

About the music ~ Nancy Zeltsman: "drinking water"



Passatempi

The work is subtitled *5 Piccoli Walzer [5 Small Waltzes]*. You will hear three of the five waltz themes, plus the Coda that features those three. My teacher in my mid-teens, xylophonist Ian Finkel, introduced me to many pieces by less-often-performed composers. Among my favorites was Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco's guitar "Sonata 'Omaggio a Boccherini'" that I recorded on my *Sweet Song* album (2005).

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco studied composition under renowned Italian composer Ildebrando Pizzeti, receiving a diploma in composition in 1918. By 1930, he was one of Italy's leading contemporary composers and a sought-after pianist, accompanist, and music critic. His collaborations with guitarist Andrés Segovia, violinist Jascha Heifetz, and cellist Gregor Piatigorsky helped elevate him to international prominence.

In 1939 at age 44, in response to Italy's new racial laws targeting Italian Jews among others, Castelnuovo-Tedesco discreetly emigrated to America with his wife and their two sons, settling in Hollywood. He became a U.S. citizen in 1948 but always felt "suspended like a cloud between two continents." During his 15 years as a composer under contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, he wrote for some 200 films. Henry Mancini, André Previn, and John Williams were among his many pupils.



"Zachowstraße" street sign in Halle, Germany

Suite in B minor

When I was in Amsterdam in June 2024, I had a short coaching on the next piece by Joep Straesser with my Dutch marimbist-friend Peter Prommel.

During this, Peter suggested that Straesser probably imagined its ornamented passages being phrased "like Handel."

A week or two later, I read in Gunther Schuller's autobiography "with what excitement [he] discovered the cantatas and oratorios of Friedrich Zachau [sic] in the New York Public Library. Zachau was not only an important predecessor of Johann Sebastian Bach, but also the teacher of the young George Frederic Handel."

These asides led me to discovering this work by **Friedrich Wilhelm Zachow!** In his biography of Handel, Paul Henry Lang wrote that Zachow "was actually one of the most cultivated, learned, and imaginative musicians in Germany at the end of the [17th] century." He embraced a dramatic style as a performer – as cantor and organist at Market Church in Halle, Germany, to which he was appointed in 1684 (at age 21). "Zachow possessed an unusually well-

stocked library of music that reflected both the catholicity of his taste and the inquisitive turn of his mind." Lang continued, "Handel's admiration for his teacher was boundless and reverential." After Zachow's death in 1712, Handel frequently sent remittances to his former teacher's widow and children. Handel also occasionally quoted Zachow's compositions, including this suite's "Fuga finalis" in the last movement of *Concerto Grosso, Op. 6, No. 12, HWV 330*.



Music for marimba

Joep Straesser studied theory and musicology, composition with Ton de Leeuw, was a church organist, and taught theoretical studies and composition at Utrecht Conservatory of Music in the Netherlands. His "oeuvre comprises works for various instrumental settings, with a specific preference for the human voice."

(Donemus)

Straesser composed several pieces for marimba beginning with a work for marimba and recorder imagined for/dedicated to marimbist Keiko Abe, but premiered by Peter Prommel for whom Straesser wrote two more pieces including this one, and some for Duo Contemporain (bass clarinet/alto saxophone and percussion). Jack Van Geem and I recorded Straesser's intriguing marimba duo "To the point" on our album *Pedro and Olga Learn to Dance*. Straesser passed away shortly after its release in 2004, so he never heard our recording.

Combing through my music library in the spring of 2024, I discovered "Music for marimba" (that had been a gratis copy from Donemus, perhaps?). I liked it! In early June 2024, I wrote to ask Prommel the backstory on the piece. I didn't recall ever suggesting it to one of my students to try, or hearing anyone play it, anywhere. The same was true for him! As Peter had begun to learn the piece in 1994, he had roughly played through it for Joep (pronounced "You[p]") in a small, public setting with his students, "but not an official concert." So, while the piece was composed 30 years ago, Peter believes my performances as part of this program marks its premiere!

Knowing well Joep's musical sensibilities and preferences – strongly based in older European traditions and musical styles – Peter recognized and interpreted many suggestions in the score that I would not have intuited. (These made the strongest case I've ever encountered for how important it is to know a composer's background and musical predilections!)

"Joep was not 'funky,'" Peter told me (meaning: someone who would lean into rhythms and syncopations). This was why Peter suggested I interpret many of the figures "like Handel." "Bring out melody more than rhythm – as if it would be spoken." With regard to dynamics, Peter imagined Straesser would favor a gentler approach (relative to typical percussion-world *fs* and *ffs*). Peter suggested, "A bird is fierce and aggressive, but it is only a little bird!"

West Virginia Rose / The Water is Wide



Vanguard in New York City.

Fred's music has melted my heart and influenced my musical aesthetic since I first heard him in the fall of 1976 when I arrived as a freshman at New England Conservatory and Fred was one of the star jazz students. We became close friends in our 20s and have remained in touch.

In October 2020, Fred wrote me, "I did a spontaneous reworking of the folk song 'The Water Is Wide' and I think it would sound lovely on marimba. I play and improvise on the tune in several keys with a couple modulating interludes in there." He was referring to his version introduced by/folded together with his composition "West Virginia Rose" (*Songs from Home*, 2020). Fred provided a transcription made by Michael Lucke.

The popular folk ballad "The Water is Wide," recorded by many artists in recent decades, originated in Scotland in the 1600/1700s (first printed in 1725), known then by the name "Oh Waly, Waly, Gin Love Be Bonny." The word "waly" signifies an expression of grief or woe.



"**Marimbiology** was written in the summer of 1993 on a commission from New Music Marimba, the Percussive Arts Society, Nancy Zeltsman, William Moersch, and Robert Van Sice, with a grant from the Meet The Composer/Reader's Digest Commissioning Program. The work is in four contrasting movements [of which you will hear two], exploiting not only the wonderfully rich sonorities of the five-octave marimba, but its remarkable technical/virtuosic and expressive capacities.

"'Sarabande' is stately in character, closing with a chorale-like passage and a wispy 'after-thought.' The finale, 'Toccata,' a virtuoso tour-de-force, features a plethora of ragtime-y syncopations and jazzy swing." - **Gunther Schuller**

One of the most fortunate occurrences in my life was that my freshman year as a percussion major at NEC overlapped with Schuller's last year as NEC's President. I performed in an orchestra concert he conducted that year, and would play under his baton many more times at Tanglewood Music Center and beyond. Soon after graduating school, I worked for Margun Music, Schuller's music publishing company based on the top floor of his home in Newton Centre, MA, which adequately supported me for many years. But beyond that benefit, being in the orbit of a brilliant, active musician was constantly fascinating, educational, and inspiring.

Fred Hersch is an American jazz pianist and composer, educator, HIV/AIDS activist, and 17-time Grammy nominee. He was the first person to play week-long engagements as a solo pianist at the Village

Schuller produced and released my first three CDs on his record label, GM Recordings: *Marimolin*; *Phantasmata* including the piece he composed for Sharan Leventhal and me by the same name; and my first solo album, *Woodcuts*. A few years later, he composed "Marimbiology" for solo marimba that I premiered and recorded on my album *See Ya Thursday*.

Dedicated to Nancy Zeltsman
MARIMBOLOGY
I - Scherzando Gunther Schuller (1993)

Very fast $d = ca. 112$

Dear Nancy -
I'm afraid I've written another
tough piece for you. I hope and pray it's
all playable. (Aw, shucks - you can do it!)

See you soon,
as ever,
Gunther

$j = ca. 112$

Gunther wrote in his autobiography that he had "as far back as I can remember, an innate love and sensitivity for low-register sounds and instruments." He taught that to me with regard to the marimba. His insistence on softer mallets to bring out the true low-fundamental pitches from the lowest keys of the marimba was transformative to how I play. - NZ



Amulet

I contacted **Paul Simon** in December 2007 via our mutual friend, Jamey Haddad (percussionist in Paul's band), to invite him to contribute a piece to the "Intermediate Masterworks for Marimba" (24 short solos) project I was organizing. You never know unless you ask someone; he was interested!

Paul suspected a guitar solo he'd written might be adaptable to marimba. He recorded a demo to send me(!), and I could imagine it too. I transcribed that and he suggested we meet to "marimba-ize" it together. We met twice in May 2008. He stood right next to me while I played, near the bass register, which resulted in very organic additions to the marimba version. The IMM collection containing "Amulet" was published by C.F. Peters in two volumes, and I recorded the piece as part of the IMM double-CD on Bridge Records. Luciana Souza released a lovely wordless vocal version, and Simon released it as a guitar solo on *So Beautiful or So What* (2011).

During his distinguished career, Paul Simon has been the recipient of numerous honors and awards including a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award for his work as half of the duo Simon and Garfunkel. He is a member of The Songwriters Hall of Fame, and the Rock n' Roll Hall of Fame as a member of Simon and Garfunkel and as a solo artist. In 2007, Mr. Simon was awarded the first annual Library of Congress Gershwin Prize for Popular Song.

Água de Beber ("Drinking Water")



Antônio Carlos Jobim was a Brazilian composer, pianist, songwriter, arranger, and singer. He is considered one of the fathers of "bossa nova" (Portuguese for "new trend"): the merging of samba with cool jazz to create a new style. "Água de Beber" is an early example. Growing up, Jobim was influenced by his two guitar-playing uncles as well the big band sounds of Tommy Dorsey and Duke Ellington and swing from America. He idolized composer Heitor Villa Lobos. "Água de Beber" has Portuguese lyrics written by Vinícius de Moraes, and English lyrics by Noman Gimbel (recorded by Frank Sinatra, at left in this photo, whose version influenced this arrangement).

In 1959, when Brasília was being built – the city that would become the new capital of Brazil – the president of Brazil invited "Tom" Jobim and Vinícius to spend a season at Catetinho (a provisional, wooden presidential palace) while they would compose a symphony to be performed at the new city's inauguration.

One evening the pair was walking near the wooden palace when they heard the sound of water. They asked the watchman about it who reportedly replied, "Você não sabe não? É aqui que tem água de beber, camará." [Don't you know? This is where you have drinking water, buddy boy.] One of the engineers who helped build the new city, Kléber Farias, said that he was the first person to hear the first song composed in Brasília, sung by Tom and Vinícius at the city's only hotel, just hours after they composed it.



Por tí, mi corazón

I close with a piece by Mexican composer, conductor, and pianist **Manuel María Ponce Cuéllar** who wrote more than 300 pieces, over 200 essays on musical topics, and was the founding editor of three influential music journals. He studied in Mexico City, Bologna, Berlin, and in Paris at the École Normale de Musique with Paul Dukas. Ponce made enormous contributions to the development of classical guitar through his association with Andrés Segovia. This piece, edited by Segovia, is one example of his incorporation of Mexican folk elements into his original compositions, as his European teachers encouraged.

I chose this beautiful tune in part to acknowledge the countries for which the marimba is the national instrument: Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rico, and Nicaragua. I love the thought of the marimba being part of the fabric of life in these countries: a sound and symbol people know in their hearts.

For you, my heart.