical Approaches to Performance Problems in *West Side Suite*” (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1990), 50.

Similar to example 2.10, example 2.11 also requires rapid interval changes in the left hand (notated in bass clef). The single alternating strokes, which outline the implied A-minor chord, require the performer to quickly change mallet intervals. The tempo of this passage, ♩ = 176, is brisk and shifting between the upper and lower manuals of the marimba would also present performance technique issues.

Gronemeier's feelings of anger, sadness, and remorse are depicted through the effective use of rhythm in *Nature Alley*. Thematic material identified in examples 2.2 – 2.8 is developed and transformed by rhythmic variations, including the processes of augmentation and diminution, and the use of polyrhythms. The recurring “Unfair” theme, initially stated in measures 124 – 131 (example 2.6), is a purely rhythmical theme based upon the 3:2 polyrhythm.<sup>16</sup> Gronemeier represents the realization of Uncle Vince's passing through the rhythmic development of the “Unfair” and “Uncle Vince Part 1” themes. Gronemeier's sadness is portrayed by the augmentation of the “Uncle Vince Part 1” theme in the upper voice of example 2.11. In example 2.12, the polyrhythmic feeling of the “Unfair” theme is maintained, although altered to 4:3, and combined with the melodic content of the “Uncle Vince Part 1” theme to reflect Gronemeier's anxiety regarding the loss.

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<sup>16</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 13, 2015.



Example 2.12. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 202 – 11)

The fully developed “Busy Bodies” theme (example 2.8) clearly relies on rhythm to depict the greed displayed by certain individuals after the death of Uncle Vince. The use of alternating triple lateral and double lateral permutations, composed in the left hand mallets 1 and 2, see illustration 2.1 for mallet numbering, emulates the conversations occurring amongst the greedy individuals.

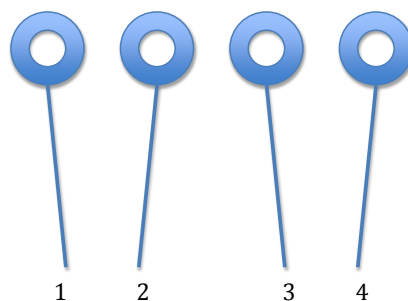


Illustration 2.1. Four-mallet numbering from performer's perspective.

## CHAPTER 3


### THE “CAR CRASH” THEME

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in 4/4 time. It begins with a tempo marking of  $\text{♩} = 152$ . The first staff contains measures 1 through 4, marked with a forte *f* dynamic. Fingerings are indicated below the notes: 4 3 1 2 4 3 1 for the first measure, and 4 3 1 2 4 3 1 4, 3 1 2 4 3 1 2, and 4 3 1 2 4 3 1 for the subsequent measures. A glissando (gliss.) is marked over the first measure. The second staff contains measures 5 through 8, marked with a mezzo-forte *f* dynamic. The third staff contains measures 9 through 12, marked with a piano *p* dynamic. A ritardando (rit.) is marked over measures 10 and 11. The tempo changes to  $\text{♩} = 100$  at the beginning of measure 12. The key signature changes from one flat to two flats (B-flat major to D-flat major) at the start of measure 12. The time signature changes from 4/4 to 2/4 at the start of measure 12. The piece ends with a double bar line at the end of measure 12.

Example 3.1. “Car Crash” theme: Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 1 – 12)

The first theme presented in *Nature Alley* is referred to as the “Car Crash.” According to Gronemeier, “the car accident that claimed Uncle Vince’s life was extremely violent.”<sup>1</sup> The 16-

<sup>1</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 6, 2015.

year old driver of a large van hydroplaned across several lanes of traffic, crossed a median and struck Uncle Vince's vehicle head-on.<sup>2</sup> The melodic representation of the crash is a rapid descending four-mallet permutation of 4-3-1-2 firmly rooted in the key of A-minor. The entire theme consists of only 3 pitches; A, D, and E . The pitches are grouped in sets of one count and according to intervals of the perfect 4<sup>th</sup> and perfect 5<sup>th</sup>. The glissando notated between beats 3 and 4 of ms. 1 (see example 3.1) was added by Gronemeier after the initial publication of *Nature Alley* by M. Baker Publications, therefore the glissando was not included in any previously published version of *Nature Alley* and has been added to the Baker Publications errata sheet included in this document (Appendix I). *Nature Alley* was a featured piece on many of Gronemeier's performances of the late 1990's – early 2000's and was continually being revised as he developed and implemented new ideas. Although this may appear to be a relatively small revision to the manuscript, the glissando effect is Gronemeier's musical representation of the tires screeching during the horrific accident.

Gronemeier develops the "Car Crash" theme in two distinct ways; 1) by changing modes and 2) by combining the "Car Crash" theme with other thematic material. Example 3.2 clearly illustrates the "Car Crash" presented in the Locrian mode. The contour of the melody and the implied mallet permutation in example 3.2 is identical to the initial presentation of the "Car Crash" in measures 1 - 12.

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<sup>2</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 6, 2015.



Example 3.2. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 232 – 239)

Example 3.3 shows the combination of the “Car Crash” and “Steering Wheel” themes. Counts 1 and 2 in the treble clef staff of measure 104 are a variation of the “Car Crash” theme. The “Steering Wheel” theme occurs in the bass clef staff on counts 3 and 4 of measure 104. Gronemeier continues to develop thematic material by extending the “Car Crash” theme in the treble clef staves in measures 106 – 107.



104 *Groove Tempo* *accel. & cresc.*

106

108

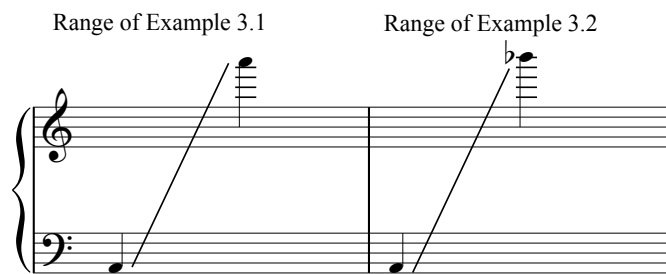
110

Example 3.3. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 104 – 111)

### MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Appropriate balance is the primary musical consideration in regards to the “Car Crash” theme. Concerns arise due to the extreme ranges of the primary “Car Crash” statements (example 3.4). To achieve the appropriate balance from the beginning to ending of these phrases, the performer must carefully choose his/her keyboard mallets. The note range of *Nature Alley* is F<sup>#</sup>2

- B<sup>b</sup>6, therefore it is feasible for performers to determine mallet selection based solely upon the “Car Crash” theme. These extreme ranges require a keyboard mallet capable of producing idiomatic sounds, typically warm and resonant, at high-volume levels without being too hard or soft. Improper mallet selection may lead to several problems including lack of projection in the instrument’s high range, undesirable timbre of the instrument’s low range, and the possibility of damaging the instrument. The suggested mallets should be articulate and capable of producing tone regardless of range. Gronemeier recommends the use of Mike Balter “Shadow Series” mallets in a graduated configuration, from left to right, of 3 - model #224 and 1 – model #223.<sup>3</sup> An attractive alternative to Gronemeier’s recommendation would be a graduated configuration of the Vic Firth Robert Van Sice Series marimba mallets including 1 – model M113 and 3 – model M114. Either of the aforementioned recommendations will enable the player to be expressive regardless of the range in which they perform.



Example 3.4. Ranges of Examples 3.1 and 3.2

<sup>3</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, email, September 29, 2015.

## TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Note accuracy may be an issue when performing the initial statement of the “Car Crash” theme. In measures 1 – 4 of example 3.2, each hand maintains the interval of a perfect 4<sup>th</sup> as the melody descends in the mallet permutation, 4-3-1-2. The D pitch is subsequently repeated, as it is the last note of the first permutation cycle and the first note of the second permutation cycle. These factors in combination with the tempo of the passage, ♩ = 152, require performers to simultaneously focus their awareness on two performance techniques to successfully execute the passage: interval control and mallet shifting efficiency.

The performer must ensure that each hand maintains the proper interval as the two double lateral strokes, required of the 4-3-1-2 permutation, are executed.<sup>4</sup> Double lateral strokes, as defined by Leigh Howard Stevens, are single motions that produce two successive pitches.<sup>5</sup> In this musical situation, the right hand executes the 4-3 portion of the permutation and the left hand executes the 1-2 portion. Note accuracy will be increased if the performer’s hands remain relaxed while executing the playing motion and they mentally commit to maintaining the proper interval.

Transitioning between beats requires rapid mallet shifting, which is the movement of mallets from one note to another.<sup>6</sup> According to Leigh Howard Stevens, there are two types of shifts: a shift that is connected to the stroke it precedes and a shift that is connected to the stroke it follows.<sup>7</sup> To perform example 3.2 at the marked tempo, mallet shifting should be interpreted as connected to the stroke it follows. Visual focus on the repeated pitch (D) is required. Example

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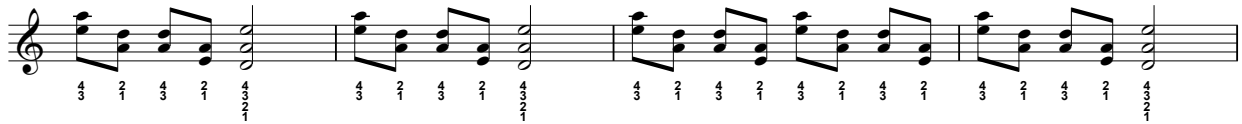
<sup>4</sup> Leigh Howard Stevens, *Method of Movement for Marimba*, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ed. (Asbury Park, NJ: Keyboard Percussion Publications, 2005), 35.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 19.

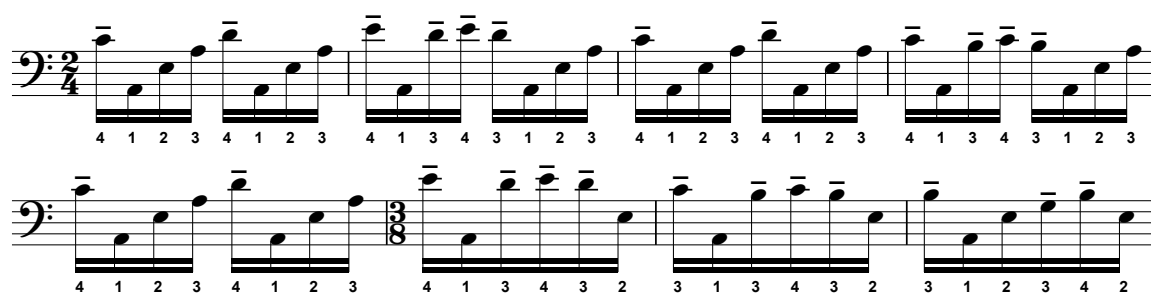
3.5 is an exercise designed to allow the performer to focus on the mallet shifting and interval control required to successfully perform the initial statement and variations of the “Car Crash” theme.



Example 3.5. Exercise for developing interval control and effective mallet shifting.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE “UNCLE VINCE PART 1” THEME



Example 4.1. “Uncle Vince Part 1” theme: Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 13 – 20)

“Uncle Vince Part 1” is the principal theme of *Nature Alley*. This theme and its variations account for approximately 30% of the composition’s melodic content. Example 4.1 is the first statement of “Uncle Vince Part 1”. The melody in A minor, notated by the tenuto markings in example 4.1, has a smooth contour which represents Gronemeier’s feelings of sadness. This passage is repeated in its entirety a total of four times within the first 94 measures of the piece. Short interjections of two other themes, “Uncle Vince Part 2” and “Steering Wheel,” occur between each repetition of “Uncle Vince Part 1.” Alternating themes in this manner is the musical representation of the confusion and frustration Gronemeier felt as he learned more details surrounding the death of Uncle Vince. The “Uncle Vince Part 1” theme is developed

through changes in rhythm, the utilization of sustaining techniques, and by combining the principal theme with other themes.

The first variation of “Uncle Vince Part 1” occurs in measures 140 – 192 (example 4.2).

$\text{♩} = 132$

140 *p* 3 2 4 2 3 1 3 2 4 2 3 1 3 2 4 3 1 4 3 2 3 2 3

144 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 1 3 2 4 2 3 1 3 2 4 2 3

148 1 3 2 4 3 1 4 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2 3

152 1 3 2 4 2 3 1 3 2 4 2 3 1 3 2 4 3 2 4 3 2 1 3 2 4 3 2 4 3 2

156 1 3 2 3 2 4 1 3 2 4 2 3 1 3 2 4 2 3 1 3 2 4 2 3

160 1 3 2 3 2 4 1 3 2 4 2 3 1 3 2 4 2 3 1 3 2 4 2 3

Example 4.2. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 140 – 163)

The tenuto marking notates the implied melody of example 4.2. The contour of this melody is disjunct because of the octave displacement between the outside mallets, numbers 1 and 4. This variation, in triple meter, depicts the slow death of Uncle Vince as he lay in the

hospital bleeding.<sup>1</sup> According to Gronemeier the melodic fragment of the left hand, number 1 mallet, represents death and the fragment of the right hand, number 4 mallet, represents life.<sup>2</sup>

The next presentation of “Uncle Vince Part 1,” the theme’s second variation, occurs in measures 192 – 211 (example 4.3). This variation is the composer’s realization that Uncle Vince has just passed away. The frantic feeling he experienced is represented by the contrasting figures of each stave. The melody of this example is clearly identifiable in the upper stave and can be divided into two distinct sections: section 1, measures 192 – 201 and section 2, measures 202 – 211. The flowing melody of each section is created by the use of the one-handed independent roll (section 1) and rhythmic augmentation (section 2). The melody is opposed by the accompanying Alberti bass figure, which emphasizes smaller rhythmic subdivisions than the melody.<sup>3</sup> The active Alberti bass, juxtaposed with the smooth melody, is an effective representation of Gronemeier’s frantic feeling.

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<sup>1</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 6, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Alberti bass – an accompaniment figure, found frequently in the left hand of 18<sup>th</sup> century keyboard music, in which the pitches of three pitch chords are played successively in the order lowest, highest, middle, highest. This figure takes its name from the composer Domenico Alberti (ca. 1710 – 40), who employed it frequently. *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (1986), s.v. “Alberti bass.”

192 ♩ = 172

196

200

204

208

Example 4.3. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 192 – 211)



The final phrase of *Nature Alley* includes a restatement of “Uncle Vince Part 1” followed by a harmonic variation of the theme. According to Gronemeier, he chose the F<sup>#</sup> and C<sup>#</sup> harmony, “because these particular notes were lowest and most dissonant notes available on a 4.5 octave instrument.”<sup>4</sup>



Example 4.4. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 392 – 411)

## MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The foremost musical consideration of the “Uncle Vince Part 1” theme and subsequent variations is balance. How do performers effectively balance the melody in a manner that allows listeners to easily identify said melody? The single line permutations of Examples 4.1 and 4.2 are monophonic textures and require performers to first distinguish which notes of the phrase are considered the melody and which notes are accompaniments. The revised manuscript (available from the composer or author of this document) and musical examples of this document outline the composer’s intended melody through the use of tenuto markings. The tenuto marking was chosen in lieu of a traditional accent marking because Gronemeier prefers that the melody retain

<sup>4</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 6, 2015.

more consistent timbral characteristics. Performers are encouraged to apply Gronemeier's concept of "leaning" when performing single line permutations. "Leaning" is a derivative of Gary Cook's approach to tone production as described in his book *Teaching Percussion*.<sup>5</sup> Essentially, the performer is visually stimulated by the printed music and should then mentally realize the sound to be created. This practice is also referred to as creating a mental-aural picture; a term first introduced by Fred Hinger in his text *Techniques for the Virtuoso Timpanist*.<sup>6</sup> In the case of examples 4.1 and 4.2, performers should not focus on the actual motor act of accenting the outlined melody, but should instead trust that their mental awareness of the melody will naturally balance the desired notes in a manner that is pleasing to the listener.

#### TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

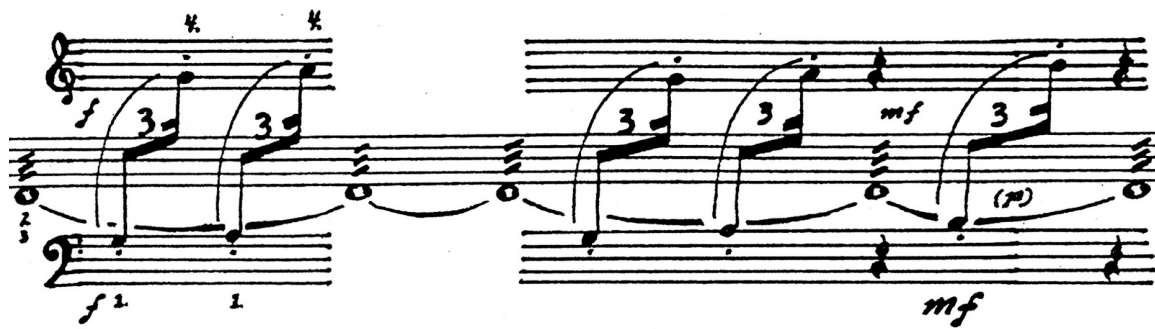
Two distinct sustaining techniques are required in examples 4.2 and 4.3, the measured roll and one-handed independent roll. When performing example 4.2, the performer should approach the figure as a measured roll rather than as an articulated rhythmic figure. The composer's intent will be realized if the performer ensures that a legato stroke style is implemented on the sustained pitch E. This approach is especially important at the beginning of the phrase due to tempo considerations. As the phrase develops and the tempo increases, implementing the legato stroke becomes more physically demanding, requiring additional concentration on stroke style. This phrase was inspired by Christopher Deane's award winning

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<sup>5</sup> Gary Cook, *Teaching Percussion: with DVD*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Schirmer, 2006), xxvii.

<sup>6</sup> Dean Gronemeier, "Advanced Marimba Techniques: An Analysis with Musical Approaches to Performance Problems in *West Side Suite*" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1990), 36.

composition *Etude for a Quiet Hall*.<sup>7</sup> Example 4.5 illustrates Deane's choice of notating the sustained pitch with a tremolo. *Etude for a Quiet Hall* is void of barlines and measured rhythms, thus the composition is open to interpretation by the performer. Regardless of notational differences, examples 4.2 and 4.5 both contain a leaping melody accompanied by a sustained single pitch and should both be approached in a similar fashion.



Example 4.5. Christopher Deane, *Etude for a Quiet Hall* (line 1)

Example 4.3 requires the use of the one-handed independent roll. This standard keyboard performance technique is required in most advanced marimba literature and is found in four sections of *Nature Alley*, each occurrence requiring its own specific technical and or musical considerations. The initiation of the one-handed independent roll may be approached in three manners: the first note is executed in the higher of the two pitches, the first note is executed in the lower of the two pitches, or with a unison attack in which both pitches are struck simultaneously. The first method accentuates the higher pitch and creates a degree of separation from the rest of the figure. The second accentuates the lower of the two pitches and allows the roll figure to easily blend into the musical texture. The third approach clearly distinguishes the

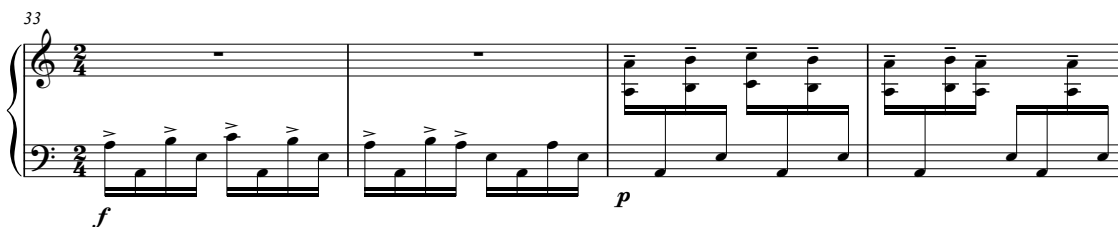
<sup>7</sup> *Etude for a Quiet Hall* won 1<sup>st</sup> place in the Percussive Arts Society Composition Competition in 1982.

rolled figure from the rest of texture. I recommend that the performer initiate the one-handed roll in the first way as described above when performing example 4.3. The relatively close distance of the highest pitch in the bottom stave versus the lowest pitch of the top stave require the performer firmly establish the melody. The homophonic texture of this phrase also dictates the need for the separation of melody and accompaniment.

The speed of the one-handed independent roll is another technical and musical consideration in the preparation of *Nature Alley*. It is assumed that performers preparing marimba literature at the level of *Nature Alley* have properly developed the one-handed independent roll and are capable of varying the speed of the one-handed independent roll. Elements influencing roll speed include the tempo of the work and the desired musical effect. The indicated tempo ( $\text{♩} = 172$ ) of example 4.3 is relatively quick when considering the active nature of the Alberti bass figure scored in the bottom stave. To establish the independence of the melody and accompaniment, the performer must implement a roll speed that is distinctively different from the rhythm of accompanying figure. For these reasons, I recommend a fast roll speed when performing example 4.3.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE “UNCLE VINCE PART 2” THEME



Example 5.1. “Uncle Vince Part 2” theme: Gronmeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 33 – 36)

“Uncle Vince Part 2” first appears in measures 33 – 36. Similar to “Uncle Vince Part 1,” the melody of this theme is notated through the use of accent and tenuto markings. According to Gronemeier, “the driving rhythm of this theme portrays Uncle Vince’s high energy type-A personality.”<sup>1</sup>

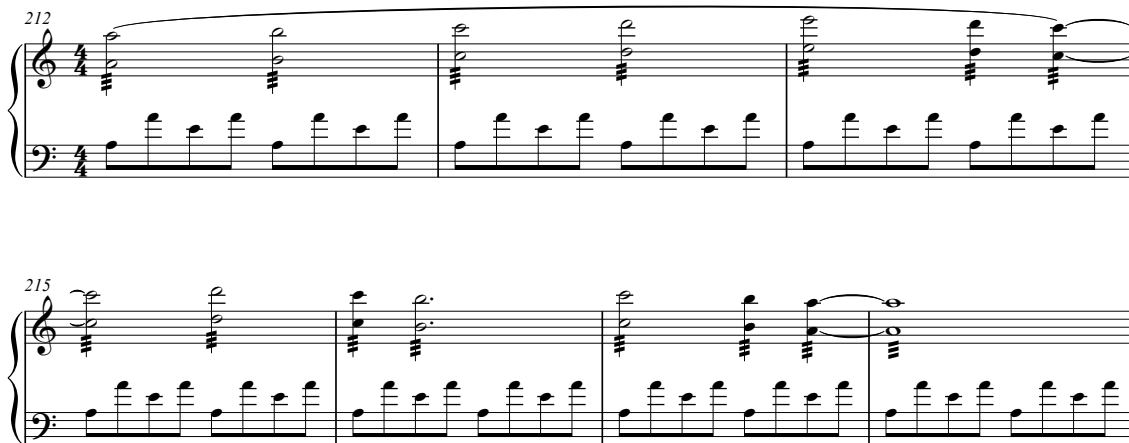
The first variation of the theme (example 5.2) is developed by extending the range of melody to the 5<sup>th</sup> scale degree (pitch E) and the addition of sequential material, derived from a fragment of measure 56, in triple meter. Example 5.3 is a rhythmically augmented variation of example 5.2, which again expresses the composer’s frantic feeling over Uncle Vince’s death.

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<sup>1</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, October 3, 2015.



Example 5.2. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 55 – 60)



Example 5.3. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 212 – 218)

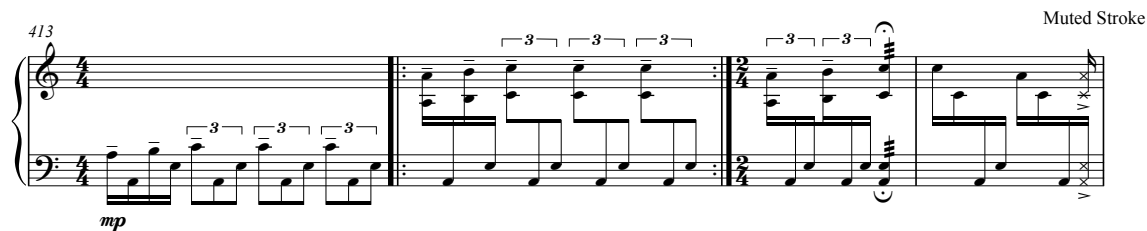
The third variation of “Uncle Vince Part 2” (example 5.4) features the theme presented in both the soprano (measures 329 – 330) and bass (331 – 334) voices. This phrase is a reference to the composer lamenting his loss and leads directly into the contrasting fourth variation (example 5.5). The *accelerando*, beginning in measure 335, forecasts the composer’s emotional state which transitions from melancholy to rage. Tempo ( $\text{♩} = 160$ ), shifting accents, and octave displacement of the melody are features of the fourth variation.





Example 5.6. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 371 – 377)

The closing statement of *Nature Alley* is the sixth variation of “Uncle Vince Part 2.” This is the composer’s final prayer to his deceased family friend.<sup>2</sup> The last note of the composition is a muted stroke. This technique produces a “dead” sound and efficaciously closes *Nature Alley*.



Example 5.7. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 412 – 415)

<sup>2</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, October 3, 2015.



## MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Example 5.6 requires use of the one-handed independent roll. This passage is very powerful due to the use of large intervals in both hands using contrasting rhythms. Because the melody of this passage has been firmly established before the initial use of the one-handed independent roll, I recommend initiating the roll with a unison attack of both mallets. This approach, as described in Chapter 4, maintains the polyrhythmic feel of the phrase and the natural decay of the roll allows the accompaniment to be easily re-established.

The melody of “Uncle Vince Part 2” is very aggressive and therefore should be approached differently than its close relative “Uncle Vince Part 1.” Examples 5.1, 5.2, and 5.5 contain melodies outlined by the use of accent markings. This marking should also encourage performers to consider tone color. The warm, rich tone color desired for “Uncle Vince Part 1” is replaced by a contrasting, bright color for “Uncle Vince Part 2.”

## TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Interval control and approach to the one-handed independent roll are the primary technical considerations regarding “Uncle Vince Part 2.” It is suggested that performers utilize the Musser-Stevens grip when performing *Nature Alley*. This non-crossed grip, created by Clair Omar Musser and further refined by Leigh Howard Stevens, allows for the comfortable execution of larger intervals and is regarded as the most efficient grip when changing intervals.<sup>3</sup> The Alberti bass figure, scored in the left hand of example 5.3, requires the performer to quickly change mallet intervals. To perform this figure accurately, one must concentrate on a target note or “guide point.” The guide point in this example, the written note A4 (within the treble staff), is

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<sup>3</sup> Gary D. Cook, *Teaching Percussion*, 3d ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomson Schirmer, 2006), 130 - 132.

executed with the number 2 mallet. When employing the Musser-Stevens grip, the outside mallets (1 and 4) remain stationary and the inside mallets (2 and 3) move to achieve the desired interval. Performers must realize the function of each mallet and be aware that the mallet intervals are actually changing rather than remaining stationary. Failure to effectively change intervals within this figure, and similar figures within *Nature Alley*, will lead to an exaggerated arm movement, which in turn may cause several issues including reduced note accuracy, inefficient movement, and improper tone production.

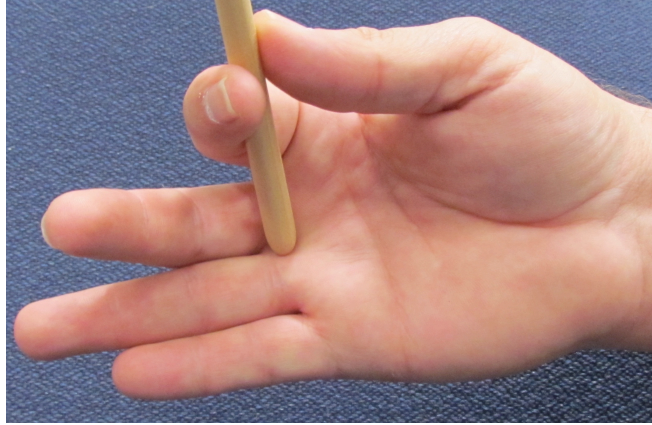
Maintaining an octave mallet interval for extended periods of time is required throughout the composition. This requirement is difficult and can be fatiguing to the performer. In *Method of Movement*, Leigh Howard Stevens recommends that when required to maintain large intervals for extended periods of time, the inside mallet position may deviate from its root position, base of the mallet centered in the palm of the hand (photograph 5.1) to a position between the bottom of the middle and ring fingers (photograph 5.2).<sup>4</sup>



Photograph 5.1. Photograph of inside mallet root position.

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<sup>4</sup> Leigh Howard Stevens, *Method of Movement for Marimba*, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ed. (Asbury Park, NJ: Keyboard Percussion Publications, 2005), 12 – 13.



Photograph 5.2. Photograph of inside mallet in altered position.

This technical approach to octave mallet placement may also be applied when performing example 5.6. As stated previously in Chapter 2, the quick alternating double vertical strokes, from the intervals of an octave to major 3<sup>rd</sup>, require the performer to quickly change intervals in a guided tossing motion.<sup>5</sup> The composer describes the concept in this way: “a guided tossing motion occurs on the up stroke as the grip is loosened just enough to toss the mallets to their desired positions, and then the hands secure the mallets to the desired position on the down stroke.”<sup>6</sup> This concept requires the inside mallet placement to alternate from root position to the altered position and demands a considerable amount of muscle memory and endurance. Example 5.8 is an exercise designed to develop the guided tossing motion.

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<sup>5</sup> Dean Gronemeier, “Advanced Marimba Techniques: An Analysis with Musical Approaches to Performance Problems in *West Side Suite*” (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 1990), 50.

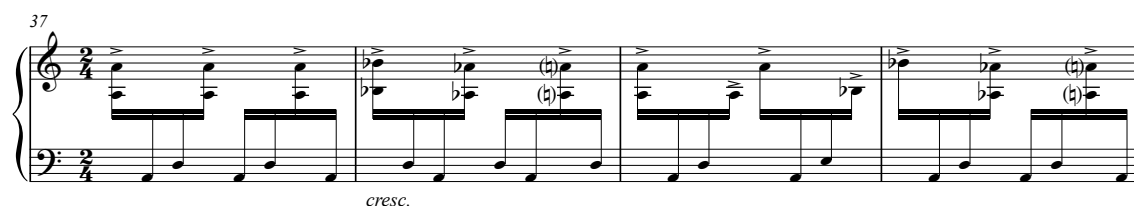
<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



Example 5.8. Guided tossing motion exercise.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE “STEERING WHEEL” THEME



Example 6.1. “Steering Wheel” theme: Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 37 – 40)

The “Steering Wheel” theme, first appearing in measures 37 – 40, is composed in the A-Phrygian mode and represents the steering wheel from Uncle Vince’s vehicle (example 6.1). Gronemeier further develops the theme by altering the mode and merging “Steering Wheel” with other thematic material. As illustrated in example 6.2, the Phrygian mode (measure 61 – 64) transforms to Locrian mode (measures 65 – 68), expressing his increasingly negative emotions as he learns more about the accident and its ramifications.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 13, 2015.



Example 6.2. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 61 – 68)

The single-line melody of example 6.3 shares the mallet permutation of the “Car Crash” and the Locrian mode of the “Steering Wheel.” The decelerating single note at the end of each fragment repeatedly interrupts the driving rhythm of this statement. This pattern is sequenced and is an effective transition to the 3<sup>rd</sup> large section of the piece as described in table 1 (example 6.4).



Example 6.3. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 94 – 103)

As previously discussed in Chapter 3, example 6.4 is yet another variation of the combined “Steering Wheel” and “Car Crash” themes, which leads to the conclusion of the third large section, example 6.5. This example is an extended variation of example 6.3, scored two octaves higher, and replaces the decelerating note with a measured value, and extends the sequence one additional repetition.

104 *Groove Tempo accel. & cresc.*

106

108

110

Example 6.4. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 104 – 111)

112  $\text{♩} = 168$

*f*

115

118 (add lib repeat and rall)

121 (8)

Example 6.5. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 112 – 123)

Examples 6.6 and 6.7 are fusions of the “Steering Wheel” and “Unfair” themes. The “Steering Wheel,” in the Phrygian mode, is scored in the upper voice of both examples.

219

*f*

223

*ff*

Example 6.6. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 219 – 226)





Example 6.7. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 378 – 380)

The final presentation of the “Steering Wheel” occurs in measures 384 – 391. This transitional phrase of *Nature Alley* is a variation of the theme in the triple group mallet mallet permutation (1-2-3-4-3-2-1).

Each sextuplet pattern may be repeated at the discretion of the performer, leading to the rolled chord on beat 4

Example 6.8. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 384 – 391)

## MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Effective balance is the foremost musical consideration of the “Steering Wheel” theme and its subsequent variations. Examples 6.1 – 6.5 are all single line permutations with a melody clearly defined by the traditional accent marking. The “Steering Wheel” is an aggressive theme, therefore performers should distinguish accented notes from those with the tenuto marking by ensuring that there is an audible increase in articulation.

As described in Chapter 2, Gronemeier introduces both the Phrygian and Locrian modes in the “Steering Wheel” theme and its variations. In the composer’s opinion, as the modes evolve they become increasingly minor and reflect his mounting emotions. The performers’ concept of tone color should follow suit by increasing in darkness.

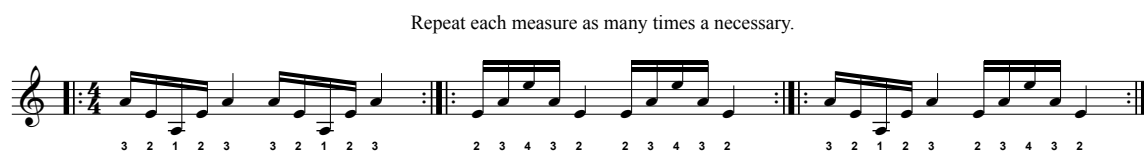
The triple group mallet permutation, employed in example 6.8, is a combination of two triple lateral strokes and may be found in differing levels of marimba literature, including Mitchell Peters’ beginner level solo *Yellow After the Rain* and Paul Smadbeck’s intermediate work *Etude No. 2*. While preparing the latter of the two compositions, Gronemeier developed a strong command of triple lateral strokes and proceeded to include the triple group permutation in several of his compositions. In *Nature Alley*, the triple group permutation is meant to be a sustaining device rather than an actual rhythm. The listener should perceive the figure as rolled, therefore the performer must ensure that the entire pitch set is equally balanced and the extremes of the pitch set not be accented.

## TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The triple group permutation as written in example 6.8 presents two primary technical considerations: absolute control of the permutation and maintaining the octave interval in both

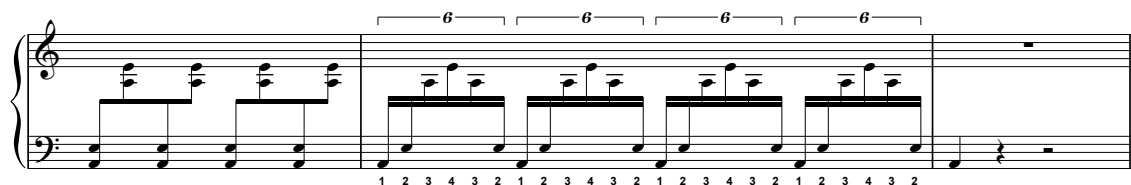
hands. To successfully perform *Nature Alley*, one must be capable of executing the triple lateral stroke at very fast tempos. The following exercises are designed to address specific technical issues associated with the triple lateral stroke and will aid the performer in developing control, and consequently speed of the stroke.

Example 6.9 allows the performer to focus on the triple note grouping of each hand individually. Proper execution of the triple lateral stroke must involve an alternating three-part wrist rotation within a single large motion initiated at the elbow. While the single large motion is in its downward trajectory, part one of the wrist rotation is executing the first note of the three note grouping and results in a prep-stroke for the execution of the second note. Part two of the wrist rotation executes the second note and concludes with a prep-stroke for the third and final note of the grouping. The third part of the wrist rotation is used to execute the final note of the grouping while the large motion is in its upward trajectory. Exercise #1 should be practiced slowly and the tempo should be increased gradually. As the tempo is increased, the performer should begin to focus awareness on the larger motion initiated at the elbow.



Example 6.9. Triple lateral stroke exercise #1.

Exercise #2 (example 6.10) is designed to establish and refine the composite hand-to-hand motion required to successfully perform triple group permutations at fast tempos. One should concentrate on establishing a fluid arm motion when performing the double vertical strokes in measure 1 of exercise #2 and maintain this motion throughout the exercise.



Example 6.10. Triple lateral stroke exercise #2.

Exercise #3 (example 6.11) addresses balance issues related to the triple group permutation. The extreme outer voices of this particular permutation, executed in the outside mallets (numbers 1 and 4), have a tendency to project more than their counterparts. This exercise allows the performer to focus on the relative balance of the inner voices while maintaining the hand-to-hand motion addressed in exercise #2. Efforts should be made to ensure that the performer's touch is consistent in all voices.



Example 6.11. Triple lateral stroke exercise #3.

As described in Chapter 5, performers may alter the position of the inside mallet (numbers 2 and/or 3) while performing extended passages requiring the use of large intervals such as the octave. When performing such passages, which do not require the immediate transition to smaller mallet intervals, the performer may utilize a “locking” technique. This technique allows for the thumb to be moved from the side of the mallet, to a position on top of

the mallet (see Photo 6.1). The benefits of the “locking” technique include the relief of tension associated with traditional thumb placement and greater leverage over the inside mallets.

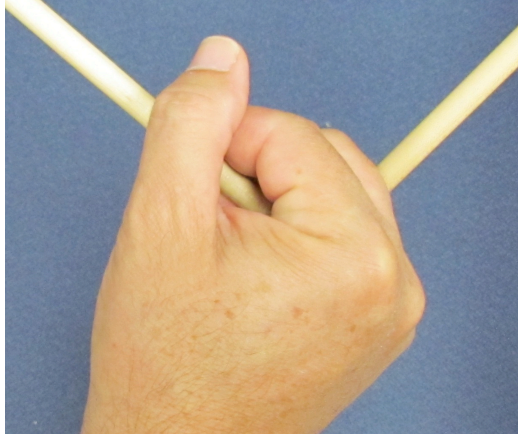


Photo 6.1. Thumb placement of the “locking” technique.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE “UNFAIR” THEME

The musical score for Example 7.1 is presented in two systems. The first system, measures 124-127, is marked *mp* (mezzo-piano). The second system, measures 128-131, is marked *sf* (mezzo-forte). The music is in 6/8 time and consists of two staves. The melody is purely rhythmic, featuring eighth and sixteenth notes. The first system shows a continuous eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a similar pattern in the left hand. The second system shows a variation in the left hand, with a more complex rhythmic pattern.

Example 7.1. “Unfair” theme: Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 124 - 131)

As stated in Chapter 2, the “Unfair” theme is unique in that it is purely rhythmic and has no intended melodic content. This rhythmic theme is the polyrhythm of 3:2, the lone variation being the 4:3 polyrhythm of measures 202 – 211 and 219 – 225. The initial statement of this theme begins in measure 124 (example 7.1). Musical statements featuring the “Unfair” theme in combination with other melodic based themes are documented in table 2. Musical and technical considerations for such statements are cross-referenced within this document.

Measure Number	Unfair Combined with:	Document cross-reference
202 – 211	Uncle Vince Part 1	pgs. 16, 26 – 27, 29 – 31
212 – 218	Uncle Vince Part 2	pgs. 32 – 33
219 – 226	Steering Wheel	pgs. 43 – 44
291 – 293	Sick	pgs. 52 – 53
358 - 370	Busy Bodies	pgs. 57 – 58
371 – 377	Uncle Vince Part 2	pgs. 14, 35 – 38
378 - 380	Steering Wheel	pgs. 43 – 44
381 – 383	Uncle Vince Part 2	no cross references

Table 2. Statements of the “Unfair” theme.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE “SICK” THEME

The “Sick” theme is described by the composer as a “sick to your stomach, woozy feeling.”<sup>1</sup> The melody of theme’s first statement is a variation of the “Uncle Vince Part 1” melody in the A-Locrian mode. The accompanying ostinato figure outlines quartal harmony moving chromatically from A to B<sup>b</sup> (example 8.1).

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<sup>1</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 13, 2015.



254 *Sadly*  $\text{♩} = 104$   
4x *Slightly Faster*

259

264 1. 2.

Example 8.1. “Sick” theme: Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 254 - 267)

As the phrase develops, the melody modulates up a perfect fourth (example 8.2) maintaining the established ostinato.

268  $\text{♩} = 132$

273 accel.

Example 8.2. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 268 - 278)

The phrase culminates with the melody composed in the interval of a perfect fourth (example 8.3) transitioning to a rhythmically augmented variation of the “Sick” theme (example 8.4).

279 *Aggressive* ♩ = 152

*f*

## MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Pacing is the primary musical consideration of the “Sick” theme. When surveying the entire musical section (measures 254 – 293, or section D referred to in table 1), one can see that both tempo and volume increase as the lengthy phrases unfold. Performers should be aware of the length of each individual phrase and must ensure that tempo and dynamics are neither over nor under estimated as the composition transitions from phrase to phrase. The left hand ostinato presented throughout section D is rather difficult to perform and if not properly executed, may result in ineffective accelerandi at the end of each musical phrase.

## TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The gradually increasing tempo in combination with the chromatic harmony of section D poses a performance issue regarding a performer’s ability to control the left hand ostinato pattern. One must establish and maintain a relaxed approach to the single alternating strokes of the ostinato at the marked of tempo ♩ = 104 to begin section D. The chromatic harmony of the ostinato requires constant mallet shifting from the lower to upper playing manuals. The performer must be cognizant of left hand positioning and ensure the left hand remain at a low profile (two to three inches above the playing manual) relative to the instrument regardless of the playing manual. Failure to realize proper hand positioning may result in an awkward physical motion, which in turn prohibits the seamless execution of the ostinato as the tempo increases.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE “BUSY BODIES” THEME

The musical score for the "Busy Bodies" theme, measures 294-302, is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 294-296) is in 7/8 time, marked *mp* and  $\text{♩} = 320$ . The second system (measures 297-299) is in 8/8 time. The third system (measures 300-302) is in 7/8 time and includes a *cresc.* marking. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-3 below the notes. Tenuto markings (horizontal lines) are placed above the notes in measures 294, 295, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, and 302, indicating sustained notes. The notation features a complex rhythmic pattern of triple and double lateral strokes in the left hand.

Example 9.1. “Busy Bodies” theme: Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 294 - 302)

The seventh theme presented in *Nature Alley*, “Busy Bodies,” symbolizes the composer’s disdain of people who were intent on advancing their own personal agenda at the time of Uncle Vince’s death.<sup>1</sup> The melody of the theme, notated by the tenuto markings in example 9.1, depicts the composer’s disbelief and budding anger concerning the behavior of these individuals. A feverous combination of triple and double lateral strokes composed in the left hand is a rendering of the conversations amongst these people.

<sup>1</sup> Dean Gronemeier interview by author, telephone, September 13, 2015.

As Gronmeier's feelings compound, the density of the melody is altered through octave doubling (example 9.2).

303  
mf

306

309 accel.

312 cresc.

Example 9.2. Gronmeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 303 - 313)

Transposing the melody a perfect fourth higher and cycling through previous variations further develops the theme (example 9.3). Large section E of *Nature Alley*, as notated in table 2.1, is comprised of the musical phrases identified in example 9.1, 9.2, and 9.3.

314 *Faster!!*

*f*

317

320

323

325 *cresc.* *rit.*

Example 9.3. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 314 - 328)

The only other presentation of the “Busy Bodies” theme is measures 358 – 362, when its melodic content, scored in the treble clef staff, is combined with the rhythmic theme “Unfair” (example 9.4).



Example 9.4. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 358 - 362)

## MUSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Rhythmic interpretation and proper execution of the composer's intended subdivisions are the main musical considerations regarding the initial statement of "Busy Bodies." An effective performance of the underlying rhythm accompanying the melody throughout section E is both physically and mentally taxing. Performers must maintain strict rhythmic interpretation of the figure composed in the left hand to properly realize the 4 and 3 note subdivisions. Each 4-note subdivision requires the execution of the triple lateral stroke (as explained in Chapter 6), while each 3-note subdivision requires the execution of a double lateral stroke. Focusing on these subdivisions, as notated in example 9.5, rather than each note individually is suggested.

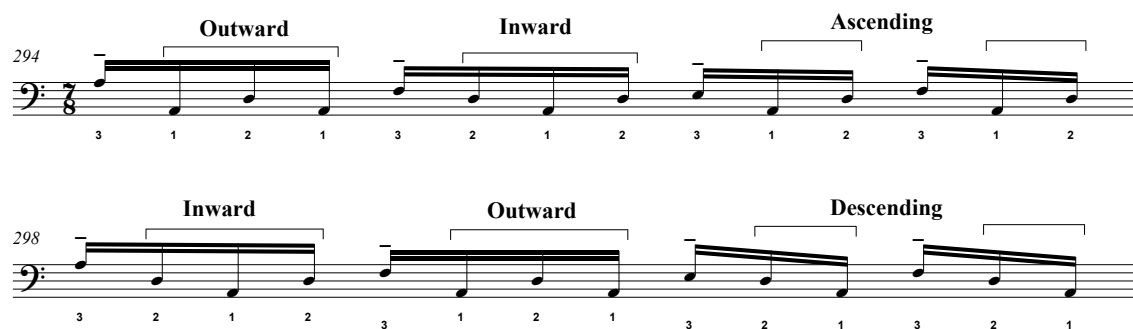


Example 9.5. 4-note and 3-note subdivisions of the "Busy Bodies" theme. Gronemeier, *Nature Alley* (ms. 294 – 295)

## TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The tempo and incessant repetition within the "Busy Bodies" theme each pose a significant challenge when performing *Nature Alley*. Mastery of triple lateral and double lateral

strokes is essential when performing this theme at the initial tempo of  $\text{♩} = 160$ , which accelerates to the marking of *Faster* indicated in measure 314 (example 9.4). One must concentrate on the inward or outward direction of each subdivision and the single large motion (defined in Chapter 6) when performing the alternating triple lateral strokes contained within each consecutive 4-note subdivision. The inward direction refers to the triple lateral stroke beginning with mallet number 2 (example 9.6). The outward direction refers to the triple lateral stroke beginning with the mallet number 1 (example 9.6). Double lateral strokes, within the 3-note subdivision, should be perceived as either ascending or descending (example 9.6). Focusing on each individual note at the marked tempo, as opposed to the direction of the double and triple lateral strokes, is ill advised.



Example 9.6. Direction of double and triple lateral strokes.



## CHAPTER 10

### CONCLUSION

Dean Gronemeier impacted the genre of solo marimba performance through the depth of technical and musical challenge he placed on the performer. At the height of his compositional output there were few pieces in the literature that required such high demands and technical mastery. Although many of his compositions have been performed worldwide none of them stands out more than *Nature Alley*. This work, no doubt his most performed and well-liked, continues to challenge performers through the musical and physical rigors required at the highest level.<sup>1</sup>

Dean Gronemeier's *Nature Alley* is a sensational work for solo marimba. Upon initial inspection, this composition may appear simple, however after thorough analysis it is apparent the composition is quite complex. The program of *Nature Alley* is brought to fruition through the composer's clever implementation of seven themes. These themes are the catalyst of the work and their development throughout the piece allows the composer to express his evolving emotions concerning the death of his Uncle Vince.

Gronemeier intertwines musical and technical elements in a manner that will challenge the advanced marimbist. *Nature Alley* encourages performers to explore musical concepts such as "leaning," pacing, and rhythmic interpretation. Marimbists must be technically proficient prior to undertaking this composition. A strong command of advanced four mallet permutations,

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Mason, D.M.A., emailed to Lonny Benoit, October 26, 2015.

various sustaining techniques, and mallet interval control are required for the successful performance of *Nature Alley*.

Nature Alley by Dean Gronemeier in my opinion represents one of the most comprehensive challenges to a performer. Technically, it requires the performer to have mastery of technique. The large interval changes in particular require a great deal of dexterity and facility on the part of the performer. Intellectually, the performer needs to always be aware of the subtle compositional changes without which the performer can become lost and the piece can become a melodic maze. Although the piece attracts performers of all levels, it really requires the focus of an advanced performer. Lastly as a programatic piece based on darker themes, a younger performer can be overwhelmed by sound and focus less on the development. The piece requires a player of mature emotional ability to balance the light with the dark. A younger performer can attain the technical skill to perform the piece, but it takes a seasoned, mature performer to truly communicate the emotion and execute the technical demands to create a performance that accurately represents the intentions of the composer. Because of the depth of this composition musically, technically and emotionally, I feel it is one of the most challenging and rewarding compositions in modern solo marimba repertoire.<sup>2</sup>

Two published versions of *Nature Alley* were reviewed in preparation of this document. After consulting audio recordings and video footage of Gronemeier performing *Nature Alley*, several engraving errors were found in both the Baker Publications and Woodbar Press Inc. publications. After consultation with Gronemeier, a revised manuscript was created by the author and given to the composer. The revised edition of *Nature Alley* can be obtained directly from Dean Gronemeier or Lonny Benoit. An errata sheet is included in Appendix I for those preparing *Nature Alley* from the Baker Publications edition.

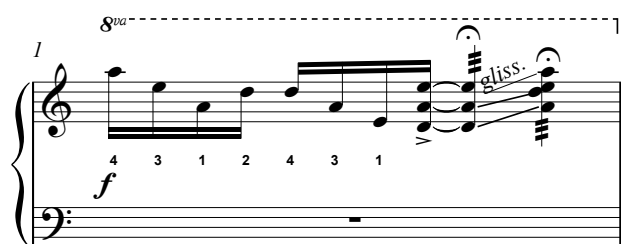
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<sup>2</sup> Frank Kumor, D.M.A., emailed to Lonny Benoit, November 2, 2015.

## APPENDIX I

### ERRATA SHEET FOR BAKER PUBLICATIONS EDITION OF *NATURE ALLEY*

1. Measure 1: add glissando between counts 3 and 4.



2. Measure 91: count 2 is E<sup>b</sup>.



3. Measures 124 – 131: staves should be flipped (right hand straight 8<sup>th</sup> notes/left hand dotted 8<sup>th</sup> notes).

124 8<sup>va</sup> 8<sup>va</sup> mp

4. Measure 316: left hand ostinato should be reversed.

5. Measure 327: change  $\circ$  to  $\text{♩}$  in bass clef.

327 One-handed roll

6. Measure 369: counts 4, 5 and 6 of treble clef staff should be one-handed roll.



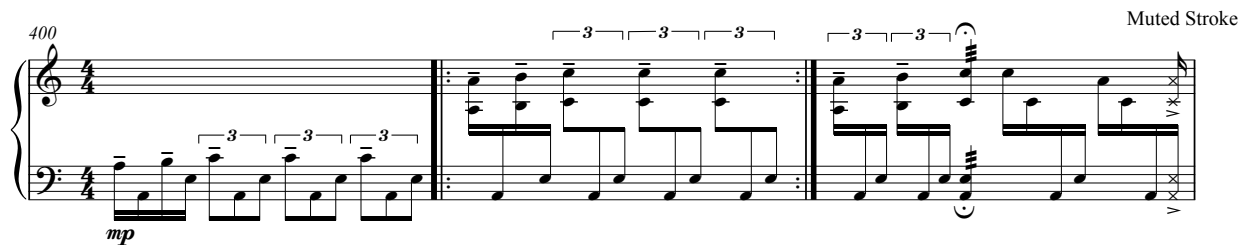
7. Measure 371: entire measure of treble clef staff should be one-handed roll.



8. Measure 375 - 77: left hand ostinato notes should outline d minor chord.



9. Measures 400 – end: should be:



## APPENDIX II

### LIST OF COMPOSITIONS BY DEAN GRONEMEIER

#### FOUR-MALLET WORKS FOR SOLO MARIMBA

*Nature Alley* – Grone Publications (1992)\*<sup>1</sup>

*Population: I Too Many* – Grone Publications (1994)\*

- I. The Welcome Party
- II. Oh, Up and Down....
- III. But What If???

*Sweet Death* – Grone Publications (1994)\*

- I. The Earthly Matter
- II. The Heavenly Matter

*Sweet Roselle* – Grone Publications (1993)\*

- I. Roselle Ragman
- II. Lady Roselle
- III. Changes

*The Walk for All Mankind* – Grone Publications (1994)\*

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<sup>1</sup> Asterisk denotes compositions that were initially published by M. Baker Publications or Baker Publications. Mike Baker sold Dean Gronemeier the rights to Gronemeier's music circa 2002. For a brief time Woodbar Press Inc. published Gronemeier's compositions. As of 2012, all of Gronemeier's compositions are published by Grone Publications.

*Unchosen Path* – Grone Publications (1994)\*

- I. The Fight
- II. The Victory

*Son of A Different God* – unpublished manuscript

- I. Inner Turmoil
- II. Meandering Search
- III. Subsequent Crossroads

#### SIX-MALLET WORKS FOR SOLO MARIMBA

*2HT2HDL* – Grone Publications (1996)

1. Game Risk
2. Trouble in Somewhere
3. Single Man's Aggression

*Coming Home* – Grone Publications (1997)

*Five Short Works for Solo Marimba* – Grone Publications (1994)\*

*Genesis*  
*Cloud Mist*  
*Distinctive Personality*  
*Which Hunt*  
*Rocatta*

*Tied By Red* – Grone Publications (1995)

*Gates Pass* – unpublished manuscript

#### WORKS FOR PERCUSSION ENSMEBLE FEATURING SOLO MARIMBA

*115<sup>th</sup> Psalm* – unpublished manuscript, available upon request from Dean Gronemeier (1996).

Instrumentation:  
Solo Marimba (four- and six-mallets)  
Baritone Voice  
Percussion Ensemble of 7 players.

*Creation* – Grone Publications (1993) \*

Instrumentation:

Solo Marimba

Narrator

Percussion Ensemble of 7 players.



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## CURRICULUM VITAE

Graduate College  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Lonny James Benoit

### Home Address:

5705 E. Dietrich Loop  
Lake Charles, LA 70605

### Degrees:

Bachelor of Music, 1999  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Master of Music, 2001  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Document Title: A Performer's Guide to Dean Gronemeier's *Nature Alley*

### Examination Committee:

Chairperson, Dean Gronemeier, D.M.A., J.D.  
Committee Member, Timothy Jones, D.M.A.  
Committee Member, Anthony LaBounty, M.S.  
Committee Member, Janis McKay, D.M.A.  
Graduate Faculty Representative, Michael Tylo, M.F.A.