

Etudes for Marimba: An Assessment of Intermediate and Advanced Techniques with
Four New Works

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Abstract

Over the past century, the marimba has experienced rapid growth. From its construction, performance practices, and technical approach, the instrument has been elevated to a well-respected instrument. Since the development of the five-octave marimba in the early 1980's, literature for the marimba has expanded exponentially. Through this expansion, works for the beginning and advanced performer has become widely available. However, a gap in literature exists within intermediate to intermediate-advanced range. Although it is of utmost importance for the progressing performer, this stepping stone literature can be difficult to find. In response, I have written my book, *Etudes for Marimba: Four New Works for the Advancing Marimbist*. This book will serve to fill this observed gap in the repertoire. The four etudes found within guide the performer from intermediate techniques and performance practices through those found just prior to advanced. Each etude is accompanied by performance tips, program notes, and exercises specifically curated for the works. This document details the criteria encompassing intermediate and advanced techniques, and how the book of four etudes fills the space between.

I. Introduction & Brief History of the Marimba

As a solo instrument recognized by the music community at large, the modern, western marimba is still in a phase of growth with its contemporaries in the string, brass and woodwind instrument families, the marimba has just begun to realize its full potential both musically and technically. Several key factors have contributed to this reality. While the marimba's history can be traced back several hundred years across many regions such as West Africa, Central America, South America and Mexico, the modern, western version found in concert halls today has only been popularized within the past one hundred years.

The five-octave octave marimba was not developed by the Yamaha Corporation until 1983 and was premiered at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention in 1984.¹ Therefore, it is no surprise that literature written for the solo marimba is greatly limited as compared to literature written for other instruments in the western, classical music field. As with any instrument within the western classical music field, literature is a driving force behind technical expansion. Thus, as our literature expands, so do the definitions for techniques categorized as beginning, intermediate and advanced. Often, definitions for beginning and advanced techniques are abundantly clear as they are on the outer extremes of ability. Definitions for intermediate techniques tend to exist in ambiguity ranging from “just after beginner” to “just before virtuoso.”

This paper seeks to more clearly define the specifications for intermediate techniques. Additionally, because intermediate is ever-approaching advanced, it is

¹ Rebecca Kite, “History of the Five-Octave Marimba,” Yamaha Music USA, November 16, 2021, <https://hub.yamaha.com/drums/d-history/history-of-the-five-octave-marimba/>.

pertinent to have a clear understanding of the advanced category as well to understand when and how a player begins to cross the threshold from intermediate into this level of technique and performance. Finally, this paper will exemplify how the four works found within my book, *Etudes for Marimba: Four New Works for the Advancing Marimbist*, provide a pathway to advanced techniques from intermediate techniques for the developing marimbist. This focused genre of literature is designed to challenge the student with techniques that appear in advanced literature, while providing ample space for the student to perform within familiar, comfortable intermediate language and technical demands.

II. Intermediate Techniques

As the marimba has evolved, many prominent composers have written significant, virtuosic works that have become standard repertoire in the field. However, due to an eager desire to produce virtuosic literature, a void in material suited for the developing or intermediate marimbist has been lacking. In her book, “Intermediate Master Works for Marimba, Vol. 1,” Nancy Zeltsman addresses the staggering lack of content available for the intermediate marimbist. On the status of available repertoire Zeltsman writes, “Most of the substantial solo and chamber works for marimba are extremely difficult—technically and musically—and predominantly in a contemporary musical language. They may include complex rhythms, unfamiliar elements and instructions in the score, and rapidly changing notes.”² As a developing marimbist attempts to digest this category of literature, several negative consequences may occur. The student may experience frustration and lose interest in the solo or instrument all together. Additionally, and perhaps more dangerous, the student may develop poor habits or become technically stunted as a marimbist. Without first consuming and processing the necessary intermediate, stepping-stone-literature, the student may fail to progress to advanced technical abilities all together. A similar issue arises when literature fails to provide technical challenges that propel students towards advanced literature. Zeltsman continues in her book:

Meanwhile, off in another corner, are many catchy, pattern-based compositions comprised of simple, repetitive tunes and chord structures, usually, in steady, even rhythm. They sound completely natural on the marimba, and some are wonderful works—even cornerstones of the repertoire. Percussionists are drawn

² Nancy Zeltsman, *Intermediate Masterworks for Marimba*, vol. 1 (Glendale, New York: Edition Peters, 2010), vi.

to their “grooves.” Many students grow up on the latter. It gets their hands moving and builds coordination. It’s fun. But such an exclusive diet limits growth as a musician, and it’s difficult to find your way from the latter to the former.³

While this version of early-intermediate literature is a piece of the puzzle, there is an additional level of intermediate literature necessary to propel students into advanced content. This version of catchy, pattern-based music is a useful tool in the development of a young player. These pieces build necessary skillsets for the beginning marimbist such as independent strokes, double-vertical strokes, scalar patterns, rhythmic understanding, tone production, alternating independent strokes, harmonic understanding, blend, and voicing to name a few. While these works can receive criticism, I believe they are necessary to whet the appetite for future literature and bolster foundational abilities in young performers.

The question then stands—what criteria encompasses intermediate techniques? By defining the technical aspects of marimba playing, one can begin to surmise the defining elements. As previously stated, intermediate literature exists on a spectrum. This ranges from post-beginner or, “just beyond beginning techniques and musicality,” to pre-advanced or, “just prior to mastering advanced techniques and musicality.” Throughout this document, I will explore, or intermediate-advanced marimba literature. I will explore those techniques that exist in the middle of the bell-curve of intermediate all the way through those found prior to techniques in advanced literature.

Zeltsman’s & Jesselson’s Definition

Nancy Zeltsman comments on defining intermediate, “In my experience, an intermediate player can conquer an isolated challenge (like a big reach or a complex

³ Ibid, vi.

rhythm), but not a series of tasks, one after another, that are challenging in a lot of different ways. My ideal is for students to feel comfortably challenged without being discouraged.”⁴ Robert Jesselson, a cellist, describes the intermediate student, “He or she is probably not very clear-thinking about what he or she is doing technically and has not been exposed to the kind of self-discipline required for playing on a higher level.”⁵ These two descriptions of the intermediate musicians will serve as the foundation for the more carefully defined descriptions to come. In the next section I will delve into definitions of intermediate techniques such as rapid isolated independent strokes, rapid alternating-independent strokes, rapid double-vertical strokes, quick, large interval changes, octaves, double-lateral strokes and rolls. I will provide examples from Eric Sammut’s *Four Rotations* to underscore these techniques as found in the current, popular intermediate repertoire.

Independent Strokes

Independent strokes and alternating independent strokes are foundational techniques for four mallet marimba playing. These techniques are found in the most basic literature and method books. As a player moves into intermediate literature, these techniques remain the same on a fundamental level, but are paired with new, more challenging demands. An independent stroke occurs when one of two mallets held in the right or left hand strikes a bar while the other mallet remains still. Alternating independent strokes follow their title closely. These strokes occur when one mallet strikes the bar followed by the other. For example, mallet 3 strikes, then mallet 4.

⁴ Ibid, vii.

⁵ Robert Jesselson, “A Sequential Approach for the Intermediate Cellist (and Other String Players!),” *American String Teacher* 63, no. 2 (May 1, 2013): pp. 30-33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000313131306300206>.

Rapid Execution, Large Leaps, & Quick Shifts

As new demands are paired with independent and alternating independent strokes, these techniques move from the beginner category to intermediate. These demands include and quick shifts from note to note, interval changes within the hands, speed of execution, and combination of stroke types. (i.e. double-vertical, double-stops, laterals, etc.) The opening measure of Eric Sammut's *Rotation 4* exemplifies many of these demands. Examples 1 and 2 below highlight the rapid speed of execution and large leaps:

Example 1 – Rapid Execution

Example 2 – Large Leaps, Quick Shifts

As can be seen in Example 1, rapid alternating independent strokes with only a sixteenth note of space at 88 bpm are required throughout the opening measure between mallet 1 and 2 as well as mallet 3 and 4. The term “rapid” is subjective to each performer. With this said, each should have their own defined tempo and rhythm at which interval changes feel comfortable and manageable, and a tempo and rhythm at which interval changes feel challenging and difficult. Additionally, as seen in Example 2, the opening measure requires a large leap and quick shift in mallet 2 from C4 to G4 and then Ab3 to G4.

Combined Stroke Types & Interval Changes

Examples 3 and 4 below highlight the combination of stroke types, in this case alternating independent strokes with double-stops, and interval changes within the right hand between mallet 3 and 4:

Example 3 – Combined Stroke Types

Example 4 – Interval Changes

Example 3 demonstrates the combination of alternating independent strokes with double stops, when mallet 4 and mallet two strike at the same time. Example 4 shows the right hand shifting from a major third to a perfect fourth within the space of an eighth note. These demands are commonly found within intermediate literature. Although many demands are required of the performer, the subsequent measures are repetitive and contain much of the same content. This alleviates the performer from mastering many different challenges one after another. The size of the interval change is directly related to ease of execution. Small intervals to big intervals, and vice versa, are more challenging than interval changes a half step or whole step apart.

Rapid Interval Changes

Throughout intermediate literature interval changes from a major second to a major sixth are commonly found. Typically, the interval changes would not move larger than a fourth in a short amount of time. The opening measure of Eric Sammut's *Rotation 2* utilizes rapid interval changes in the left hand. Examples 5 below highlights each interval change.

Example 5 – Rapid Interval Changes

Mallets 1 and 2 begin at perfect fifth followed by a minor second, minor third, perfect fourth and then returning to a perfect fifth. Between each interval change, there is merely one sixteenth note of space at 96BPM requiring a quick and efficient shift of intervals. While the demand on the left hand is high, it should be noted that the demand on the right hand is low. Mallets 3 and 4 rest above the same region of the marimba and have little interval-change demand. Additionally, the subsequent measures contain similar material alleviating the mental demand on the performer. These factors combine to create the perfect environment for growth for the advancing intermediate marimbist.

Octaves

As time has progressed, and techniques for the marimba have evolved, octaves have become more commonplace in early literature. Octaves present challenges in many ways for young performers. Physically, an octave hold can be more taxing on the hands. Each grip requires a slightly new approach to an octave hold as compared with smaller intervals. Thus, stamina can be difficult when performing octaves throughout long passages. Visually, the top note of an octave may be out of the direct line of sight of the performer creating note-accuracy issues. As the bars of a marimba are graduated, the distance of an interval must change depending on the range they are performed in. This can be a tricky nuance that is hard to master as a young player. Measure 49 to the end of Eric Sammut's *Rotation 2* features octaves. The octaves sit within the middle range of the

instrument creating less demand on the nuanced spacing of the interval. Example 6, shown below, presents measure 49-51 of this passage:

Example 6 – Octaves

Throughout this passage, melodic content found previously in a singular mallet is found in octaves. While this is effective musically, it is also another instance of providing a smooth pathway into a challenging technique for a young performer. Rather than having to learn new music along with a new technique, the performer can focus solely on technical proficiency in light of the familiar notes.

Double & Triple Lateral Strokes

Another intermediate technique formerly reserved for advanced literature is laterals. Laterals occur within one hand between two mallets; either mallets 1 and 2, or mallets 3 and 4. Laterals function in a similar way to alternating independent strokes. However, physically, they require unique execution. The performer must decide at which tempo and rhythm to switch from alternating independent strokes to laterals. Laterals can contain a high number of strokes. However, it is common to find laterals in groupings of two, referred to as double laterals, or three, referred to as triple laterals. Double laterals are executed as a double vertical stroke combined with the roll of the wrist either low-to-high or high-to-low. Triple laterals and beyond are executed similarly at the stroke's initiation, then utilize quick-twitch muscles to continue an even, rapid, alternation between the two mallets. (Laterals that are required to be executed for a lengthy period in

a work are considered an advanced technique. However, an isolated measure or two of laterals, either double or triple, are manageable for the intermediate performer) One-handed rolls fit into as similar category as laterals, and are liable seen in literature labeled as intermediate. I believe one-handed rolls exist just outside the realm of intermediate techniques and therefore will not cover them in this section.

Eric Sammut's *Rotation 1* contains instances of both double lateral and triple lateral strokes. Example 7 below presents the final measure of *Rotation 1* which features double laterals in the right hand moving from mallet 3 to mallet 4:

Example 7 – Double Lateral Strokes

While this passage requires a strong level of proficiency, there are several elements that make this appropriate for the intermediate performer. First, the length of passage is quite short; only one measure in length. Second, the musical ideas are in groupings of six sequenced down by octave alleviating the performer of complicated note-learning. Last, the hand performing the laterals, the right hand, is holding either a P4 or P5 interval avoiding any large interval changes that could further complicate the passage. Because of these factors, the performer can focus on the technique at hand: double laterals. Example 8 below shows Sammut's use of triple laterals in *Rotation 1*:

Example 8 – Triple Lateral Strokes

In this passage, once again, a challenging technique is met with simpler surrounding material. While the triple laterals post a test to the intermediate performer, the pitches do not change, and the intervals held are a comfortable P4 and P5.

Rapid Double Vertical Strokes

As with independent strokes, double vertical strokes are essential building blocks for four mallet technique. In one hand, either right or left, both mallets strike the keyboard at precisely the same time. Furthermore, like other foundational techniques, when double vertical strokes are paired with additional demands such as large interval changes, rapid repetition, or large leaps, this technique moves from the beginner category to intermediate. Emmanuel Sèjourné's marimba solo *Katamiya* features rapid double vertical strokes. Once again, this term may be subjective based on each performer's ability. However, it is reasonable to assume that a sixteenth note space at 112BPM, as observed in *Katamiya*, qualifies as rapid. Sèjourné avoids rapid double vertical strokes appearing more than two at a time. As rapid double vertical strokes appear three or more times, the technique begins to move into the intermediate-advanced to advanced category. Example 9 below demonstrates rapid double vertical strokes in the right hand. Generally, the hand remains static on two pitches. When the hand does deviate, the interval shift is manageable, moving from a M2 to a P4 and then back to a M2:

Example 9 – Rapid Double Vertical Strokes

The image shows a musical score for a marimba, specifically Example 9. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff (right hand) and a bass clef staff (left hand). The right hand part features rapid double vertical strokes, indicated by vertical lines with dots above them, occurring in pairs. The left hand part provides a steady accompaniment with eighth notes. The score is marked with a dynamic of *pp* (pianissimo) and a *p* (piano) dynamic. The tempo is 112 BPM. The notation includes a measure number '5' at the beginning of the first measure.

Example 10 demonstrates rapid double vertical strokes paired with leaps and interval changes. While neither the leaps nor the interval change are particularly large, the combination of demands plants this passage, and piece, firmly in the intermediate category:

Example 10 – Rapid Double Vertical Strokes, Leaps, Interval Changes



Rolls

Marimba rolls are often presented as a beginning technique for four mallet marimba performance. I believe this is a mislabeling of the technique. Rolls at their most basic level are either rapid independent stroke, rapid double vertical strokes, or rapid laterals if a Musser roll or ripple roll is required. Each of these techniques, two of which have been covered in this document, rest firmly within the intermediate context of performance. Most often rolls in intermediate literature appear as rapid double vertical strokes alternating between both hands with all four mallets engaged. Rolls tend to be related to sustained sounds as heard in wind instruments or voices. I believe rolls are more accurately described as tremolo or vibrato as heard on wind instruments, stringed instruments, and voice. Roll speed, and variation of that speed, can emulate vibrato or tremolo and use this for expression. Nancy Zeltsman, in her book *Four Mallet Marimba Playing: An Approach for All Levels*, details this idea:

I want to you get you thinking about the expressive possibilities inherent in rolls. I like to imagine that rolls are my *vibrato*. Despite the fact that vibrato (applied to voice or any wind or string instruments) technically refers to a wavering of pitch, I think we can emulate the texture and effect of vibrato, even though we are

playing the same pitch. One way to achieve this is by varying the speed of our rolls—as we would if we were singing.⁶

An excellent roll requires several elements. First the double vertical strokes between the hands must play flat, or both mallets must strike at the same time. Next, the roll speed between the hands must be even. There cannot be a disjointed “gallop” between the hands. In other words, the roll must be rhythmically even, regardless of the speeding up or slowing down of the roll speed. Last, the volume of the strokes between the hands must be similar. For voicing purposes, it is not necessary to be the same volume. However, the further apart the volumes are, the less illusion of sustain and vibrato is created. Emmanuel Sèjourné’s *Katamiya* opens with rolls featured within a chorale setting. Example 11 below presents an excerpt of the chorale:

Example 11 – Rolls Featured in Chorale



It should be noted that although rolls can be difficult to master, the excerpt seen in Example 11 contains few interval changes or large leaps. Additionally, this chorale is devoid of upper-manual pitches and resides solely on upper-manual keys. Once again, a challenging technique is presented within familiar, manageable language and techniques.

⁶ Nancy Zeltsman, *Four-Mallet Marimba Playing: A Musical Approach for All Levels* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2003).

III. Advanced Techniques

In addition to intermediate techniques, defining advanced techniques is of utmost importance. Without a clear understanding of the threshold between intermediate and advanced, the developing player can be lost in the tumult of an advanced work before obtaining the skillsets for success. While it would be nearly impossible to cover every element of advanced literature, this section will cover those techniques that are specifically reserved for advanced performance. The advanced player should have a mastery of intermediate techniques and should be ready to execute them in any order, paired with any number of additional demands, without reprieve. Additionally, the advanced player should have a mastery of techniques beyond the intermediate level. These techniques include double and triple laterals without break covering large portions of the marimba, large and quick leaps, perpetual motion without break and independent, contrasting motion between the hands. Furthermore, techniques within the intermediate category move into the intermediate advanced category and/or the advanced category when met with specific, additional demands. It is pertinent to recall Nancy Zeltsman's definition of intermediate as advanced techniques are highlighted. An intermediate performer can handle an isolated challenge, while an advanced performer will tackle several challenges at once. To highlight these techniques, I will provide examples from several prominent advanced solos in the modern marimba repertoire: *Merlin* by Andrew Thomas, *Velocities* by Joseph Schwantner, *Etude in C# Minor* by Casey Cangelosi and *Northern Lights* by Eric Ewazen. I will draw comparisons to techniques found within intermediate literature my etudes while describing the elements that separate intermediate techniques from advanced.

Length of Repertoire

An often-overlooked element of advanced repertoire is the sheer length of the works. New players may develop physical stamina early on, but may not yet possess the mental stamina to successfully execute a work that is eight, ten, twelve minutes long, or more. The advanced performer must possess both physical and mental stamina. On the work *Velocities* Mai Tadokoro, in his dissertation, writes, “One of the challenges in this piece is the physical and mental endurance it demands. As the title, *Velocities*, and subtitle, *Moto Perpetuo* (Perpetual Motion) suggest, this piece consists of constant sixteenth notes at a fast tempo without any rests. Not only is it technically difficult, it is physically and mentally exhausting.”⁷ In addition to perpetual motion without breaks, *Velocities* frequently travels the distance of the marimba in a short amount of time. *Velocities*, when performed at the written tempo of 120BPM, runs just over eight minutes. *Merlin*, when both movements are performed, runs over ten minutes. Dr. John Parks, professor of percussion at Florida State University commented on the preparation required to perform *Merlin*, “It takes so long to learn it, and you have to learn it so deeply, that it took me a year to get the work ready to perform.”⁸

Large Leaps & Widespread Hand Positioning

Large leaps and wide intervals between the hands, greater than a P5, are found frequently throughout advanced literature. This requires the performer to have a mastery of vision of the instrument as well as fine-tuned kinesthetic awareness. This skillset appears throughout both *Merlin* and *Velocities*. As seen in Example 12 below from

⁷ Mai Tadokoro, “Preparation Strategies in Percussion for the Music of J. S. Bach, Joseph Schwanter, and Iannis Xenakis” (dissertation, University of Kansas, 2014), p. 31.

⁸ Matthew Richards (California State University, Northridge, 2014), p. 17.

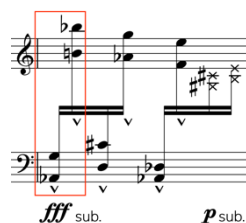
Merlin, the performer must span half the length of the marimba rapidly, moving from D5 to the F#2 below it.

Example 12 – Large Leap in Merlin



Similarly, in *Velocities*, the performer must execute fast moving rapid double stops at a widespread interval. This places the top and bottom note over three octaves apart. The performer is then required to move quickly to new pitches only slightly closer together than the previous. Example 13 highlights this difficult measure:

Example 13 – Widespread Hand Positioning in Velocities



While the previous two examples are isolated moments from each work, these two solos present these challenges frequently throughout. It is important to recall that intermediate repertoire may present similar technical challenges. However, they will be presented in isolated moments, and surrounded by familiar and comfortable material.

Rapid Octaves

Octaves, as mentioned previously, present several challenges. In advanced literature, it is common to find octaves presented in rapid succession, covering large portions of the marimba, and performed between the upper and lower manuals. *Merlin* contains arguably the most famously challenging passage of octaves in advanced

literature. First the passage, measures 90 and 91, is presented as octaves singular octaves performed between the inner mallets, mallets 2 and 3. Already, this is a high level of difficulty as the previously stated tempo and sixteenth note rhythms create a high demand physically. Example 14 presents this passage:

Example 14 – Rapid Octaves, Inner Mallets



Shortly thereafter, at measures 94 through 96, a similar demand is observed. However, this passage includes the addition of an octave in the right hand paired with the octave between the inner mallets. This presents immense accuracy and stamina challenges.

Example 15 presents this excerpt:

Example 15 – Multiple, Rapid Octaves, Inner Mallets & R.H. Octave

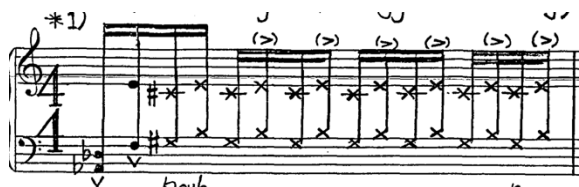


Extended Techniques

The use of extended techniques is typically reserved for advanced literature. Performers who are new to the instrument must focus on fundamental techniques and demand before attempting techniques designed to create timbres and textures outside of the standard marimba paradigm. One of the earliest, and best examples can be found throughout Schwantner's *Velocities*. The performer begins the work striking the bars as usual with the heads of the mallets. Soon after the performer strikes the keys with shafts of the mallets creating a thin "tick" sound from the bars. This requires the performer to

lower their body to the instrument to allow the ability to perform double vertical strokes on separate manuals with the shaft of the mallets. Example 16 presents this passage of music from the opening measure of *Velocities*. Example 17 is an example of a performer, Doug Perry, executing this technique:

Example 16 – Mallet Shafts



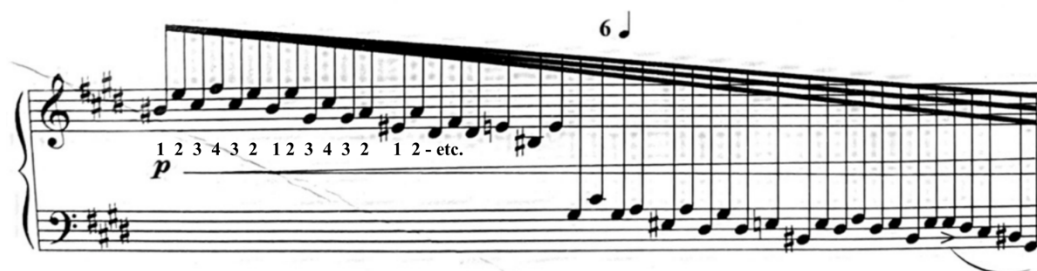
Example 17 – Doug Perry



Advanced Triple Lateral Strokes

As discussed previously, double and triple laterals can be found in isolated moments throughout intermediate literature. Throughout advanced repertoire, each can be found in lengthy passages paired with motion up and down the instrument and interval changes. A quintessential example of this is found in the opening section of Casey Cangelosi's *Etude in C# Minor* shown in Example 18 below:

Example 18 – Advanced Triple Lateral Strokes



As can be seen, the passage covers several octaves of the marimba, increases in rhythmic density, and contains interval changes in both hands. An advanced player would be required to negotiate each of these elements while executing the triple lateral stroke.

One-Handed Rolls

It is my belief that one-handed rolls should be reserved for advanced literature. However, it is possible to fathom this technique appearing in intermediate or intermediate-advanced literature if it is isolated and without additional challenges. Frequently, in advanced literature, one-handed rolls appear with several additional demands. The performer may be required to move from one pair of notes to another. They may be required to perform the roll in octaves. Or, they could be required to performed additional material with the other hand. In Eric Ewazen's *Northern Lights* these demands are required of the performer throughout measures 140 to 152. Example 19 provides an excerpt of this passage:

Example 19 – One-handed rolls with additional demands

The performer is required to roll in octaves in the right hand while performing rhythmically complex lines with the left. While this is happening, the performer moves between pitches in the right hand while continuing to roll.

IV. Etudes for Marimba

The four etudes found with my book, *Etudes for Marimba: Four New Works for the Advancing Marimbist*, are designed to provide a pathway to literature such as this. The techniques I will be detailing include octaves, double-laterals, perpetual motion, widespread hand positioning, rapid and perpetual double vertical strokes, rolls, contrary motion and hand-to-hand independence. One of the main obstacles to advanced literature for the young player is the use of contemporary, sometimes atonal, compositional language. Players progressing through their music career may not yet have developed a pallet for such works. The four etudes I have written contain language that is tonal, easily digestible, and easy to analyze for the young player. Moreover, the length of my etudes ranges from three and a half minutes to four and a half minutes, providing a manageable volume of content for the advancing intermediate performer. This portion of the document will provide examples from each of the four etudes describing the technical concepts covered. I will draw comparisons to the intermediate etudes, the *Four Rotations* and *Katamiya*, as well as the advanced solos, *Velocities*, *Merlin*, and *Etude in C# Minor*, to the four etudes I have written.

Etude in Eb Major

The etudes found in the book are progressive in difficulty. The first etude found within the book, *Etude in Eb Major*, is the nearest to intermediate-level techniques and performance practices. The etude draws influence from works and composers that influenced me as a young player. Solos such as *Land* by Takatsugu Muramatsu and *Polaris* by Mark Ford sparked my interest in the instrument. The etude is written for a 4.3-octave marimba for two reasons. The availability of five-octave marimbas is scarce

for young players. 4.3-octave marimbas are still the most commonly found instruments in public schools. Additionally, the extra range of a five-octave marimba can present a higher level of difficulty as it presents a greater distance to cover. This etude is meant to be harmonically beautiful and technically pattern based. The techniques addressed in this etude are rapid independent strokes, perpetual motion, widespread hand positioning, and rolls.

Independent Strokes

Independent strokes comprise much of *Etude in Eb Major*. They are presented with varying levels of difficulty throughout. The “A” section of the piece contains manageable independent strokes with ample amounts of space between phrases for the performer to regroup mentally and physically. The opening measure of the work contains independent strokes within an EbM7 chord arpeggiated in an ascending line. This measure covers the span of the marimba and can be challenging for the young performer. It is designed to be executed with the hands largely remaining on one manual for the entirety of the run. The left hand remains on the upper manual while the right hand remains on the lower manual. Example 20 shows the opening measure with the suggested sticking for this split-manual approach:

Example 20 – Independent Strokes, Split Manuals, Quick Shifts

The musical notation for Example 20 is presented in a grand staff with two systems. The top system is in treble clef (upper manual) and the bottom system is in bass clef (lower manual). The key signature has two flats (Eb major) and the time signature is 6/4. The tempo is marked 'Poco Rubato' with a quarter note equal to 86 (♩ = 86). The piece begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The notation shows an arpeggiated EbM7 chord in the upper manual, with notes ascending from Eb4 to G5. The lower manual plays a series of eighth notes, with a dynamic marking of *mf* and a final *p* dynamic. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4 below the notes. A large slur covers the entire measure, indicating a continuous run.

As can be seen in Example 20, this opening measure is much more manageable with the proper approach and sticking. Like examples from Sammut’s *Four Rotations*, this

measure requires quick shifts from note to note as the entirety of the instrument is covered. Generally, the performer can hold a manageable fourth or fifth interval in each hand throughout this run. The proceeding measures present comfortable material for the performers. This passage, along with much of the “A” section of the etude, would fall within the intermediate category while presenting achievable challenges.

In the “B” section of *Etude in Eb Major*, rapid alternating independent strokes are utilized in the context of perpetual motion. This section, marked as “a little faster,” presents a physical challenge to the performer with rapid independent strokes. Perpetual motion presents a physical and mental stamina challenge as well with constant sixteenth notes being performed for thirty-eight measures until returning to the initial, slower tempo. Throughout the section, the left hand is in motion consistently, while the right hand moves from a static position to in motion. The harmony typically changes every two measures, with the hands rarely traveling more than an octave throughout. While perpetual motion presents challenges, the localized positioning of the hands provides comfort visually and physically. This differs from perpetual motion as observed in *Velocities* where the performer must travel great distances of the instrument without reprieve for the entirety of the work. This “B” section introduces this advanced demand while offering the security of comfortable surroundings. Example 21 presents an excerpt of this passage:

Example 21 – Rapid Independent Strokes, Perpetual Motion

38

The musical score for Example 21 is presented in a grand staff with two systems. The first system contains measures 1 and 2, and the second system contains measures 3 and 4. The key signature is two flats (Bb and Eb), and the time signature is 4/4. The right hand (treble clef) plays a continuous stream of sixteenth notes, while the left hand (bass clef) plays eighth notes. The dynamics are marked *mf* (mezzo-forte). The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the fourth measure.

Widespread Hand Positioning

Widespread hand positioning, as aforementioned, is typically avoided in intermediate literature. As previously observed in *Merlin* and *Velocities*, this technique presents challenges physically and visually. *Etude in Eb Major* presents this challenge in a single, isolated moment at the return of the “A” section. The reach is from Bb2 to Bb4 in consecutive sixteenth notes at 86BPM. Example 22 presents this widespread hand position:

Example 22 – Wide Spread Hand Positioning



Although executing this at a high level may venture into advanced abilities, this demand only occurs twice throughout the etude. Additionally, as expected, the surrounding material is familiar and attainable.

Rolls, Chorale

Etude in Eb Major ends with a chorale. As observed within *Katamiya*, chorales and rolls can appear often within intermediate literature. *Katamiya* featured few interval changes with small leaps and no pitches outside of the lower manual. Chorales can quickly move past the intermediate difficulty when one or two outside factors are involved. The entirety of the first movement of *Merlin* is written as a chorale. The length of the chorale combined with large intervals, large leaps, and widespread hand positioning creates advanced demand. The chorale seen at the end of *Etude in Eb Major* falls somewhere in between the chorales in *Katamiya* and *Merlin*. Intervals remain manageable, never appearing wider than a M6 interval and the chorale length is short

serving as a tag ending to the primary content of the etude. The chorale does contain mixed manuals, quick shifts, and interval changes that bring an additional level of difficulty as compared to *Katamiya*. Example 23 below shows some of the challenges presented throughout the chorale:

Example 23 – Chorale: Mixed Manuals, Quick Shifts, Quick Interval Change

Etude in C Major

The next etude found within the book, *Etude in C Major*. While this etude is more challenging than *Etude in Eb Major*, the techniques covered throughout are more focused. This etude draws influence from Keiko Abe’s *Memories of the Seashore*, the first solo for five-octave marimba that I learned, as well as Claire Omar Musser’s *Etude in C Major*. The techniques found within this etude are alternating independent strokes, rapid double vertical strokes, and octaves. The appearance of octaves and the context in which they are presented propel this etude into the next level of difficulty. Additionally, the independent motion and opposing motion between the hands present added challenges.

Independent Strokes

The main idea presented throughout the “A” and “A” sections of *Etude in C Major* is alternating independent strokes in the right hand with ascending scalar patterns and descending thirds in the left hand. The right hand remains static over M3 and m3

intervals affording the performer the opportunity to apply all focus to the left-hand demands. Example 24 shows the opening of the etude that contains this idea:

Example 24 – Static Alternating Independent Strokes in Thirds, Left Hand in Motion



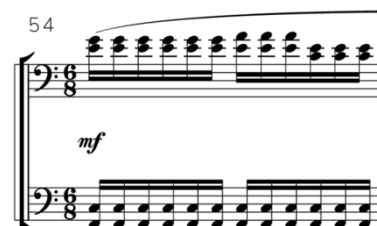
Double Vertical Strokes

The “B” section of *Etude in C Major* features double vertical strokes. The opening of this section provides space between each instance of this technique. At measure 53, the tempo increases to 100 BPM. In addition, double vertical strokes are performed without reprieve for several measures at a time. These instances of rapid double vertical strokes create physical demand on the performer. These rapid double vertical strokes are performed in tandem with opposing motions in the hands. The combination of this technique with the added demand of opposing motion moves this passage outside of the intermediate realm and closer to the advanced level of playing. Example 25 below shows opposing motions that lead into rapid double vertical strokes present in Example 26 below:

Example 25 – Opposing Motion



Example 26 – Double Vertical Strokes



Octaves

Octaves appear in intermediate literature as previously observed in *Rotation 2*.

The “A” section of *Etude in C Major* presents octaves in much the same way. Material from the “A” section is repeated. However, rather than alternating independent strokes, these same pitches are performed in octaves in the right hand. This same presentation of octave material—single pitch, then octave—can be seen throughout Sammut’s *Four Rotations*. Example 27 shows this presentation of octaves in the intermediate paradigm:

Example 27 – Octaves Built on Previous Material

The final presentation of octaves occurs three measures from the end of the etude. It is here that the octaves are met with increased demand. The right hand performs octaves in an ascending chromatic scale. Meanwhile, the left hand performs a separate chromatic scale beginning on a separate pitch and offset by one sixteenth note. The nature of the two separate starting points combined with octaves in the right hand presents a high level of demand often observed in advanced literature. Example 28 presents this measure below:

Example 28 – Offset Chromatic Scales, Octaves

Etude in C# Minor

The third etude found within the book is *Etude in C# Minor*. This etude is arguably influenced the most by pop music. It is intentionally modeled after Michael Burritt's *White Pines* and alludes to the works of Blake Tyson and well. These composers were among the first that sparked my interest in marimba performance and composition. The greatest challenge throughout the etude is the perpetual-motion ostinato that comprises much of the "A" and "A'" sections of the work. The performer must possess the stamina necessary to execute this idea for minutes at a time.

Rapid Double Vertical Strokes

This ostinato is comprised of rapid double vertical strokes. Performing this section, players must be sure that their mallets strike "flat," without separation, to serve the rhythmic ideas within. As fatigue sets in, this can be difficult. An additional test can be the quick shifts and interval changes found at the start of nearly every measure. This too adds to the demand for playing mallets flat, without flams. The combination of demands with the length of execution places this passage at the upper end of the intermediate category. Example 29 below details each of these demands within the perpetual-motion ostinato:

Example 29 – Rapid Double Verticals, Perpetual-Motion Ostinato, Quick Shifts, Interval Changes

Rapid Double Vertical, Perpetual-Motion Ostinato

10

Quick Shifts, Interval Changes

The image shows a musical score for a marimba. It features a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The music consists of a series of chords and intervals. A red bracket above the staff spans from the first measure to the last, labeled "Rapid Double Vertical, Perpetual-Motion Ostinato". Two red boxes below the staff highlight specific measures, labeled "Quick Shifts, Interval Changes". The first box is under the fourth measure, and the second is under the eighth measure. The notation includes various rhythmic values and accidentals, with some notes marked with a 'v' for accents.

Double Lateral Strokes

Double lateral strokes are the first technique presented in *Etude in C# Minor*. As previously stated, this technique is found throughout intermediate literature, such as Sammut's *Four Rotations*, in isolated bursts. Throughout *Etude in C# Minor*, this technique is presented as an ornament in grace notes as well as a rhythm in thirty-second notes. Additional demands include quick shifts as the motive is sequenced upwards by an octave. For the advancing performer, the movement from lateral strokes to alternating independent strokes can be difficult as the physical requirements differ between the two stroke types. Example 30 presents the opening of the pieces with double laterals as an ornament. Example 31 presents laterals in thirty-second notes, as seen later in the work, sequenced up by octave:

Example 30 – Laterals as Ornaments

Example 31 – Thirty-Second Note Laterals

Multiple-Demand Material

A moment of advanced difficulty level appears as transitional material centered around an arpeggiated C# dim7 chord. The challenges found within these measures include the distance covered on the instrument, the body and hand positioning of the performer, quick shifts, and interval changes. In the casual vernacular, this would be labeled a “lick.” Like Example 7 detailing the final measure of *Rotation 1*, these measures present an isolated challenge with comfortable material surrounding. Of the

difficulties presented, the body and hand require the most attention. The performer must position their body at a 45-degree turn toward the top of the keyboard while keeping their left hand split between the upper and lower manuals. Mallet 1 strikes the upper-manual keys while mallet 2 strikes the lower-manual keys. Meanwhile, mallets 3 and 4 in the right hand, holding a M6 interval, are positioned on either side of mallets 1 and 2. The figure is then sequenced down the keyboard before moving to a split-manual arpeggiation of the C# dim7 chord up the keyboard in thirds. Example 32 below shows the passage described above. Stickings are included to highlight the hand and body positioning of the performer:

Example 32 – Multi-Demand Transitional Material



Octaves

In the closing section of *Etude in C# Minor* octaves are performed in the right hand as a part of the ostinato. The octaves ascend step-wise in a scalar manner while the left hand remains static in a M6 interval. The hand positioning begins at a manageable interval but quickly moves to a widespread position. As the hands spread further apart, the performer must negotiate several factors. The body must move lower to the keyboard to facilitate the spread. The octaves must move to a slightly smaller interval as they ascend the keyboard. Last, the performer must utilize peripheral vision to ensure note accuracy and proper placement of mallets on the bar. This is like the content presented in Example 13 from *Velocities*. However, the left hand remaining anchored to two pitches

alleviates some of the demand. Example 33 below presents this concept at the point at which the hands are spread the furthest:

Example 33 – Octaves, Widespread Hand Positioning

The musical notation for Example 33 consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both staves have a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a time signature of 5/4. The piece begins at measure 140, indicated by a bracket above the first measure. The right hand plays a series of eighth notes with a wide interval, while the left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. A dynamic marking 'f' is present in the bass staff.

Etude in G Minor

The final etude presented in the book is *Etude in G Minor*. This etude may not appear to be the most difficult of the four at first glance. However, the independent demand between the right and left hand, opposing motion, multiple instances of widespread hand positioning, single-hand controlled melodies, complicated body, and hand positioning, and mature melodic and harmonic content firmly plant this etude as the most difficult of the four within the book. The opening and closing of this work are meant to allude to the neo-romantic marimba works of Pius Cheung and Casey Cangelosi. However, this etude is considerably more achievable as it is designed to prepare intermediate performers for the leap to advanced material. The “B” section of the etude is an intentional nod to indie artist Sufjan Steven’s tune, *Redford (for Yia-Yia and Pappou)* from his album *Greetings from Michigan, The Great Lake State*. The blend of the two styles, neo-romantic and popular folk, is meant to offer both complicated and comfortable language for the performer. Hints of cinematic harmony and melodies can be heard throughout as well.

Multiple-Demand Passages

The opening measure presents several challenges. As with many piano and marimba etudes in the romantic or neo-romantic style, a sweeping run of rapid notes opens the work. The performer will play the length of the instrument from Bb6 to D2. The performer will turn their body at a 45-degree angle toward the bottom of the marimba. Additionally, their right hand is angled between the top and bottom manual with mallet 4 being placed on the upper manual and mallet 3 on the lower manual. Much of the measure is comprised of six pitches in groups of three sequenced down by an octave for the length of the instrument. Efficient and quick shifting is a must throughout this passage, although, the performer is afforded the opportunity to “push” and “pull” at their discretion. Depending on the speed of execution, the performer will either execute this measure with alternating independent strokes or laterals. Example 34 presents this measure with the suggested stickings:

Example 34 – Etude in G Minor, Opening Measure, Multiple Demands

♩ = 58 *molto rubato*

4 3 2 4 3 2 sim.

fp *mf* *p*

1

The main theme of the etude is stated in measure 8. While the tempo and rhythmic demands are manageable, the independence between the hands creates a greater level of difficulty. The right hand contains the melodic motive while the left hand is primarily responsible for the accompaniment and counter-melodic content. At times these separate responsibilities present a juxtaposition of motion, mixed stroke types, quick shifts, and rapid interval changes. These techniques and demands comprise much of the

content of the “A” section of the etude. Example 35 presents these challenges at measure 18 of the work:

Example 35 – Main Theme, Multiple Demands

18 a tempo

4 3 4 3 sim.

p

1 2 3 2 3 2 1 1 2 2 1 1

A passage with similar technical requirements appears beginning at measure 43. The performer continues the theme from the previous four measures in the right hand while performing a scalar counter motive in the left hand. The final measure of this passage requires the performer to arpeggiate an Ebm chord with mixed stickings. The last two beats of the measure incorporate polyrhythms, opposing motion, and widespread hand positioning spread out over three octaves. Example 36 shows this measure:

Example 36 – Poly Rhythms, Opposing Motion, Widespread Hand Position

46

3

f

mp *mf*

The subsequent measures present difficulty in the form of mixed manuals, body and hand positioning, and rapid, scalar, independent strokes. At different times, and with quick shifts, the performer’s body will move from a 45-degree turn toward the bottom of the keyboard, to flat on with the keyboard, to a 45-degree turn toward the top of the keyboard. These positions occur because of the mixed-manual stickings necessary to execute this passage with fluidity. The mallets move from the upper manual to the lower

manual quickly, often performing in mixed manuals, requiring the performer to move with quick efficiency. Additionally, throughout this passage, the performer is required to perform rapid independent strokes in the right hand, both single and independent, that highlight the melody to afford the left hand time to return to the bottom of the keyboard to begin the next measure or idea. Finally, the passage concludes with octaves, split by sixteenth notes, arpeggiated and descending the marimba. This passage requires an advanced level of execution and ability. Example 37 presents the entirety of this passage:

Example 37 – Mixed Manuals, Mixed Body Position, Rapid Independent, Split Octaves

a little faster ♩ = 54

47

f **Mixed Registers**
Mixed Body Position

mf **Rapid Independent Strokes**

51

49

Rapid Split Octaves

fp

The image displays a musical score for Example 37, consisting of two systems of music. The first system, starting at measure 47, is marked 'a little faster' with a tempo of ♩ = 54. It features a right hand with a melodic line and a left hand with rapid independent strokes. A red box highlights the first few measures, labeled 'Mixed Registers' and 'Mixed Body Position'. The second system, starting at measure 49, features a right hand with rapid split octaves and a left hand with arpeggiated octaves. A red box highlights the final measures, labeled 'Rapid Split Octaves'. Fingerings and dynamics are indicated throughout the score.

V. Conclusion

As an educator, performer, and composer I have observed the need for a greater variety of marimba works between the intermediate and advanced ranges. Performers require proper “stepping-stone” literature to move from the intermediate level of performance to the advanced. Techniques found within intermediate literature serve as building blocks to advanced literature. When these techniques are met with additional demands, they move from intermediate difficulty to advanced. The intermediate-advanced literature I have written contains passages with advanced difficulty while offering the performer comfortable techniques in the surrounding material. As most advanced works are of significant length, the etudes I have composed offer a manageable amount of music. Consequently, the developing marimbist can focus their efforts on the passages of advanced material without being exhausted by copious sections that would require large amounts of time to master. The overarching goal of this project is to contribute to the intermediate-advanced marimba repertoire. The book of four marimba etudes I have written will provide a pathway to advanced literature while offering familiar, intermediate techniques the growing marimbist is comfortable with. This book will supplement the growing repertoire of intermediate to intermediate-advanced literature.

Appendix

Recommended Solos, Etudes, & Books

Progressive Etudes & Solos:

Beginner to Intermediate:

Sea Refractions - Mitchell Peters
 Waves - Mitchell Peters
 Marimba Flamenca - Alice Gomez
 Ghost Garden - Adam Hopper
 Anthem - Ivan Trevino
 The Offering - Michael Burritt
 Yellow After The Rain - Mitchell Peters

Intermediate to Intermediate-Advanced:

Etude in Eb Major - Will Alderman

Katamiya - Emmanuel Séjourné
 Monograph IV - Richard Gipson
 Restless - Rich O'Meara
 Ghanaia - Matthias Schmitt
 A Cricket Sang and Set the Sun - Blake Tyson
 Five Etudes for Marimba - Gordon Stout
 Nancy - Emmanuel Séjourné
 C Major Prelude - J.S. Bach

Etude in C Major - Will Alderman

Memories of the Seashore - Keiko Abe
 Four Rotations - Eric Sammut
 Three Spirals - Eric Sammut
 Evergreen - Benjamin Finley
 Etude in C Major - Claire Omar Musser
 Rhythm Song - Paul Smadbeck
 Four Episodes - Gordon Stout
 Michi - Keiko Abe

Intermediate-Advanced to Advanced:

Etude in C# Minor - Will Alderman

Strive to Be Happy - Ivan Trevino
 Afwa Yuovu - Robert Zolnowski
 Beads of Glass - Gordon Stout
 Virginia Tate - Paul Smadbeck
 Libertango - Eric Sammut

Firefish - Blake Tyson

Two Mexican Dances - Gordon Stout

October Night - Michael Burritt

Polaris - Mark Ford

Etude in G Minor - Will Alderman

Land - Takatsugu Mruamatsu

Rumble Strips - Gordon Stout

Quondom Reflections - Gordon Stout

Etude in E Minor - Pius Cheung

Etude in C# Minor - Casey Cangelosi

Chameleon - Eric Sammut

Sedimental Structures - Gordon Stout

Merlin - Andrew Thomas

Velocities - Joseph Schwantner

Khan Variations - Alejandro Viñao

Burritt Variations - Alejandro Viñao

Technique & Etude Books:

Impressions on Wood - Julie Davila

Marimba: Technique Through Music - Mark Ford

Sequential Studies for Marimba - Julia Gaines

Marimba Baby - Mark Ford

Simply Four - Gif Howarth

Song Book Vol. 1 - Ivan Trevino

Four Mallet Marimba Playing - Nancy Zeltsman

Intermediate Masterworks for Marimba Vol 1 & 2 - Nancy Zeltsman

Funny Mallets Vol. I & II - Nebojsa Zivkovic

Pedagogy, Reference, & Composition Books:

The Study of Orchestration - Samuel Adler

The Complete Percussionist - Robert Breithaupt

Teaching Percussion - Gary Cook

How to Write for Percussion - Samuel Solomon

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