

MUS 490 – Performance Concentration
Final Paper example

Transcriptions, Arrangements and Adaptations for Keyboard Percussion

A transcription in the music world by definition is “the arrangement of a composition for a medium other than that for which it was originally written.”¹ This research paper discusses the emergence of transcriptions for mallet percussion and reasons they are performed in the 21st century. It will draw comparisons of previously transcribed material and the authors own work on transcribing materials. This paper will also pay close attention to three distinct ‘categories’ of transcriptions and how the lines between them can become unclear.

The idea of transcriptions and arrangements started in the 18th century where instrumental and vocal music was the standard. Though pieces by composers such as C.P.E Bach are traditionally scored, the performer in most cases would ornament the music, therefore changing the original contents of the piece. This became even clearer when composers would write piano concerti and the performer would improvise or write their own cadenza, though the composer would have written one. Though this still does not stand as a true transcription, this started the movement of playing pieces written for one instrument, performed on a different medium.²

With the beginning of the 19th century, a clearer move toward the idea of transcriptions and arrangements arose. One of the reasons was the invention of the pianoforte. In addition to the Bach revival, people like Franz Liszt had begun the process of writing down music in the exact way they wanted it performed, stopping the performer from embellishing as they had in the 18th century.³ The first move from one instrument to another was Franz Liszt taking Bach organ music and transcribing it for the pianoforte.

Liszt transcribed the *Six Great Organ Preludes and Fugues* written by Bach to the piano, appropriately in order to maintain the original artistry within the music.⁴ As writer Evelyn Howard-Jones explains,

“Liszt's transcriptions never try to reproduce the principle of what is known on the Organ as doubling, the automatic adding of a stop or stops of a pitch of an octave lower. In these six works he does not even take it for granted that the pedal passages are necessarily best

¹ Dictionary.com

² Howard-Jones, Evelyn *Arrangements and Transcriptions* P. 306

³ Howard-Jones, Evelyn *Arrangements and Transcriptions* pg.307

⁴ Howard-Jones, Evelyn *Arrangements and Transcriptions* pg.308

reproduced by being executed in octaves, and uses that method only where he feels sure of Bach's artistic intention being best insured by that device.”⁵

For a majority of the 19th and early 20th Century, before the introduction of the marimba into the western world, piano transcriptions to various instruments, such as cello, were the primary literature of choice for the arranger. Eventually marimba arrangers started to emerge, marking the beginning of keyboard percussion transcriptions.

After the introduction of the marimba into the western world, there was a lack of original compositions written for the instrument. It was not until the 1940s when a surge of composers writing original works for the marimba began. Until that point, marimba players relied heavily on music for solo guitar, piano, and strings.⁶ Today marimba players perform transcriptions and go through the process of transcribing for the instrument, but doing this now is a nod to tradition rather than out of necessity.

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⁵ Howard-Jones, Evelyn *Arrangements and Transcriptions* pg.308

⁶ Zambito, Pete *A Comparative Study of Keyboard Transcriptions for Solo Marimba* pg. 32