THESIS

ANDY AKIHO: A CONDUCTOR'S ANALYSIS OF *TO WALK OR RUN IN WEST HARLEM*

Submitted by

Cameron S. Honnen

School of Music, Theater, and Dance

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Music

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, CO

Spring 2026

Master's Committee:

Advisor: Rebecca L. Phillips

Jayme Taylor
James M. David
David Riep

ABSTRACT

ANDY AKIHO: A CONDUCTOR'S ANALYSIS OF

TO WALK OR RUN IN WEST HARLEM

Andy Akiho (b. 1979) is a prominent contemporary American composer whose works span solo, chamber, wind, and orchestral mediums. Most known for his innovative percussion writing, Akiho fuses the influence of visual art, film, popular music, Caribbean steel pan traditions, Bebop jazz, found sounds, his synesthesia, and his Japanese heritage into a compositional voice that is authentic to the composer and his lived experiences. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze Andy Akiho's *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* (2008) to examine its compositional techniques, contextual influences, and performance considerations, while contributing to the limited body of scholarly literature on the composer.

to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem, written for winds with Pierrot-inspired instrumentation, is his first work for winds and represents a key moment for the composer's overall body of work. Utilizing techniques associated with composers such as György Ligeti, John Cage, and Robert Schumann, the composition incorporates metric displacement, group dissonance, layered grooves, prepared instrumentation, polyrhythms, and non-traditional tonal relationships. Through evolving permutations of motivic material and the interplay of metrical and antimetrical layers, Akiho constructs a non-linear musical narrative that reflects the fragmentation of trauma-informed memory.

This thesis provides biographical context for Akiho's artistic development, examines the historical background of the work, offers a detailed theoretical analysis of its structural and

harmonic design, and presents rehearsal strategies for conductors and performers. As his compositional output continues to expand beyond percussion-centered works into chamber and wind genres, further academic engagement with his music becomes increasingly necessary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With immense gratitude, I would like first to thank Mr. Andy Akiho, the subject of this thesis. It was an honor to study your work and to write on its intricacies and its impact. I'm astounded by your dedication to your craft and the immense humility you have shown me. Thank you for supporting this project to make it the best it can be. Your work is so unique and undeniably yours. It's world-changing; I'm excited to see what music and crazy instrumentation you'll come up with next and how your music will impact the musical community in the future.

Thank you to my committee members, Dr. David Riep and Dr. James M. David. Dr. Riep, thank you for jumping on board, providing your insight as an artist for this project, and asking some incredibly thought-provoking questions. Dr. David, thank you for guiding me through all things music theory here at CSU, creating such wonderful pieces for the students here at CSU to play, and dealing with my many stupid jokes.

Dr. Jayme Taylor, thank you for meeting with me that first day at Midwest. I was lost and unsure of where I was headed next, but you listened and took the time to meet with me in person. Thank you for trusting me throughout my time here at CSU and for fostering my passion for the marching arts and good food!

Dr. Rebecca Phillips, my advisor and mentor, thank you for your guidance, teaching, and belief in me, even when I didn't believe in myself. Watching you direct the CSU Wind Symphony and seeing firsthand your incredible musicianship and leadership has been the highlight of these past two years. Thank you for your guidance and for holding me to the high standards you knew that I could meet. I am a better musician, educator, and person because of you

To my fellow CSU band graduate colleagues, James Mepham, David Davis, and Amanda Manning: I'm sorry for how grumpy I always am; thank you for dealing with me at my worst and loving me at my best. I'm so inspired by all your individual talents, musicianship, empathy, passion, and intelligence, and I'm so glad to call you all friends. Thank you for making my time here at CSU fun.

Thank you to my friend Kait Oresky for guiding me throughout this degree. Your singular advice to "use what you know" has helped more than you realize. Matty Parker, thank you for being my editor and making me sound smarter than I deserve.

To my parents, Chris and Tami Honnen: thank you for always being present at all my concerts, even the bad ones, and for fostering my love for music. I really lucked out in the parent lottery. I love you both so much and cannot thank you enough for the sacrifices you have made for me. You are seriously the best.

Lastly, thank you to my dog Kai. I know you can't read this because you're a dog, but I promise I'll take you on more hikes and play fetch with you every day now that this thesis is done. Thank you for being the cutest pup and the best reason to take a study break a grad student could ask for.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Andy Akiho (b. 1979) is a contemporary American composer whose compositions span from solo instruments to full orchestras. He has been commissioned and performed by notable ensembles such as the New York Philharmonic, the National Symphony Orchestra, the Shanghai Symphony, and the Oregon Symphony, where he has served as composer-in-residence since 2023. Specifically, Akiho has written nineteen solos, twenty-seven chamber works, one wind ensemble piece, and eleven works for orchestra. As a percussionist, many of his works heavily utilize the percussion section in innovative ways, with a heavy emphasis on the natural theatricality of live performance. An accomplished composer, Akiho has been nominated for a Grammy in the Best Contemporary Classical Composition category in 2022, 2023, and 2024, and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Music for his 2022 composition *Seven Pillars*.[1]

While Andy Akiho is one of the most significant composers of the modern era, scholarly writings about him and his compositions are minimal. Though he is most well-known for his percussion writing, his writing for wind instruments is worthy of study, particularly his chamber wind works. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to analyze *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* (2008) to better understand the work's unique compositional techniques and influences, provide a resource for conductors in their rehearsals and performance of this piece, and present this composition to a larger audience. Thus, chapters will discuss the composer's biography and compositional voice, provide historical information and performance practices for the piece, analyze the theoretical aspects of the piece, and provide a framework for rehearsals.

[1] Andy Akiho, "About Andy Akiho," Andy Akiho, 2025, accessed July 10, 2025, https://andyakiho.com/pages/about#.

"Chapter One: Background on Andy Akiho" will provide the necessary background information about the composer. This chapter will include a brief but detailed biography of the composer, including details about his childhood, education, career as a performer, and career as a composer. A description of Akiho's individual compositional voice and definition of the music elements that allow the composer to create his unique musical works will be included. The chapter will conclude with a literature review of scholarly works about Akiho and his music.

"Chapter Two: Historical Background and Performance Considerations of *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* (2008)" will contain background information on Akiho's first work for mixed wind chamber ensemble. Aspects of the chamber ensemble will be compared to the percussion ensemble version (2016), and how he utilizes each instrumentation specifically. Additionally, a brief history of the mixed wind ensembles of the Pierrot ensemble will also be included. A secondary section will provide important performance practices, such as ensemble set-up and key performance recommendations.

"Chapter Three: Analysis of *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* (2008)" will contain compositional elements of the work, including form, melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, and orchestration as it relates to the theoretical analysis. This chapter will primarily be used as a resource for performance preparation of this work. The paper will conclude by suggesting further areas of research on Andy Akiho and his music.

Methodology: A Conductor's Analysis

As described by Eugene Ormandy, the role of the conductor in a musical ensemble is multifaceted and "one of the most complex and demanding activities in the realm of music."[2] To Ormandy, the conductor must consider three major tasks to be successful: personal study, rehearsal, and performance. The performance is the ultimate goal, and where the music comes to life for the audience. However, without personal study or rehearsal, a successful performance is nearly unattainable. When asked about the amount of time she spends on these three tasks, Catherine Comet stated,

> I really believe (and I think that most conductors would agree on this) that only one percent of our work is done at concerts. Four percent of our work is done at the rehearsals. The remaining ninety-five percent is done by the hours you spend at home with the score.[3]

Herbert Blomstedt argues that the vision of the performance comes from the score study process.[4] He states, "the performance is just the realization of the vision the conductor has as it is fertilized through the work with the orchestra […] By the time of the rehearsals and then the performances, the work should be synonymous with [the conductor]. It should just flow naturally."[5] The goal for the conductor and ensemble is to represent the composer's intentions, so the audience can experience the work authentically. Therefore, the goal of a conductor's analysis is to aid the conductor in creating a natural and emotive performance through a biographical

[2] Eugene Ormandy was the lauded conductor and music director of the Philadelphia Symphony from 1938 until 1980 and was instrumental in the development of the symphony's infamous "Philadelphia Sound"; Elizabeth A. H. Green and Mark Gibson, *The Modern Conductor* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), xi.

[3] Catherine Comet was the first woman to hold a position as music director of a professional orchestra in the United States, serving as music director for the Grand Rapids Orchestra from 1986 until 1997; Jeannine Wagar, *Conductors in Conversation: Fifteen Contemporary Conductors Discuss Their Lives and Profession* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1991), 58.

[4] Herbert Blomstedt is the conductor laureate of the San Franciso Symphony, where he also served as the music director from 1985 to 1995.

[5]Wagar, *Conductors in Conversation*, 12.

sketch of the composer, a detailed theoretical analysis of the work, and a rehearsal analysis used to assist in the preparation for performance.

To begin the studying process, a conductor must first understand the composer's voice. A researched biography provides insight into the individuality of the composer, shedding light on their personality, the artistic and cultural influences that shape their work, and the elements that make up their unique compositional language. Learning the biography of a composer and the context of the history that surrounded them allows the conductor to perform the work not as an isolated artifact, but as a musical composition created with intent and purpose. According to Ormandy, "[the composer] must understand the historical context in which a particular work is conceived […] To study such a masterwork as Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony without some knowledge of the composer's response to the ideals of the French Revolution and Napoleon's unique political position in 1806 is to study music in a vacuum."[6] Through a deeper understanding of history and the composer's biography, a conductor can conceptualize the music through a cultural and historical lens. This informed perspective will shape the theoretical analysis of the work, influence interpretive decisions, guide rehearsal decisions, and enrich performances.

To gain a deeper understanding of the composer's musical ideas within, a conductor must analyze the work's theoretical elements. Frank Battisti supports this concept in his book, *Guide to Score Study for the Wind Band Conductor*,

[6] Green, *The Modern Conductor*, xi.

> To communicate the expressive potential of a musical composition to an ensemble in an effective and efficient manner, a conductor must first acquire an understanding of the score. Interpretive decisions are based on insight and knowledge gained through thoughtful and imaginative study of the score.[7]

This process involves an analysis of the melody, harmony, thematic material, rhythm, orchestration, texture, and form. When combined, these elements create what David McGill describes as the "grammatical structure" of the music, a concept that draws parallels between music and spoken language.[8] Just as a speaker relies on grammar to convey meaning clearly and persuasively, so too must a musician understand the underlying grammar of a composition to communicate its message with precision and artistry. McGill stresses that this analytical approach does not diminish the emotive power of performance; rather, it enriches it. In his book *Music in Motion*, he writes,

> Self-respecting musicians must analyze music to find a plan for one's phrasing. The music's surface elements are flexible things (dynamics, ornaments, instrumentation, etc.), but the underlying grammatical structure (consonance, dissonance, meter, harmony, skeletal structure, etc.) is not. Musical grammar is absolute. Identifying and showing the music's "grammatical structure," while playing, is the performer's duty.[9]

A thorough understanding of a work's theoretical contents can aid a conductor by guiding their musical phrasing and reinforcing interpretive decisions.

A conductor's analytical work can culminate in a set of practical strategies for rehearsal and performance. This plan serves not only as a summary of musical insights but as a blueprint

[7] Frank Battisti is a revolutionary figure in the development of the wind ensemble, writing many books and articles on the medium and founded the New England Conservatory Wind Ensemble, one of the United States's premiere wind ensembles; Frank Battisti, Robert Garofalo, *Guide to Score Study for the Wind Band Conductor* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Meredith Music Publications, 1990), 1.

[8] David McGill served as the principal bassoonist for the Chicago Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony, and currently serves as the Professor of Bassoon at the Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University; David McGill, *Sound in Motion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 25.

[9] McGill, *Sound in Motion*, 26-27.

for guiding the ensemble through the entire preparation process. The rehearsal of any significant work demands careful forethought and meticulous planning if the ensemble is to achieve both technical accuracy and artistic integrity. Frank Battisti underscores this necessity in *Rehearsing the Band*, stating, "A good teacher has long-term objectives as well as specific goals for each rehearsal. You must know what you and your students can do, and then allot the proper amount of time needed for the various tasks."[10] His advice highlights the dual responsibility of the conductor: to envision the overarching interpretive goals of a performance while also structuring each rehearsal with concrete, attainable objectives. Through meticulous score study and historical research, a conductor's analysis can provide a practical document of rehearsal strategies for others who wish to perform the piece.

Literature Review

An Annotated Bibliography and Online Database of Original Published Works for Solo Steel Pan, submitted by Keith Alan Leinert in 2017, is a collection of works for the steel pan, an instrument that Andy Akiho specializes in. The works annotated are all original and must be written for solo steel pan, with or without accompaniment. Steel pan ensemble works are excluded from this study. Over seventy original compositions for steel pan are included, with eight of Akiho's original works also included. Each work is analyzed, with a brief background, theoretical information, and performance information included for each work.[11]

[10] John E. Williamson, Kenneth L. Neidig, ed., *Rehearsing the Band* (Chicago: Meredith Music Publications, 2008), 6.

[11] Keith Alan Leinert, "An Annotated Bibliography and Online Database of Original Published Works for Solo Steel Pan" (DMA diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2017).

In 2012, Brian Thomas Ebert submitted a dissertation to the University of Northern Colorado titled *Integrated Exercises for Clarinet and Bass Clarinet*. Ebert's paper provides exercises and analysis of six works that require clarinetists to double on both soprano clarinet and bass clarinet. Ebert provides a history of the doubling, offering information dating back to Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, and pedagogical information to aid performers who are asked to perform the six pieces mentioned in the study or other works with similar requirements. Akiho's 2009 work, *NO one To kNOW one*, is included, with Ebert providing specific pedagogical information to aid in the performance of that work.[12]

Michael Timothy Pratt's 2019 dissertation *Exploring the Modern Solo Snare Drum Tradition through Analyzing Five Snare Drum Solos* looks at the solo snare work *Stop Speaking* (2011) by Andy Akiho. This dissertation provides background, analysis, and performance practices for the modern snare work. Special attention is paid in the dissertation to the interaction between the electronic playback accompaniment and the written snare part, to help guide performers. Philosophical information is also given to the electronic playback to give performers context for the meaning of the work itself. Much of the dissertation is dedicated to analyzing works for snare, with little emphasis on the biography of the composers. Other works explored in this study include *American Suite for Unaccompanied Snare Drum* by Guy G. Gauthreaux II, *Fragments II* by Jean-Charles François, *Music for Snare Drum, Pure Wave Oscillator and One or More Reflective Surfaces* by Alan Lucier, and *Peeping Tom* by Dan Senn. This dissertation serves as a helpful guide for discerning Akiho's compositional voice as he writes for percussion.[13]

[12] Brian Thomas Ebert, "Integrated Exercises for Clarinet and Bass Clarinet" (DA diss., University of Northern Colorado, 2012).

[13] Michael Timothy Pratt, "Exploring the Modern Solo Snare Drum Tradition through Analyzing Five Snare Drum Solos" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 2019).

Susannah Rae Clabough defended her dissertation, titled *The Modern Snare: An Analysis of Repertoire for Snare Drum and Electronics by Underrepresented Composers*, in May of 2024 at the University of Memphis. Not exclusively about Andy Akiho and his works, this dissertation analyzes five solo snare works that utilize electronics in their performance and were written by underrepresented composers. The other compositions included in the study were *Spur* by Ivan Trevino, *Pulsar* by Francisco Perez, *Obbligato Snare Drum Music No.1: "The Power of Love"* by Thomas Kotcheff, and *Heart.throb* by Nina C. Young. This study includes a biography of Akiho, which is valuable for the research of this thesis. Biographies, analyses, and background information are provided for the additional solos featured in the study.[14]

In May 2022, Jessica Marie Williams defended her dissertation, titled "*The Synesthesia Suite: The Color Pieces of Andy Akiho,"* also at the University of Memphis. In her dissertation, Williams analyzes Akiho's collection of works for solo steel pan, written from 2004 until 2009. This collection of pieces was influenced by the composer's own synesthesia and chromesthesia, which Williams defines as a "neurological phenomenon in which a person responds to one stimulus in more than one sensory mode simultaneously."[15] Many of the works are written for the C-lead tenor pan, which Akiho is referenced as a pioneering composer of. An interview with the composer and a detailed biography is included. The dissertation analyzes melody, harmony, rhythm, form, and specific performance techniques to aid performers of this work.[16] Much of Akiho's theoretical thought processes and how his synesthesia affects them are explained in detail, making this dissertation an important resource for this thesis.

[14] Susannah Rae Clabough, "The Modern Snare: An Analysis of Repertoire for Snare Drum and Electronics by Underrepresented Composers" (DMA diss., University of Memphis, 2024).

[15] Jessica Marie Williams, "The Synesthesia Suite: The Color Pieces of Andy Akiho" (DMA diss., University of Memphis, 2022), 1.

[16] Williams, "The Synesthesia Suite: The Color Pieces of Andy Akiho," 14-15.

As part of the Public Broadcasting Service's series "Great Performances: Now Hear This," producer and director Harry Lynch interviewed Akiho in his home city of New York, where Akiho took Lynch on a tour of the city and discussed his biography and the inspirations for his music. In the interview, Akiho and Lynch discuss in length about his 2022 work, *Seven Pillars*, and how Akiho incorporates "found sounds" into the composition. This video is a great resource for understanding Akiho's background and influences, and particularly his work, which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize.[17]

The composer's website also provides valuable information, including biography, video and audio recordings, and scores for purchase and download. The website is run by Akiho and his team and is a great primary resource. A contact page is available that allows requests and inquiries to be sent directly to Akiho to review and answer if needed.[18]

[17] Harry Lynch, *Andy Akiho Found (His) Sound*, PBS Video, produced by Harry Lynch (Arlington, VA: Public Broadcasting Service, 2023).

[18] Akiho, "About Andy Akiho," Andy Akiho, 2025.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND ON ANDY AKIHO

Biographical Sketch

Andy Akiho (b. 1979) was born and raised in Columbia, South Carolina. His mother, an employee at the multinational cosmetics company Estée Lauder, and his stepfather, a hearing aid repairman, primarily raised him. Akiho's musical journey began at the age of nine, when his older sister introduced him to the drum set:

> My sister had a drum set [...] She had this drum set that she bought from a friend who stole it, like this illegal double kick, Metallica-style drum set, and she didn't know it was an illegal purchase from this scam artist […] she used to hang with a lot of rock bands in South Carolina. Sometimes drummers would come by, and she would learn songs. That kind of just got me inspired to play drums.[19]

Akiho's earliest musical inspirations came from the music he heard at home and in his neighborhood. His sister and mother played a central role in his early exposure to music, and he recalls listening to "everything," including rock, heavy metal, and early hip-hop groups such as Run-DMC. Akiho began playing drums in his middle school band program. He continued through high school, where he played snare drum in the marching band drumline. His first composition, *Phatamachickenlick* (1997), is a marching snare drum duet that stems from Akiho's time playing in the high school marching band.[20] In addition to performing with his school bands, Akiho performed in Drum Corps International between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one, with both Carolina Crown of Fort Mill, South Carolina and The Cadets of Allentown, Pennsylvania. He describes this experience as formative, instilling a strong sense of discipline and craft in him:

---

[19] Williams, "The Synesthesia Suite: The Color Pieces of Andy Akiho," 111.

[20] Frank J. Oteri, "Andy Akiho: Inside The Instrument," *New Music USA* (blog), Jun. 1, 2018, https://newmusicusa.org/nmbx/andy-akiho-inside-the-instrument/.

> Drum Corps was life-changing for me because it taught me about work ethic and how to apply that to my everyday life. Drum Corps requires precision, technique, rhythmic integrity, and so many other qualities that I bring to my music now, but primarily what I took away from that experience was the focus on dedication and the commitment that is required to create something quality.[21]

Despite his growing skill, Akiho still viewed himself primarily as a drummer rather than a well-rounded percussionist, stating, "I just played the snare drum all through that. I couldn't read pitches until college basically."[22] In 1997, Akiho enrolled at the University of South Carolina, where he majored in percussion performance. He describes this period as one of intense focus, exploration, and he was "obsessed" with performing in every percussion ensemble available.[23] During his undergraduate years, he played in the West African percussion ensemble, the Carolina Band Drumline, the orchestra, and the concert band. That's when Akiho discovered the steel pan, the instrument that would define his creative voice:

> I feel fortunate that when I was first learning how to read pitches, it was the same time I was learning how to play steel pan. I was quicker at learning pan than I was at marimba or piano, because it just came to me; it was all right there. With marimba, I got so worried about missing a note that's a millimeter off. But with the pan, I just felt like it was all right there, and I just felt really comfortable. So it made sense to me more.[24]

Through a year-long school exchange program with the University of North Texas, Akiho immersed himself in the world of bebop jazz and the process of improvisational transcription, which profoundly shaped his musical thinking:

> That's when I really started homing in on transcribing and applying it to steel pan. The house I lived in was like a big jazz house. I was inspired by a lot of them to pursue jazz more with the steel pan, something I always wanted to do, but I never got to. Being there and being surrounded by all that talent and inspiration just got me motivated to start applying it with the steel pan. […] I started doing a lot of transcriptions on the steel pan.

---

[21] "Composers You Should Know: Andy Akiho," *Omaha Symphony* (blog), Feb. 23, 2023, https://www.omahasymphony.org/blog/composers-you-should-know-andy-akiho.

[22] Williams, "The Synesthesia Suite: The Color Pieces of Andy Akiho,", 112.

[23] Oteri, "Andy Akiho: Inside The Instrument," *New Music USA*.

[24] Oteri, "Andy Akiho: Inside The Instrument," *New Music USA.*

> That whole experience, being in North Texas, being in a steel band, doing all the ensembles I could be in as a percussionist. It's what I did in South Carolina, too, but it was nice to have a different experience. You know it was just a different vibe. I loved being in Carolina. But Texas, it was just different.[25]

The freedom and spontaneity of jazz improvisation inspired him to approach sound in new ways, fostering an inventive relationship with rhythm and timbre that would later become hallmarks of his compositional style. The act of transcribing what he heard into musical notation would be a precursor to his future as a composer.

Following his graduation in fall 2001, Akiho stayed in South Carolina, but began traveling to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the birthplace of the steel pan. He sought to merge the improvisatory spirit of bebop with the expressive possibilities of the pan. Between 2001 and 2003, he made several extended visits to Trinidad, sometimes for weeks at a time, to study directly from local players and masters of the tradition:

> I went to Trinidad without knowing anybody. The first day I got there I immediately began telling the locals I met that I really wanted to play. The place I was staying happened to be a block from where Ray Holman lives, and within a few hours I was knocking on his door. He led me to the Starlift Orchestra pan yard, and I got to play with the band that night. I played and performed with them for the next few weeks.[26]

Although Akiho's formal training strengthened his reading and technical skills, much of his learning in Trinidad took place by rote; a process that deepened his rhythmic intuition and physical connection to the music: "I remember one year I learned my part from like basically the 'cellist.' That's how well they knew everybody's parts. And these are like crazy, intricate things.

---

[25] Andy Akiho (composer) in conversation with the author, February 2026.

[26] Ray Holman (b. 1944) is a respected arranger and innovator for the steel pan orchestra. Born and raised in Trinidad's Port of Spain, Holman began as player in the famous Starlift Orchestra, then began arranging and composing original works for the group that helped shape the sound of steel pan in the latter half of the 20th century; Shannon Dudley, "Ray Holman and the Changing Role of the Steelband, 1957-72," *Latin American Music Review* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2001):183-185; Scott Yoho, "Meet Finale Composition Finalist Andy Akiho," *The Finale Blog* (blog), Sep. 20, 2011, https://www.finalemusic.com/blog/meet-finale-composition-contest-finalist-andy-akiho/.

It was almost easier to learn by rote than reading because you feel the rhythms different. It's really internal." [27]

Through these experiences, Akiho's identity coalesced as he bridged the worlds of classical percussion and jazz improvisation with the rhythmic vitality of Trinidadian steel pan culture. During his first stay in Trinidad, he first experienced synesthesia. It was profound:

> When I was in Trinidad, we were playing a piece called "Doctor Mannette" by Ray Holman. We were playing this octatonic lick and it kept starting on D. And every time we start that D, I saw orange. That was the first pitch. I didn't know what synesthesia was [...] But I started doing that kinesthetically.[28]

Synesthesia, as described by neurologist and author Richard E. Cytowic, is an umbrella term for the neurological trait of "sensory couplings," when stimulation of one sense involuntarily triggers another.[29] For many people with synesthesia, these sensory interactions occur when they hear a sound that evokes an accompanying sensory response, such as color, texture, or sometimes taste.

Akiho's synesthesia is kinesthetic, meaning that he must physically engage in creating the sound to experience the color association. When performing, Akiho hears the sounds and then visualizes them as flashes or "waves" of color:

> I get it when I play steel pan, especially when I'm improvising. In fact, when I improvise, I think more of colors than of pitches. There are splatters of color, something like a Jackson Pollock painting. I see a series of bright lights going off; some days, they're

[27] Oteri, "Andy Akiho: Inside The Instrument," *New Music USA*.

[28] Williams, "The Synesthesia Suite: The Color Pieces of Andy Akiho," 128.

[29] Richard E. Cytowic was a pioneering neurologist in the study of synesthesia and helped popularize the neurological trait during the latter half of the Twentieth Century with such works as his 1989 novel *Synesthesia: A Union of Senses* and his 1993 book *The Man Who Tastes Shapes*; Richard E. Cytowic, *Synesthesia* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018), 16-25.

> dimmer; some days they're stronger. But they're pretty consistent by hue. With an A minor chord I see red, blue, and green.[30]

Akiho's synesthesia unlocked a previously unrealized creative dimension of his artistry. Realizing that sound could generate colors in his mind, he began exploring the newly found physical and timbral possibilities of instruments. His curiosity about sound manipulation became a defining feature of his compositional language, much like fellow synesthetic composers such as Alexander Scriabin (1872-1914) and Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992).[31] Due to the consistency of the relation of pitch with color hue, Akiho's synesthesia is much closer to that of Messiaen's, whose own synesthetic response was prescribed to specific sonorities and their combinations.

During his second stay in Trinidad in 2002, Akiho composed his first original work for steel pan and his first work to use pitches, *Macqueripe*. Written while he was a member of the steel band Phase II Pan Groove, under the direction of Len "Boogsie" Sharpe, the work won Second Prize in the 2002 World Steelband Music Festival solo competition.[32] Although an early composition, *Macqueripe* demonstrates characteristics of Akiho's emerging style: his synthesis of popular and traditional musical influences, intricate rhythmic layering, and an intuitive sense of timbral color.

In 2003, Akiho moved to Washington, D.C., to reconnect with his father, a sushi chef and nightclub manager. During the year he spent living and working alongside him, Akiho immersed

---

[30] Elaine Strauss, "Andy Akiho on Steel Pan, Composing & Colors," *Princeton Info* (blog), Feb. 12, 2013, https://www.communitynews.org/princetoninfo/artsandentertainment/andy-akiho-on-steel-pan-composing-colors/article_41bcf0a1-5957-55e3-8317-0992ad7ee980.html.

[31] Though there are many composers who admitted to experiencing synesthesia and utilizing it in the creation of their compositions, and Messiaen are the most well-known synesthetic composers and their implementation of this phenomenon is explicitly stated in many of their works, including Scriabin's 1911 *Prometheus*, which utilizes projected colors in performances to enhance the music; Evan Norcross Flynn, "Liberation of the Senses: An Exploration of Sound-Color Synesthesia in the Music of Alexander Scriabin and Olivier Messiaen" (MM thesis, University of Kansas, 2014), 1-2.

[32] Williams, "The Synesthesia Suite: The Color Pieces of Andy Akiho," 11.

himself in Japanese culture, a heritage he knew little about at the time. He began working at his father's restaurant as a sushi chef, an experience he credits as pivotal to his artistic and personal growth. This year marked a turning point in which Akiho began to see connections between his artistic practices, his synesthesia, and his emerging identity as a composer:

> It was a really inspiring year. I mean, that was an extremely pivotal year in my growth as an artist, you know? Really getting in touch with my Japanese roots to see, like, his [Akiho's father's] kind of artistry and incredible sushi chefs doing it at the highest level. It just really inspired me musically to see another art form […] I think it takes a lifetime to really do it right. […] Composition, when I found that path, I realized, okay, this is going to be a lifelong process, and I will never be good at it. It's the hardest thing I've ever done, and I'm so inspired to get better, to learn, and to create in the whole journey.[33]

Following this period of reflection and artistic awakening, Akiho composed *Aka* in 2004, a work for solo steelpan that integrates his love of hip-hop and jazz, the pan's Caribbean roots, and his growing awareness of Japanese identity.[34] *Aka*, the Japanese word for "red," reflects both his cultural heritage and his synesthetic perception of the pitch A, which triggers that color in his mind. *Aka* is the first in a series of fourteen works for solo steel pan, collectively known as the *Synesthesia Suite*. As much as Akiho appreciated working as a sushi chef, this was the period in his life when he could see his future as a full-time musician.

Upon arriving in New York City, the next major move of the composer's young career, Akiho deeply explored New York's steel pan and percussion communities. He performed frequently, playing weddings (particularly within the Caribbean-American community), cocktail parties, and informal jam sessions with local steel orchestras. Alongside his performing career, Akiho devoted considerable time to educating others in the arts and teaching two youth steel pan

[33] Lynch, *Andy Akiho Found (His) Sound*.

[34] Williams, "The Synesthesia Suite: The Color Pieces of Andy Akiho," 14.

programs through ArtsConnection. ArtsConnection is New York City's largest non-profit organization dedicated to connecting artists with public schools.

In 2006, through support from ArtsConnection and his growing network, Akiho arranged for the shipment of more than eighty steel pans from Trinidad to the United States, providing instruments for his students in the Bronx and Brooklyn. This initiative expanded access to steel pan education, strengthened the presence of steel pan culture, and fostered a love of Caribbean-inspired music within the broader New York musical landscape.[35]

Though Akiho found success as a performer and educator, he wanted to expand his compositional voice and integrate the steel pan with other instruments and ensembles. During a conversation with his former classmate and composer Baljinder Sekhon, Sekhon encouraged him to apply to the Manhattan School of Music (MSM) and pursue graduate studies.[36] Akiho was accepted into the Master of Music in Contemporary Performance Program in 2007, the inaugural year of that program.

Because Akiho was the only percussionist in the Contemporary Performance Program at MSM, he was highly sought after for performances and collaborations. Though his degree focused on performance, Akiho found time after classes to write sketches for his compositions. At MSM, Akiho studied primarily with John Ferrari, a versatile percussionist known for his work with the Bang on a Can All-Stars, a leading ensemble in the contemporary music scene. The group's commitment to genre-blending and exploration of new sonic worlds profoundly shaped Akiho's developing aesthetic.

[35] Yoho, "Meet Finale Composition Finalist Andy Akiho," *The Finale Blog.*

[36] Oteri, "Andy Akiho: Inside The Instrument," *New Music USA.*

Founded in 1987 by composers David Lang, Michael Gordon, and Julia Wolfe, Bang on a Can is a New York-based organization dedicated to "creating an international community devoted to innovative music, wherever it is found."[37] Their mission is to commission new works, support emerging composers, and foster musical collaboration without stylistic boundaries. That deeply resonated with Akiho's approach to making music. Participation in the Bang on a Can Summer Music Festival at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) was transformative. The program fosters a community embracing experimentation, collaboration, and freedom from convention. Akiho found inspiration and it spurred his compositional growth. He worked directly with Lang, Gordon, and Wolfe. Wolfe would later become his first composition teacher.[38]

Akiho credits Julia Wolfe as a central figure in his emergence as a composer:

> Julia Wolfe, she was the one who encouraged me to start embracing the title of "composer," because I had previously never thought of myself that way. […] I'm glad that I didn't have a traditional path to becoming a composer because I had such a range of musical and lived experiences that by the time I started composing, I was sure of what I wanted. And I felt free to explore my musical voice without being placed in any sort of artistic constraints.[39]

After his first summer at the festival, Wolfe began tutoring Akiho in private composition study, and he bartered with rhythm lessons for her children for her guidance. His involvement in the Bang on a Can Summer Music Festival continued through 2007 and 2008, initially as a performer and later as a composer. The summer of 2008 proved significant, and it marked a major turning point in his career. That year, Akiho began to push the boundaries of timbre and instrumentation with three big releases: *Vick(i/y)* for prepared piano, which uses dimes placed in

[37] "About – Bang on a Can," Bang on a Can, Nov. 17, 2025, https://bangonacan.org/about_us/.

[38] Yoho, "Meet Finale Composition Finalist Andy Akiho," *The Finale Blog.*

[39] "Composers You Should Know: Andy Akiho," *Omaha Symphony*.

the piano strings to create gamelan-like sonorities; *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, his first work for winds, scored for clarinet, flute, prepared vibraphone, drum set, piano, and strings; and *rAy's end* for trumpet, violin, and steel pan, which further demonstrating his expanding command of color, texture, and rhythmic complexity.

Following his graduation from MSM in 2009, Akiho was accepted into the Yale School of Music, Julia Wolfe's alma mater, where he studied composition with Christopher Theofanidis, Ezra Laderman, and Martin Bresnick.[40] During his time at Yale, Akiho's output expanded rapidly, producing twelve new works across diverse instrumentations. Notable pieces from this period include *21* for cello (2009), *NO one To kNOW one* (2010), and *Stop Speaking* (2011), an innovative snare drum solo with digital playback.

Throughout the early years of his compositional career, his music garnered national attention, receiving the Brian Israel Prize (2008), the ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer Award (2009), and the Yale School of Music Alumni Award (2011). In 2011, Akiho also released his first studio album, *NO one To kNOW one*, featuring recordings of ten original works, including the album's title *NO one To kNOW one, rAy's end*, and *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*. That same year, Akiho won the MakeMusic National Composition Contest, where his work *erase* (2011) was chosen out of five hundred submissions for performance by the renowned ensemble *eighth blackbird*.[41] The performance, described by the promoters as an "all-out, over-

[40] Williams, "The Synesthesia Suite: The Color Pieces of Andy Akiho," 10.

[41] The *eighth blackbird* ensemble name is spelled with only lower-case letters. The spelling above is intentional.

caffeinated, off-kilter jam session," took place at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University, foreshadowing Akiho's next academic chapter. [42]

Soon after, Akiho enrolled in the Doctoral Program in Composition at Princeton University, where he studied with Steven Mackey and Paul Lansky, both known for their innovations in sound and timbre. The period of their mentorship further expanded Akiho's interest in experimental sounds, codifying sonic innovation as paramount to his compositional voice. Akiho says that he likes to "invent" and "alter sounds" without damaging the instruments.[43] These experimental sounds include unusual mallet selections for percussionists, *col legno* on bowed string instruments performed with chopsticks instead of the wooden part of the bow, and credit cards scraped across piano tuning pins. Extended techniques like these are defining elements of his early compositional voice, and they reflect his lifelong fascination with both the physical and emotional phenomenon of sound.

In 2012, while at Princeton, Akiho received his first orchestral commission from Alan Gilbert, then Music Director of the New York Philharmonic. The resulting work, *Oscillate*, premiered on December 21, 2012, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, conducted by Gilbert. Akiho described *Oscillate* as a continuation of ideas explored in *erase*:

> They're pretty related, the two pieces, actually, especially with the percussion and piano techniques. But they don't tell a story together! It's not like a direct narrative story or anything. But there is definitely a relation between the two, as far as techniques and stylistic approaches.[44]

[42] Rose Amico, "Princeton graduate student Andy Akiho's 'Oscillate' to be performed by New York Philharmonic," *The Times of Trenton* (blog), Dec. 12, 2012, https://www.nj.com/times-entertainment/2012/12/princeton_graduate_student_and.html.

[43] Strauss, "Andy Akiho on Steel Pan, Composing & Colors," *Princeton Info*.

[44] Amico, "Princeton graduate student Andy Akiho's 'Oscillate' to be performed by New York Philharmonic," *The Times of Trenton*.

Both works employ extended techniques to generate unconventional timbres. With his growing interest in integrating winds, brass, and unconventional timbres into large-scale works, Akiho intensified his orchestral writing period during the mid-2010s. His 2015 composition, *Tarnished Mirrors*, which is written for strings, full wind section (woodwinds and brass), percussion, celeste, and harp, represents his first major orchestral score with winds. *Tarnished Mirrors* marks Akiho's first foray into full-ensemble composition, and it was his first work that was not a concerto. That same year, Akiho revisited his musical origins with *Beneath Lighted Coffers* (2015), a steel pan concerto with full orchestral accompaniment written for virtuoso pannist Liam Teague. Composed during his residency at the American Academy in Rome, as part of his Luciano Berio Rome Prize Fellowship, the piece merges Akiho's Trinidadian influences with his contemporary compositional language. *Beneath Lighted Coffers* stands as one of Akiho's most personal works to this point, symbolizing his commitment to bridging his personal tastes with classical traditions.

Both *Tarnished Mirrors* and *Beneath Lighted Coffers* were composed during his time in Rome. Later in 2015, he composed the *Ricochet/Ping Pong Concerto*, premiered by the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Long Yu. Like *Coffers*, *Ricochet* is a concerto for full orchestra, but its premise and execution display Akiho's characteristic inventiveness. Scored as a triple concerto for solo percussion, violin, and ping pong players, the work transforms the percussive energy of table tennis into a virtuosic and humorous exploration of rhythm, coordination, and sound. Akiho treats the ping pong balls as instruments that create music as they slam against a bass drum, bounce on a table, or off wine glasses. This embodies Akiho's fascination with "found sounds." Akiho uploaded the premiere performance to his YouTube channel, where the video quickly went viral, amassing over 300,000 views since its 2015 release.

Ricochet brought widespread attention to Akiho's work and reinforced his place as a composer of note in contemporary music. His heavy output during this pivotal year of his career would also reward him with the Lili Boulanger Memorial Prize (2015), an award founded by famed Twentieth-Century composition educator Nadia Boulanger in 1939 to financially support talented musicians.

In 2017, Akiho expanded his musical output to include works for the wind band genre, with his composition *Ondine's Epilogue*. His first for the medium, *Ondine's* was commissioned and dedicated to the Frost School of Music (University of Miami) Wind Ensemble and to Robert Carnochan, the Frost Wind Ensemble's conductor at the time of the premiere. Since the writing of this paper, this remains Akiho's only work written for wind ensemble.

After he wrote *Ondine's*, Akiho expanded his compositional repertoire, most notably for percussion and mixed chamber groups. Works during this period included *Prospects of a Misplaced Year* (2017) for piano and string quartet, *Lost on Chiaroscuro Street* (2017) for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, and *Aluminous* (2019), written for vibraphone and string quartet and his *Percussion Concerto* (2019) for solo percussion and orchestra. In the same year that Akiho wrote *Percussion Concerto*, he moved to Portland, Oregon, where the Portland Symphony premiered the work. Portland offered a grounded environment for the bustling composer and the chance to write in a less stressful environment. This change of scenery was improved the composer's quality of life: "A lot of times, you can think you need that hectic kind of life, or your stuff won't be good. But I think when I'm healthy, I write better, and I'm happier with what

I'm doing. It's more about enjoying the journey than trying to get to the finish line and crashing."[45]

This monumental shift from New York City to Portland, and a commission from Sandbox Percussion, a New York-based percussion group whose mission is to expand "the breadth and depth of the percussion form through commissions of original work that broaden representation in chamber music," helped Akiho complete his next major work, *Seven Pillars*.[46] Unlike many of his other works, *Seven Pillars* was much more of a collaborative effort, and one of Akiho's favorite accomplishments.[47] The work is an eighty-minute, eleven-part percussion quartet composition, which he began in 2013, but didn't complete until 2020, during the global shutdown caused by the Coronavirus-19. The sudden availability of others made the collaborative nature of the work possible. *Seven Pillars*, a product of seven years, is a defining work for Akiho. Its percussion instrumentation and experimental sounds heavily emphasize the rhythmic qualities of music and visual elements, such as interpretive dance, and shape the entire composition into a complete work of art. This earned Akiho's *Seven Pillars* a Pulitzer Prize nomination, following its premiere in 2022, and cemented Andy Akiho as one of the twenty-first century's preeminent composers.

Following the success of *Seven Pillars* and his status as a Pulitzer Prize finalist, Akiho was awarded the position of "Composer in Residence" for the Portland Symphony, which offered stability for the rising composer. Also in 2023, the Portland Symphony and the Omaha

[45] Zachary Woolfe, "One Composer, Four Players, 'Seven Pillars,'" *New York Times*, Dec. 2, 2021, https://www.proquest.com/docview/2605437335/citation/57E96098FE0949F5PQ/24.

[46] "About – Sandbox Percussion," Sandbox Percussion, Dec. 20, 2026, https://sandboxpercussion.com/about/.

[47] Piper Harried, "Causing a Raucous: Letting Loose with Andy Akiho and *intO tHe WiLd*," *University Wire* (blog), Mar. 6, 2025, https://www.proquest.com/docview/3181223776/citation/7C59E9FE1A604D79PQ/1.

Symphony commissioned Akiho to write another work inspired by the artwork of the artist Jun Kaneko.[48] Akiho's composition, titled *Sculptures*, not only used Kaneko's works as inspiration but also as part of the performance. Utilizing some of the actual artwork (including a large bronze bust that inspired the movements *Bronze I* and *Bronze II*) as instruments within the composition, Akiho further solidifies himself as a composer of interdisciplinary work, infusing art and music again in his work.

Composing a work based on the artwork of a Japanese artist allowed for an opportunity for Akiho to reflect on his identity as a Japanese American, similar to when he was a sushi chef:

> I've learned that identity shows up in the art and, specifically, the process of how the art is made. For example, this concept called "Kintsugi": when things are broken, you put them back together by infusing them with gold. There is a lot of symbolism in this process for me, and it can be applied to my music, but also, ultimately, to life as well. There is a lot to dig into, and I'm still discovering what this whole process has meant for me […], but I know that I'll look back on this and understand how meaningful and special it was.[49]

Following the premiere, *Sculptures*, a full-length album, was nominated for the Classical Compendium Grammy Award in 2024, marking his third overall nomination.[50] Akiho was also nominated for Best Contemporary Classical Composition, the third time he had been nominated for that award, with previous nominations in 2022 and 2023.

Since the release of *Sculptures*, Akiho has written and recorded numerous works, both for full orchestra and mixed chamber groups. These works include *Longing* (2024) for steel pan, *Nisei* (2024) for solo cello and orchestra, and *Copper Canvas* (2025), which was commissioned

[48] Jun Kaneko is a noted visual artist who was born in Japan in 1942. He is most notable for his ceramic sculptures that infuse elements of Japanese art with contemporary techniques, and he was a major influencer in the Contemporary Ceramics Movement during the middle part of the Twentieth Century; "Biography," Jun Kaneko, Oct. 5, 2025, https://junkaneko.com/biography/.

[49] "Composers You Should Know: Andy Akiho," *Omaha Symphony*.

[50] "Artists - Andy Akiho," Grammy Awards, Sep. 14, 2025, https://www.grammy.com/artists/Andy-Akiho/37874.

by his alma mater, the University of South Carolina, for a large, mixed chamber ensemble. Akiho currently lives in New York City, but splits his time between Portland, where he is still the "Composer in Residence" for the Portland Symphony.

Since 2013, Akiho has finished all the required coursework for his post-graduate degree, but has yet to earn his doctorate from Princeton University. The composer has yet to complete the writing of his dissertation, though he is optimistic about its completion and sees its completion as not only a personal goal, but also as a sign of accomplishment and an opportunity to give back to his community:

> I've got to write a dissertation. […] And I will get it done; it matters to me. I feel like the opportunity it gave me, being there and having that kind of inspiration there and knowledge and resources and just that experience, it wouldn't be right if I didn't finish […] I just hope I'm setting a positive example and feeling that sense of accomplishment of actually finishing, too.[51]

At the time of this writing, Akiho has just recently completed a timpani concerto, scenes for an opera, and has worked extensively with the Royal Danish Ballet. Though Akiho is an accomplished and internationally renowned composer, he still feels that there is more to create and other musical collaborations to have, regardless of genre:

> I want to work with Lil Buck, and I would love to work with Kendrick Lamar. I used to think it would be a cool collaboration. [...] Style is not what I'm attracted to; it's the artist and the innovation. It doesn't matter what style […] Even with my future, I just want to make good things that I'm really happy and excited about. Being honest in who I am, no matter the genre.[52]

[51] Andy Akiho (composer) in conversation with the author, February 2026.

[52] Victoria Looseleaf, "Music Is Intensely Visual for Composer Andy Akiho," *San Francisco Classical Voice* (blog), Apr. 1, 2015, https://www.sfcv.org/articles/artist-spotlight/music-intensely-visual-composer-andy-akiho.

Compositional Voice

When describing his own compositional voice, Andy Akiho states that his authenticity is the sum of the musical influences that inspired him from the beginning. As mentioned, some of Akiho's biggest influences come from popular music, such as rock, hip-hop, and jazz. His musical vernacular makes his compositions accessible, despite their complexity. Though not directly quoting pre-existing musical material, such as exact melodies or rhythmic motifs, Akiho does interpolate known popular conventions, particularly well-established drum grooves, to provide a hook for listeners and performers that grabs them. Akiho's desire to write authentically is why he chooses popular music for inspiration: "I'm trying to create something I would want to hear or listen to nonstop. So, it's a lot of the music I grew up on, and a lot of my personality. That's all it really is."[53]

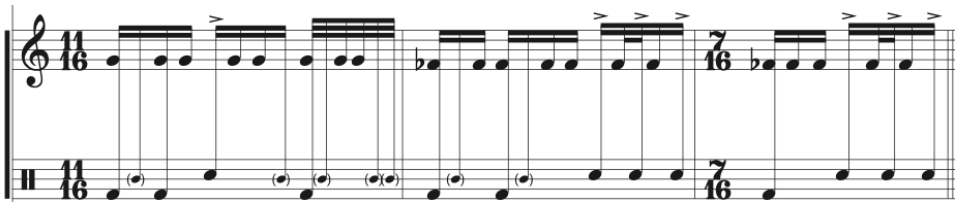


Figure 1.1. Andy Akiho, *NO one To kNOW one*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2010, B section groove Drum set and Glockenspiel, mm. 124-126

Akiho's percussion performance background heavily influences the type of music to which he listens, how he composes, and his approach to instrumentation. Akiho's oeuvre has over fifty works for solo percussion, chamber percussion works, and mixed ensembles that feature percussion, including three concertos for percussion instruments. Having written nineteen

[53] Matthew Neil Andrews, "Andy Akiho: Systems Within Systems," *Oregon Arts Watch* (blog), Sep. 17, 2018, https://archive.orartswatch.org/andy-akiho-systems-within-systems/.

completed works for the tenor steel pan, the composer regards that instrument as his musical "root."[54]

Rhythm, the primary function of percussion instruments, usually leads his compositions, with Akiho using compositional techniques such as syncopation, polyrhythm, tempo fugue, and metric modulation. The key to Akiho's rhythmic writing is his use of asymmetrical meters and time signatures, especially those with the number seven, because of the rhythmic dissonance it creates: "Another thing I like with those types of rhythms, like seven: I always have this habit of feeling things against the quarter note. Even when I'm writing in 7/16 or 7/8 I'll feel it against the quarter note, like 7/4." [55]

Figure 1.2. Andy Akiho, *21*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2015, Melodic Syncopation
Cello, mm. 1-4

Akiho believes that rhythm is a key building block to his works; however, it is one of many integral aspects of his music: "I know I work a lot with rhythm, but I feel like that's the fundamental parameter in music. Rhythm and timbre. Being a percussionist, I grew up with that."[56]

Akiho's fascinating use of timbre comes from his love of found and experimental sounds. Many of Akiho's works use prepared instruments, and it harkens back to John Cage's works for

[54] Andrews, "Andy Akiho: Systems Within Systems," *Oregon Arts Watch*.

[55] Andrews, "Andy Akiho: Systems Within Systems," *Oregon Arts Watch*.

[56] Andrews, "Andy Akiho: Systems Within Systems," *Oregon Arts Watch*.

prepared piano, such as *Bacchanale* (1940).[57] According to Grove Music Online, prepared instruments, like a prepared piano, are instruments in which "the pitches, timbres, and dynamic responses of individual notes have been altered by means of bolts, screws, mutes, rubber erasers, and/or other objects inserted at particular points" to create such unconventional sounds.[58] Ever an aural mad scientist, Akiho creates and discovers found sounds through personal experience and experimentation. These unorthodox sounds, such as dimes placed inside the strings in a piano for *Vick(i/y)* (2008), or magnets placed on a tenor steel pan for *Karakurenai* (2007), are reflective of Akiho's desire to share sounds from his environment:

> I get a lot of inspiration from spending time in urban environments, where I can really integrate myself into the energy, culture, and feel of a city. And I've taken something from every place that I've been. I like writing in coffee shops, bars, and hotel lobbies, which allows me to experience that energy and stay focused. I know almost every coffee shop in the cities where I spend time […] I can also go for a walk for inspiration, but that offers a different kind of perspective.[59]

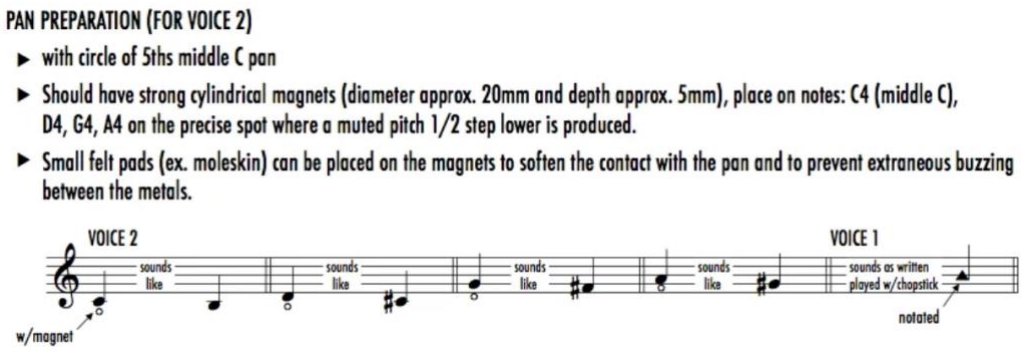


Figure 1.3. Andy Akiho, *Karakurenai* | *Crimson*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2007, Pan preparation notes Tenor steel pan, p. 1

[57] John Cage was one of the most influential composers of the Twentieth century and a leading figure of postwar avant garde music. He pioneered uses of indeterminacy, silence as sound, and prepared instruments in his music; James Pritchett, Laura Kuhn, and Charles Hiroshi Garrett, "Cage, John," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), https://doi-org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2223954.

[58] Edwin M. Ripin, Hugh Davies, and Thomas J. Kernan, "Prepared piano," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2013), https://doi-org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2252176.

[59] "Composers You Should Know: Andy Akiho," *Omaha Symphony*.

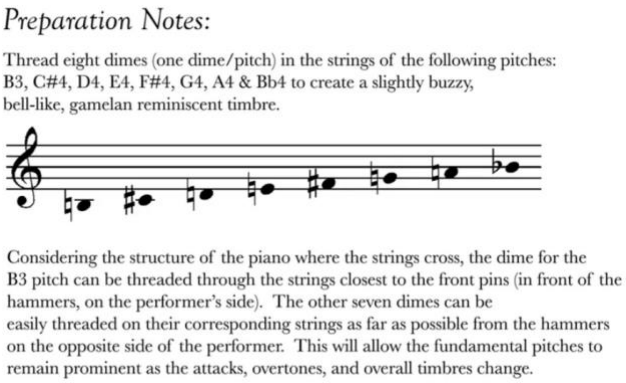


Figure 1.4. Andy Akiho, *Vick(i/y)*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, Piano preparation notes
Piano, p. 1

While Akiho emphasizes rhythm and timbre in his compositions, there is a large element of tonality. His synesthesia guides the prescribed tonality and melodic figures present in his work. For the composer, composing melodies is more about "feeling" the notes rather than hearing them.[60] Of himself, the composer states, "I'm kind of tone deaf. I can't sing 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' without going off-key. It's pretty rough."[61] However, the melodic content of his works is based on his synesthetic response to the music, or the colors he sees in his mind when playing or hearing music. This type of synesthetic-based composing creates non-traditional harmonies and melodies, or "systems" that are uniquely his own:

> It's very, very much feeling. That's everything to me. I will create systems sometimes, and I will still work in and out of those on intuition and feeling […] I like to create systems within systems just to create these colors, synesthetic kinds of colors. I'll have some kind of system, or maybe just a melodic minor type, modal maybe, and then I'll just bring in a totally different polytonal harmony. If I'm feeling it in D minor, it's orange and burgundy and red, and I literally picture this wave of orange crashing through. It's nice to see these colors take over. I do that visually and aurally, simultaneously. That's how I think of it.[62]

[60] Andrews, "Andy Akiho: Systems Within Systems," *Oregon Arts Watch*.

[61] Oteri, "Andy Akiho: Inside The Instrument," *New Music USA*.

[62] Andrews, "Andy Akiho: Systems Within Systems," *Oregon Arts Watch*.

Identity and authenticity are key themes throughout his life and compositional career. The influence of other composers is evident in many of his works, especially the music of those who mentored him or those musical idols who inspired him. Included in this list are his direct mentors: Julia Wolfe, David Lang, Steven Mackey, and Paul Lansky; iconic classical composers such as Olivier Messiaen, Béla Bartók, Steve Reich, John Cage, JS Bach; and jazz composers Max Roach and Miles Davis.[63]

[63] Andrews, "Andy Akiho: Systems Within Systems," *Oregon Arts Watch*.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL INFORMATION AND PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS OF *TO WALK OR RUN IN WEST HARLEM*

Historical Information

Akiho composed *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* in 2008 for the "Bang on a Can Summer Festival," where he participated as a composer fellow. Akiho previously attended the festival in 2007 as a performer and according to the composer, "got lucky" with admittance as a composer the following fall.[64] Recognizing that his compositional oeuvre was smaller than that of his peers, and lacking extensive formal training, Akiho spent the next year dedicated to his craft, expanding his output and proficiency in the months leading up to the summer of 2008. The 2008 festival challenged him in multiple ways. For the first time, Akiho would write a work for others, and he would not perform with them. He couldn't rely on own his performer's instincts through the writing process: "My first year was as a performer. […] And, I don't know, for some reason, they let me in as a composer in 2008, and the instrumentation they gave me didn't have myself in it. It was for the performer fellows. The first time I didn't write for myself was that piece."[65]

It was one of his first works for multiple wind instruments, had prepared percussion, and was not written for Akiho's preferred instrument, the steel pan: "I don't even think I started it on the pan. It was a really interesting exercise for me […] I played around the piano. I remember I

[64] Oteri, "Andy Akiho: Inside The Instrument," *New Music USA*.

[65] Oteri, "Andy Akiho: Inside The Instrument," *New Music USA*.

experimented a lot with the vibraphone, and I was messing around with rubber bands a lot back then […] And I just kind of improvised for hours and hours, then I started to record myself."[66]

Although he wouldn't perform his own music with *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Akiho found a way to make the narrative deeply personal. It wasn't for him; it was about him. Akiho was stabbed on his way to a rehearsal at the Manhattan School of Music in the fall of 2007. This trauma is the seminal event that creates the narrative framework for the piece, although it unfolds in a non-linear fashion. Akiho cites film as a primary influence: "I tried to create a soundtrack of what took place that evening, in a *Pulp Fiction* kind of way. I was trying to recapture those moments and sounds that I heard, like hospital beeps or cars screeching, from my memory of the incident, but not in chronological order." [67]

While modeled on the non-linear structure of Quentin Tarantino's landmark film, there is a scientific basis for memory distortion in recalling traumatic events. In a published study by psychiatrists Bessel van der Kolk and Rita Fisler, the physicians conclude that recollection of highly stressful and traumatic experiences is commonly irregular when merging memories into a narrative:

> The study of flashbulb memories has shown that the relationship between emotionality, vividness and confidence is very complex, and does not necessarily reflect accuracy […] Thus, while trauma may leave indelible sensory and affective imprints, once these are incorporated into a personal narrative this semantic memory, like all explicit memory, is likely subject to varying degrees of distortion.[68]

---

[66] Oteri, "Andy Akiho: Inside The Instrument," *New Music USA*.

[67] Steven Libowitz, "Setting a New Rhythm," *The Montecito Journal* (blog), July 1, 2025, https://www.montecitojournal.net/2025/07/01/setting-a-new-rhythm-with-akiho/.

[68] Bessel van der Kolk and Rita Fisler were faculty members of the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts at the time of publication of the article "Dissociation and the fragmentary nature of traumatic memories: Overview and exploratory study." van der Kolk is a particularly noted doctor and lecturer and who specializes in the study of post-traumatic responses in both adults and children is the author of the 2014 bestselling novel, *The Body Keeps the Score*; B.A. van der Kolk and R. Fisler, "Dissociation and the fragmentary nature of traumatic memories: Overview and exploratory study" *Journal of Traumatic Stress,* no. 8, 521, https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.2490080402.

Not only is Akiho referencing the non-linear narratives of a film, but he is also subconsciously using a scientifically grounded model of traumatic memory. This distorted recollection lends both realism and emotional weight to the composition, adding a nuanced perspective on how individuals process trauma and the complicated web of recollection it can create.

Like many of his works, the title *to wALK Or ruN in wEst harlem* contains a concealed message embedded within its capital letters. When isolated, the capital letters spell the word "ALONE." Ian Rosenbaum, a frequent collaborator with Akiho, believes the title acts as a de facto subtitle and Akiho's emotional state following the attack:

> *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* is actually kind of an autobiographical piece […] it sort of tells the story of an experience he had getting mugged when he lived in West Harlem. And it was that moment when he was deciding to walk or run, when he was standing here in West Harlem. And perhaps he's trying to say that he felt a little bit alone at that time or something like that.[69]

The subtitle helps explain part of why Akiho authored a unique narrative that touches trauma, memory, isolation, and that moment of distress that creates or amplifies those feelings.

to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem is scored for seven instruments with three families of instruments: woodwinds (flute, clarinet), strings (violin, cello), and percussion (piano, prepared vibraphone, drum set). Akiho's website previously labeled this instrumentation as a "Pierrot Ensemble," an informal title given to mixed chamber ensembles similar in configuration, though this label was removed. The term "Pierrot Ensemble" originates from the instrumentation utilized in Arnold Schoenberg's original work, *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), which included violin, cello, flute,

[69] Williams, "The Synesthesia Suite: The Color Pieces of Andy Akiho," 193.

clarinet, piano, and a vocalist employing the *Sprechstimme* technique.[70] Though the term "Pierrot Ensemble" is loosely connected to many ensembles that closely resemble Schoenberg's groundbreaking work, Akiho's exact instrumentation does not precisely match Schoenberg's. However, both Christopher Dromey outlines in the Grove Music Online entry for "Pierrot ensemble" and *The Pierrot Ensembles: Chronicle and Catalogue, 1912-2012*, make the case that development in the years following *Pierrot*'s premiere allows for considerable flexibility:

> By satisfying a prevailing preference for more colourful, heterogeneous chamber groups, the Pierrot ensemble became popular but never fixed. Several related types emerged: Pierrot ensembles that omit or substitute the piano, as in *Palmström*, Berio's *Folk Songs* (with harp), and Peter Maxwell Davies's *Antechrist* (with harpsichord); Webern's streamlined Pierrot quintet, without doubling or vocalist; and voiceless ensembles that preserve instrumental doubling, as in Lutyens' *Concertante for Five Players* and Torke's *Telephone Book* […] The most common Pierrot ensemble form, however, adds percussion to the lineup, such as Martino's *Notturno*, Elliott Carter's *Triple Duo*, Xenakis's *Plektó*, Louis Andriessen's *Zilver*, and Steve Reich's *Double Sextet*. Their modifications owe a debt to the Pierrot Players (1967–70, under Davies and Birtwistle) and The Fires of London (1970–87, without Birtwistle), who revived Pierrot Lunaire and reshaped its template in their own works.[71]

With this broader definition, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* could be a "Pierrot ensemble" or a "Gas Trilogy Ensemble." Benjamin Britten's 1935 trilogy of works uses a closer match to Akiho's ensemble than Schoenberg's does. A "Gas Trilogy Ensemble" is a modified "Pierrot ensemble" with added percussion and no vocalist. It is also called an "eighth blackbird Ensemble," named after a modern ensemble that closely matches and for which Akiho has written, or a modified "Bang on a Can All-Stars Ensemble," named after the original

[70] Christopher Dromey, Christopher Wintle, ed., *The Pierrot Ensembles: Chronicle and Catalogue, 1912-2012* (London: Plumbago Books, 2013), 11-16.

[71]Christopher Dromey, "Pierrot ensemble," in Grove Music Online (Oxford University Press, 2014), https://doi-org./10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.2261027.

commissioning group. Akiho confirms the multiple names that this ensemble could be called, though he is hesitant to officially classify this instrumentation:

> It's almost like *eighth blackbird*, Bang on a Can All-Stars, the Pierrot Ensemble kind of. […] I just don't know. Ever since I've been out of school, I haven't really heard an ensemble be called that. I know that's a very academic term, so I don't really stick with that, because also, there are so many modified Pierrots, almost any combination of instruments that are six or a modified Pierrot. So, I don't want to confuse people, because Pierrot Ensemble, I mean, in a way, I know there is more to a Pierrot Ensemble, because there's voice. And there's no voice in Harlem, so I try to not confuse myself or others with that terminology.[72]

Based on prior evidence, the *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* instrumentation is a modified Pierrot Ensemble, though for this analysis, the instrumentation will be classified as a mixed chamber ensemble that can be traced to the Schoenbergian Pierrot Ensemble. The understanding of the historical context of this instrumentation, along with all background information, is imperative in realizing Akiho's compositional intent.

Performance Considerations

The unique compositional and instrumental choices utilized by Akiho in *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* present many considerations for conductors to have planned for before the first rehearsal, the first of which is the performance and rehearsal setup. The typical performance setup of a Pierrot-derived ensemble is a piano quintet: a chamber group of four string instruments and a piano. Often, the piano is in the center-back, with the four strings placed in an arc in front of the piano. Similarly, a Pierrot ensemble positions the four small instruments, both strings and winds, in the front arc with the piano behind them. The string and wind instruments are next to each other, with the lower of the instruments, the cello and bass clarinet, in the center

[72] Andy Akiho (composer) in conversation with the author, February 2026.

of the ensemble, and the higher instruments, the violin and flute, on the outer edges. It's challenging to balance the percussion with the rest of the ensemble. To prevent unwanted volume imbalance, the percussion should sit behind the ensemble near the piano. This should ensure correct musical interplay while preventing overpowering sounds from the percussion.

One should pay special attention and keep the vibraphone and piano close to each other for the interplay of their musical lines, and the drum set should sit back far enough to maintain the rhythmic pulse without overpowering the ensemble. The exact arrangement of the drum set, vibraphone, and piano varies depending on the performance area and equipment, these instruments should be placed in the second row of the ensemble. Microphones and amplification for the string instruments would help properly balance the overall orchestration of this unique ensemble. Although the score does not include a suggested setup diagram, one is provided in this thesis that accounts for all the mentioned factors:

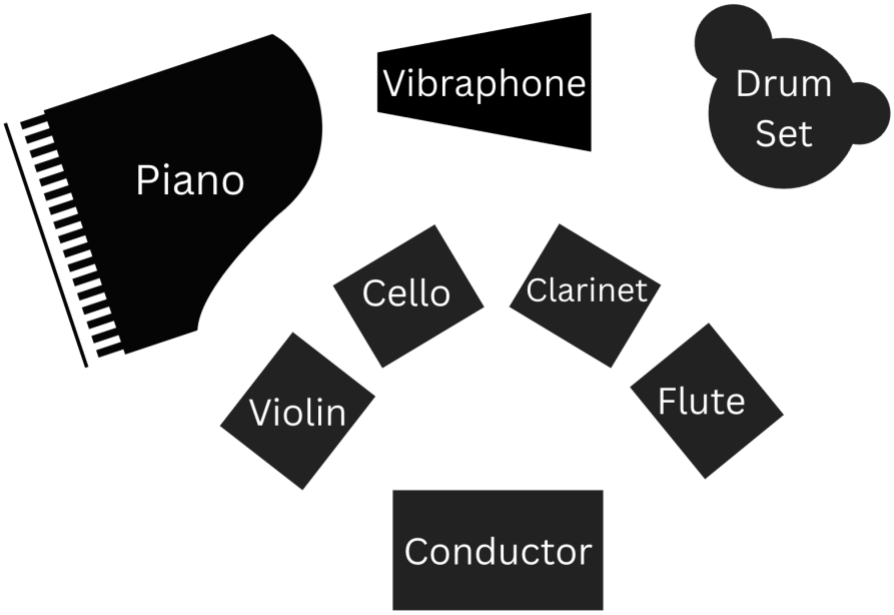


Figure 2.1. *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* suggested performance setup

Although the instrumentation for this assigned composition was predetermined, Akiho found a way to express his compositional voice: by infusing experimental timbres and extended techniques. Each of the seven instrumentalists performs non-traditional techniques on their traditional instrument to achieve a desired effect. For the woodwinds, Akiho instructs the flute player to match timbres with the cello and for the bass clarinetist to "slap tongue" throughout various passages.[73] The strings are written in *scordatura*, where the strings are tuned abnormally to specified pitches creating novel timbres and harmonics, and the violinist has instructions to create a "high-pitched tire screech" sound.[74] The violin plays *sul ponticello*, or to bow close to the bridge of the instrument, near the end of the work.[75] Additionally, the cello is asked to use a snap *pizzicato*, or a "Bartók *pizzicato*," where the string is lifted upward with the thumb and first finger, and released to slap the fingerboard to create a percussive sound with audible pitch.[76]

The percussion parts are unconventional with experimental instruction. Akiho includes indications for the piano to slam the fallboard, simulating a car door slam, and certain notes as *pizzicato*, by plucking the string inside the instrument. The drum set part has a specific setup, which includes the standard instruments of kick drum, snare drum, floor tom, hi-hat cymbal, and

[73] "Slap tonguing" is an extended technique utilized by single reed instruments where performers create a percussive sound by suctioning the tongue to the reed and closing off the reed, then pulling the tongue down quickly. This technique is outlined in various method books, though this definition is taken from Allison D. Adams and Brian R. Horner's technique book, *Playing & Teaching the Saxophone*; Allison D. Adams, and Brian R. Horner, *Playing & Teaching the Saxophone: A Modern Approach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 153-156.

[74] David D. Boyden, Robin Stowell, Mark Chambers, James Tyler, and Richard Partridge, "Scordatura," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), accessed Jan. 2, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.41698; Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* (Harlem, NY: Aki Rhythm Press), 7.

[75] "Sul ponticello," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), accessed Feb. 1, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.27102.

[76] Ashley Sandor, "Extended Techniques for String Instruments as Applied to Selected Twentieth-Century Cello Repertoire" (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2004), 9.

crash cymbal, with the unique additions of a mounted brake drum and the found sound of a "resonant metal pipe."[77] The prepared vibraphone part includes detailed instructions for keyboard preparation of the vibraphone, specific mallet choices, and the hand setup for the vibraphonist.

Table 2.1. Instrumentation	
Part (In Score Order)	**Special Considerations**
Flute	
Clarinet	Doubles on Bass Clarinet (mm. 16-82, mm. 90-99) Slap Tongue technique asked for throughout
Violin	Written in *scordatura:* G, D#, Ab, D# (from lowest to highest) Harmonics written mm. 1-16 High-pitched glissando on A (Ab) and E (D#) strings to simulate tire screech (m. 32) *Sul ponticello* marking (mm. 106-107) Quadruple stop *pizzicato* written in a "strumming" pattern (mm. 112-117)
Cello	Written in *scordatura:* B, G, D, A (from lowest to highest) Harmonics written mm. 1-16 *Pizzicato* written throughout Snap or "Bartók *pizzicato*"
Piano	Instructed to slam piano fall board (m. 30) *Pizzicato* written (mm. 114-117), can be achieved by plucking the string inside
Vibraphone	Four plastic bell mallets, two hard vibe mallets, and a hard-gauged wire brush (dreadlock) required Eight 9G (9"x1"x1/16") rubber bands needed for prepared vibraphone sounds
Drum Set	Small China Crash (can be substituted for crash with a fast decay) 10" Zil Bell (can be substituted for a found resonant metal pipe) Brake drum Hi-hat cymbal Snare drum Floor tom Kick drum

[77] Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, i.

Performing a "high-pitched tire screech sound" is one of the few examples of non-musical and emulative sounds cued in the music. In a single section, these non-musical sounds simulate the victim fleeing to receive medical care. Along with the screeching tire, Akiho wrote cues for "Footsteps" and "Car Door Slam."[78] Although he includes instructions, experimentation is encouraged within the performance space to achieve the best results.

Table 2.2. Emulative Sounds	
Emulative Sounds	**Performance Recommendations**
Footsteps	Simulated running in walkways behind/next to stage, optionally utilizing gravel or rocks to create different sounds Semi-soft mallets on a thunder sheet
Car Door Slam	Slammed piano fall board with rim knock of kick drum Marching machine slammed on top of a cajon Thick textbook thrown on wooden desk
Screeching Tire	Slow, high-pitched upwards glissando starting in 5th position on the A and E strings of the violin Scraped credit card or pick along higher pitched string inside a piano with a pick or credit card

The exact instructions, performance notes, and notational key are in all parts of the score. This one-page document includes important notes for the entire ensemble at the top, including information on the key signature, *scordatura* tuning, and the ensemble approach to dynamics. Akiho also includes keys for the vibraphone and drum set note heads, a prepared vibraphone diagram, and a vibraphone mallet setup.

The prepared vibraphone is distinctly Akiho. Large rubber bands create a "Bartók *pizzicato*" on a metallic instrument, which he originally conceived on the steel pan:

> That was inspired by learning how to write for string quartet right around that time […] I was inspired by Bartók [*pizzicato*]. So, do you know the snap and toccata of the strings? Yeah, so when I learned about that technique from studying Bartok string quartets, and learning techniques from my colleagues in Manhattan School, I wanted to apply that, and so I was like, 'How can I recreate that?' And I used a rubber band […] It snaps, […] like

[78] Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, 7.

> a metallic Bartók pizz on the pan […] I was just thinking of ideas like, 'What was the largest [rubber band] that you got?' […] and they sent me a sample pack of some rubber bands. And one was like an inch wide. And I think nine inches long or 12 or something. So then, with that, I experimented with putting it over a vibraphone bar. And then I wrote *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*.[79]

The original work was a success for the composer and marked the beginning of more compositions for winds and strings for years afterward. After delving deeper into wind ensembles, he received a surprising request. In 2016, Akiho was asked to create an original percussion piece. But with the short time window, he simply couldn't. Instead, he wrote a version of *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* for percussion ensemble. The University of Nebraska, Lincoln percussion studio performed it at the 2016 Percussive Arts Society International Convention:

> That was for the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. Dave Hall, who runs the percussion department there, asked me to write a new piece. But it was a very short timeline, and I wouldn't have had time to rewrite a brand-new piece. He was really into *harlem*, so somehow, we came up with the idea to just make a new arrangement of it. But I didn't want it to be just an arrangement. So, I was like, 'Let's take the same music, but I'm really going to orchestrate it, not just make it work, not just take the clarinet part and put it here. Just rework the entire piece.' The piano part is pretty much exactly the same, though. That's the one thing I kept. I spent a day with them working out some of the kinks, and then they performed it, and they did that video and I thought it came out really nice. It was really great.[80]

The reworked version for percussion changes the original septet instrumentation to an octet and adds a percussion part covering all of the musical elements in the original. Instruments in the 2016 rearrangement include the intact piano part, a similar drum set, and a prepared vibraphone. There are five newly formed percussion parts: glockenspiel, crotales, marimba, thunder sheet, tam-tam, and marching machine. Though the form and narrative remain, the orchestration is a fundamental transformation.

---

[79] Williams, "The Synesthesia Suite: The Color Pieces of Andy Akiho," 113-114.

[80] Oteri, "Andy Akiho: Inside The Instrument," *New Music USA*.

The percussion ensemble version shows Akiho's commitment to his work, his own compositional voice, and the value it means for him as an artist: "A lot of people think I'm trying to do novelty things, but it's really the world I live in where I feel I can create the most. It's not just a cool effect. A lot of people will think it's like trying to be some kind of gimmick, but it's really just where I feel at home."[81]

Both the original 2008 chamber version and the 2016 percussion ensemble arrangement are available for purchase on the composer's website, under the "Scores" tab: andyakiho.com/collections. The scores and parts are available for purchase as physical copies, digital downloads, or both. Akiho operates his own publishing company, Aki Rhythm Press, to publish all his compositions.

[81] Oteri, "Andy Akiho: Inside The Instrument," *New Music USA*.

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSIS OF *TO WALK OR RUN IN WEST HARLEM*

Akiho's *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* is comprised of four identifiable sections that are differentiated primarily by their accompanying grooves, as well as by melodic figures. Though form is primarily derived from tonal concepts, such as diatonic cadential resolutions, the emphasis on rhythm is the most relevant structural element in this work. The changing percussion and accompaniment groove, in conjunction with melodic content, defines each formal section: as the groove changes, the music enters into a new section. This chapter will give an overview of the form, groove, rhythmic devices, texture and orchestration, harmonic elements, and melodic figures.

The form of *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* can be separated into four distinct sections, each of which has its own established groove: Section 1. "The Attack" with the "Syncopated March" groove, Section 2. "Emergency Room" with the "Off-set Funk," Section 3. "Harlem Streets" with the "7/8 Hip-Hop," and Section 4. "Ambulance Ride," which returns to a modified version of the "Syncopated March" before evolving into the "Syncopated Bass and Downbeat Groove."

Table 3.1. *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* Form

Section	**1. "The Attack"**	**2. "Emergency Room"**	**3. "Harlem Streets"**	**4. "Ambulance Ride"**
Groove	Syncopated March	Off-Set Funk	7/8 Hip-Hop	Syncopated Bass and Downbeat Groove
Measures	mm. 1-32	mm. 33-64	mm. 65-89	mm. 90-121
Tempo	♩=104-110	♩=94-96		

The individual sections of this form have been given names in addition to their numerical designation to better understand the connection of the musical elements to the programmatic

narrative. Each section is not named by the composer but rather was determined by the author of this thesis, deriving the names from the emulative sounds heard in each section. This includes the sounds of footsteps and tiring screeching in Section 1. “The Attack,” sounds of hospital machinery beeps in Section 2. “Emergency Room,” and the ambulance sirens heard in Section 4. “Ambulance Ride.” As previously described, this work is a non-linear narrative retelling of a stabbing and the preceding and following events. If the work was rearranged to follow a linear retelling of the narrative, a proposed reordering is as follows: Section 3. “Harlem Streets,” Section 1. “The Attack,” Section 4. “Ambulance Ride,” and then concluding with Section 2. “Emergency Room.” As the composer intends for the narrative to be non-linear, the work should not be rearranged and performed so that the musical elements and ideas are connected as composed.

Each groove is not a preestablished one, but rather a uniquely composed pattern by Akiho to evoke common drum set idioms. The given name to each groove serves as a descriptive label connecting each groove to its stylistic inspiration. Like the section titles, these grooves are named by the author of this thesis and not by the composer. While the drum set provides the primary rhythmic propulsion, other instruments in the ensemble actively reinforce and articulate the groove through rhythmic unison and add melodic content to the groove.

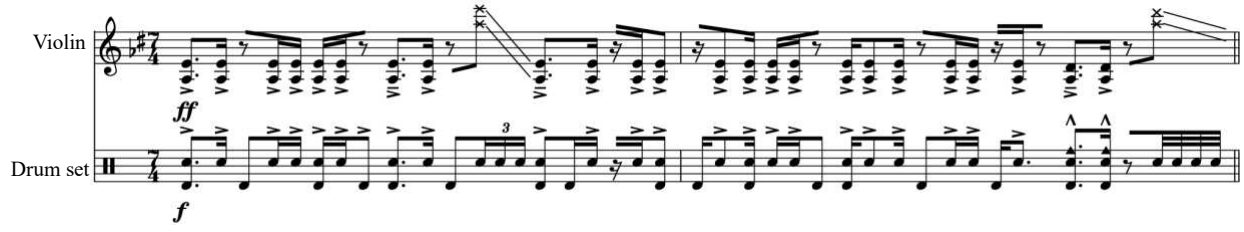


Figure 3.1. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, “Syncopated March” Violin and Drum set, mm. 23-24

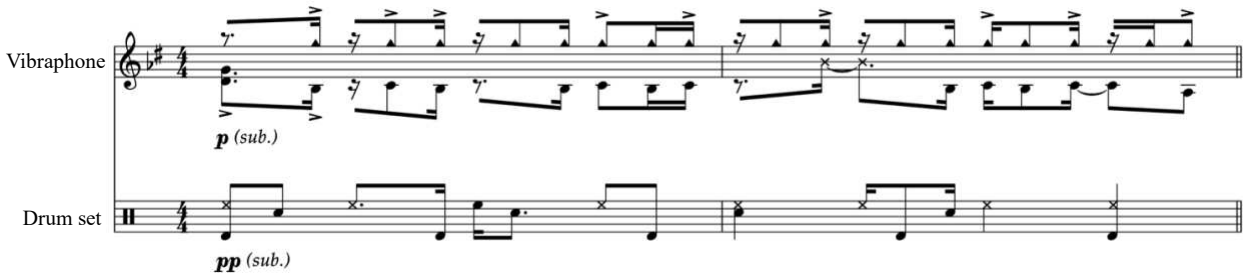


Figure 3.2. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, "Offset Funk"
Vibraphone and Drum set, mm. 44-45

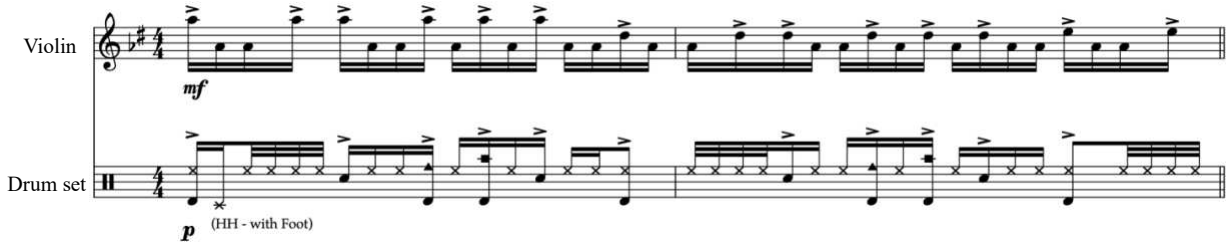


Figure 3.3. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, "7/8 Hip-Hop"
Violin and Drum set, mm. 65-66

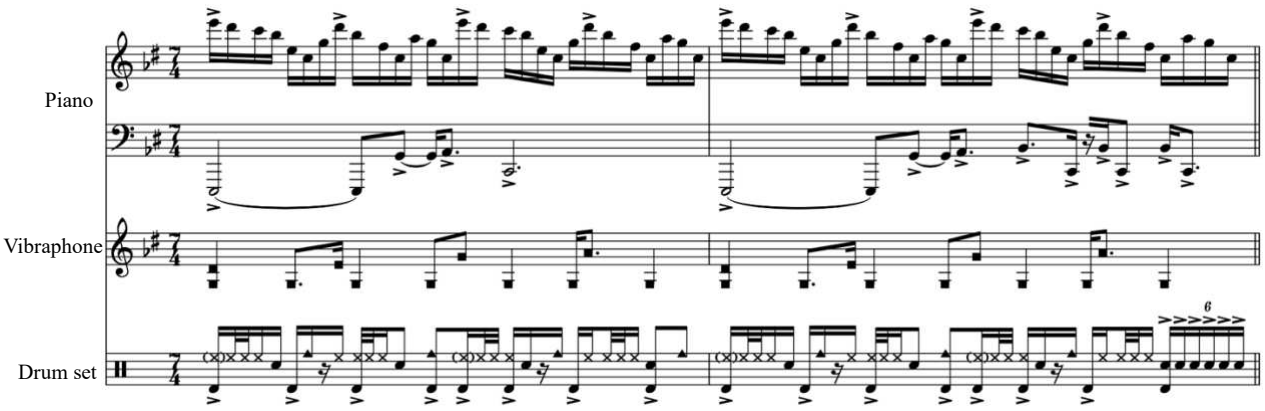


Figure 3.4. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, "Syncopated Bass and Downbeat Groove"
Piano, Vibraphone, and Drum set, mm. 102-103

In addition to the use of these grooves and the narrative aspects defining the form of the work, metric dissonances and their resolutions also signify the ending of phrases and formal units. This analytical tool, outlined by Harald Krebs in the sixth chapter of his book *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann*, is useful for understanding form from

metric cadential points.[82] These metric cadential points are seen throughout the work: as the rhythmic tension increases until its ultimate release, the form then shifts into its next section.

Akiho heavily employs metric dissonance throughout this work, a key aspect of his compositional voice. Most notably, Akiho utilizes "grouping dissonance," a concept in which multiple nonequivalent groups of pulses are layered against a prevailing metrical framework.[83] In grouping dissonance, there are two groups: the metrical layers and the antimetrical layer. The dissonance arises from the interaction between a stable metrical layer and a conflicting antimetrical layer, resolving only when the pulses realign into rhythmic consonance. Visually, this dissonance is more pronounced as the conductor at times appears to be conducting against the; however, the conductor is in fact maintaining the written meter as the performers create the antimetrical layers. Conductors should prioritize maintaining a clear sense of pulse, a clear conducting pattern, and precise cueing whenever rhythmic consonance is made from unison attacks. Throughout the work, groupings based on the number seven are most seen, either functioning as the consonant framework or used to create the dissonant antimetrical layer. Akiho utilizes this specifically in the "7/8 Funk," which uses a 7/8 metered drum groove that plays over the written 4/4 time signature.

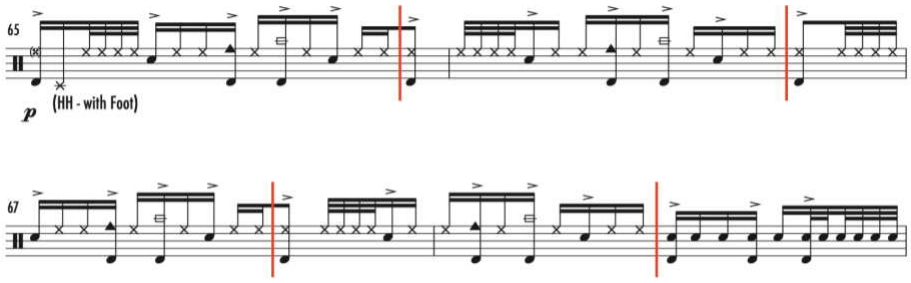


Figure 3.5. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, "7/8 Funk" Metric Dissonance Drum set, mm. 65-68

[82] Harald Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 142-156.

[83] Krebs, *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann*, 31.

Rather than notating multiple simultaneous time signatures, Akiho consistently keeps all parts within a single meter, shifting the placement of phrasal emphasis across instruments. Isorhythms, or the "periodic repetition or recurrence of rhythmic configurations," are often used in conjunction with these polymetric effects to create more and varied dissonances across this expanded rhythmic texture.[84]

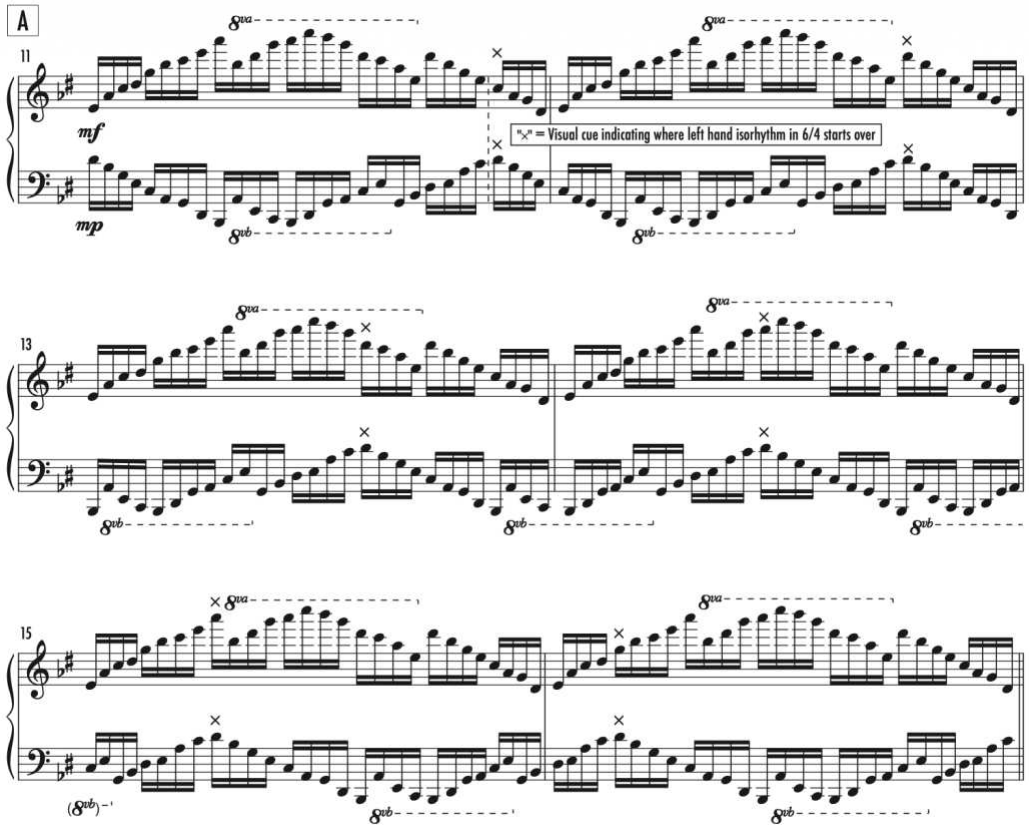


Figure 3.6. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, Isorhythmic-Metric Dissonance Piano, mm. 11-16

Another use of grouping dissonance is found in the composition is the tempo fugue, a technique developed by noted composer György Ligeti in works such as his *Kammerkonzert*

[84] Margaret Bent, "Isorhythm," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), accessed Dec. 10, 2025, https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.13950.

(1969), *Melodien* (1971), and his sixth piano etude, *Automne à Varsovie* (1985).[85] A tempo fugue is a technique wherein a subject is presented in a singular voice and then imitated by other voices at different tempo levels, utilizing the same pitches. Due to the perceptual complexity of the subject, there is often no countersubject, relying instead on the augmentation and diminution of the subject to create the desired effect, wherein the superimposed rhythms create a musical illusion of colliding tempos. Found in Sections 1, 2, and 3 of this work, the tempo fugue is used to illustrate different musical ideas, such as found sound imitation or as a representation of the expansion and diminution of temporal recollection and compositional representation of Akiho's fascination with the interplay of rhythm. Whenever present, the tempo fugue must be heard through the musical texture, as its inclusion in this work connects to the idea of disjointed memory following trauma.

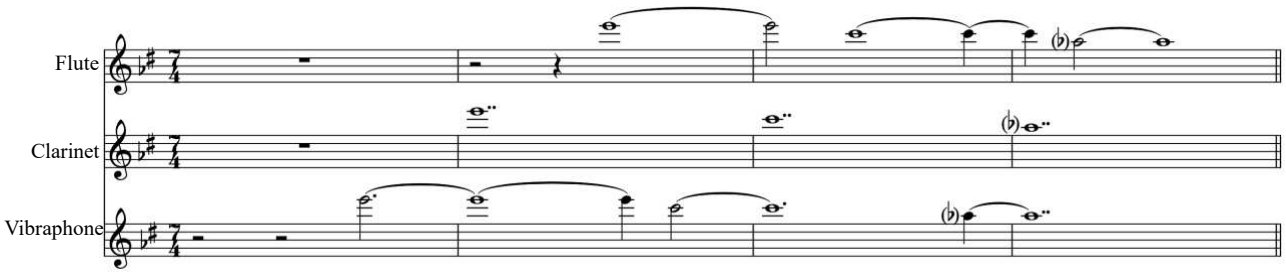


Figure 3.7. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, Tempo fugue Flute, Clarinet, in concert pitch, and Cello, mm. 7-10

Harmonically, the composition is constructed entirely from the hexachord-derived scale known as the hexatonic collection, which can be described as set class [014589]. Specifically, utilizing what music theorist Joseph N. Straus outlines as the Hexatonic Collection 3-4, which is comprised of the pitch class [3478E0], or the notes D#, E, G, Ab, B, and C.[86] The harmonic

[85] Lois Svard, "Illusion in Selected Keyboard Works of György Ligeti" (DMA diss., Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, 1991), 96-98.

[86] Joseph N. Straus, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson

functionality of the work is evident by the unique key signature utilized by Akiho: a concert Ab and D# are the only accidentals present in the key signature. The Hexatonic Collection 3-4 (or the $HEX_{3,4}$) is constructed from two augmented triads a half step apart: D# Augmented (D#-G-B) and E Augmented (E-Ab-C). Described through intervals, this collection is built from the alternation of intervals of a minor second, then a minor third or vice versa (a minor third, then a minor second). A symmetrical scale, the hexatonic scale only has four variants and is known for its unique timbral quality and lack of a dominant-tonic relationship, creating harmonic ambiguity.

Despite this ambiguity, Akiho creates a non-traditional tonality with tonic pedal points and intervallic resolutions. Recurring uses of the pedaled pitch Ab heavily suggest a perceived tonic, providing a harmonic anchor. Additionally, the inclusion of selected dissonant intervals with their resolutions, such as the augmented fifth resolving to a doubly augmented fourth and the minor second resolving to a perfect unison, creates a sense of tonality not often present in compositions that utilize the hexatonic scale as a harmonic foundation.

The utilization of the $HEX_{3,4}$ as the functioning harmonic device was a subconscious choice by Akiho to emphasize the feeling of isolation and confusion that is inherent to the narrative of the work:

> I use that kind of stuff [hexatonic scales] a lot because you can pull it in so many directions with that. And then you can also feel at home sometimes. And so that's kind of parallel to the narrative of the piece, too. Just being pulled in so many directions, not knowing where home is.[87]

The hexatonic scale and its harmonic language are also key aspects of the composer's compositional voice, saying that the "darker vibe of hexatonic is just something [he's] attuned to

Prentice Hall, 2005), 149.

[87] Andy Akiho (composer) in discussion with the author, February 2026.

more" and can relate to its unique tonality, implying a strong synesthetic connection to this augmented collection.[88]

The primary motivic idea presented in the work is the "ALONE" motif, a six-note gesture centered on variants of $HEX_{3,4}$. Using a pitch class set, the gesture follows the sequence [E04087], but appears in three augmented variants, centered around the notes of C, E, and Ab (or a C augmented triad when spelling Ab enharmonically to G#). The downward transposition of this motif through the notes of C, E, and Ab (G#) points to the primary interval of the work: the augmented fifth. Each iteration retains the same intervallic structure, including minor second relationships between both the opening and closing pitch pairs, creating a sense of resolution, though no tonic is truly perceived. Varied rhythmically throughout, the "ALONE" motif uses this intervallic pitch set in every iteration of the melody. Clear communication of this melody in its various forms is key to the success of this work, as it gives the listeners and performers a clear melodic through-line throughout the work.

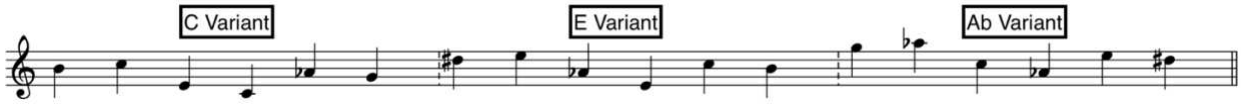


Figure 3.8. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, "ALONE" Motif variants

Section 1: The Attack

Section 1 (mm. 1-32), "The Attack," serves as an introduction to the work and utilizes the "ALONE" motif solely in the piano part. It features the groove, "Syncopated March," introduced by the cello and violin (m. 19) and reinforced by the bass clarinet and drum set (m. 23). A pedal point of Ab is established, suggesting a tonal center, though no functional harmonic devices are

[88] Andy Akiho (composer) in discussion with the author, February 2026.

utilized in the piece. At the tempo marking of ♩=104-110, this section of the work has the fastest pulse, while the final section has the fastest feel. “The Attack” introduces many key elements presented throughout the work.

This section includes two subsections. The first subsection (mm. 1-16) begins with an auditory bang symbolizing the abrupt shock of being stabbed. To create this stabbing effect, Akiho has the vibraphone and drum set play a unison and dissonant strike to begin the work. For the vibraphonist, a cluster tetrad of B, C, D#, and E is played with hard bell mallets to create the bright dissonance of the shock. The drum set adds weight to the downbeat, reinforcing the vibraphone with a brake drum, snare drum, and kick drum attack. A concentrated focus on the placement of the downbeat and its timing should occur from all members of the ensemble, and the conductor should give a clear downbeat to ensure the stabbing auditory sound is effective.

Underneath this dissonance, the strings play harmonics of the defining notes of the key signature: the cello on an Ab5, violin harmonizing with a D#7 above. This pedal point, an interval of a doubly augmented fourth with a perceived tonic of Ab, is maintained from mm. 1-16. With the written dynamics of *pianississimo,* the strings should begin the work underneath the initial hit of the percussion and crescendo out of the texture to slowly establish the tonic. The pedal point will reach its conclusion following the glissando of the cello (m. 16) and ending the first subsection. Special attention should be paid to the tuning of this interval, and if the harmonics cannot be achieved, then the written note performed up an octave may suffice. String players should create a delicate, ethereal timbre that creates a harmonic landscape for the piano to interrupt.

In measure 3, the piano introduces the “ALONE” motif, the six-note sequence that establishes each pitch iteration for the remainder of the work. Rather than functioning like a

melody, this piano sequence comes across as a musical gesture that further establishes the augmented tonality of the work. Written as continual sixteenth notes over ten and a half beats in 7/4 time, the piano creates metric dissonance, creating an antimetrical material over the metric pulse and the first instance of grouped dissonance. This piano sequence is repeated three times (mm. 3-8), with each iteration decreasing in length and dynamics as if the musical phrasing is suggestive of a fading memory. Each entrance of this figure begins on a different pitch, with the first entrance starting on a B7, the second entrance on a D#6, and the final entrance on a G6. A sustained pedal cue with an arrow is shown below the measure, indicating to the pianist to sustain throughout the entirety of these phrases and the entirety of Section 1.

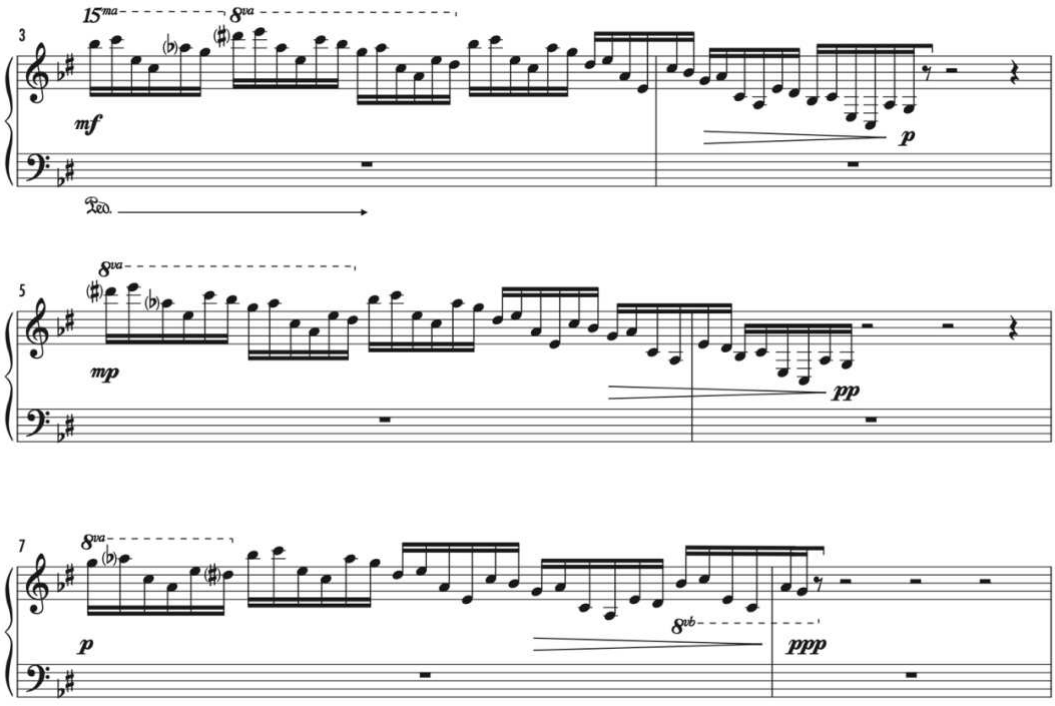


Figure 3.9. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, "ALONE" Piano sequence Piano, mm. 3-8

Measures 7-16 reinforce the modality of the work in the sustained notes of the vibraphone, clarinet, and flute. Each instrument outlines the notes of an A-flat augmented triad,

starting on the sharp-5, descending to the 3rd, and finishing on the root (E-natural, C, and A-flat). This inverted arpeggiation is performed three times by each instrument, with each iteration ending together. The beginning of this arpeggiation differs between the instruments to add rhythmic ambiguity. This is the first iteration and use of tempo fugue in the work. This tempo fugue is repeated by the same three instruments in the same order, starting on beat 1 of measure 11. On the fourth beat of measure 14, the tempo fugue is inverted into smaller note durations, ending the fugue on beat 2 of measure 16. The exposition of the subject must be well articulated and heard above the texture in each use of this compositional technique. Articulation, timbre, and intonation should match the vibraphone as it introduces the subject and its intonation is unchangeable.

The piano interrupts the tempo fugue in measure 9 with a brief arpeggiated figure of the HEX 34 collection that is mirrored between the left and right hands. This figure is then expanded into a full, repeated pattern (mm. 11-27). Another use of grouped dissonance, the right hand is playing metrically (seven beats over seven pulses), while the left is playing antimetrically (six beats over seven pulses). The conductor should rehearse this section slowly with the piano player to ensure the sixteenth note pulse is maintained. The repeated left-hand pattern and the isorhythm of the right will not rhythmically resolve until measure 17, the start of the next subsection.

Subsection 2 of Section 1 (mm. 17-32) begins with a continuation of the repeated isorhythmic piano pattern from subsection 1. The vibraphone enters with a variation of the piano sequence, mostly outlining major third intervals. The vibraphone pattern, though metrically outlining the sixteenth note subdivision of the 7/4 meter, is a polymetric writing of 7/8 pattern embedded within the quarter note pulse. The primary groove, the “Syncopated March,” is then introduced by the double-stopped strings (m. 19), outlining the shifting intervals of a perfect fifth

(C-G) and minor sixth (B-G) in the cello and an augmented fifth (Ab-E) in the violin. This groove is antimetric, shifting the stressed pulse off the downbeat. Attention should be made by string players to the down bows and how they interact with the stressed pulse and harmonic movement. The groove is repeated before the conclusion and resolution of the piano isorhythm (m. 23).

In the final phrase of subsection 2, the drum set and clarinet (now on the doubling instrument of bass clarinet) are added to the texture of the "Syncopated March" groove. The first use of slap tongue is used (m. 24) during a unison and accented dotted eighth note-sixteenth note attack in all groove musicians. The use of the brake drum during this brief unison hit in the groove should be emphasized. The established musical texture continues uninterrupted until a 4/3 polyrhythm is introduced on beat six of measure 26 through measure 27 in the drum set, clarinet, and flute that is counter to the piano and vibraphone pulsation. The bass clarinet is the only instrument to continue this polyrhythm into measure 28. The cello, flute, and violin will continue to add to the dissonance with an offset 6/16 pattern (m. 28) while the drum will switch to a 3/16 pattern (m. 28) that will continue to outline the 3/4 polyrhythm. The resolution for this rhythmic dissonance coalesces in the final pulse of measure 28 with all instruments ending on a tutti accent on beat 7, ending the musical phrase. A strong sense of pulse, internal subdivision, and careful placement of accents is needed in the final measures of this subsection to create this dissonance effectively.

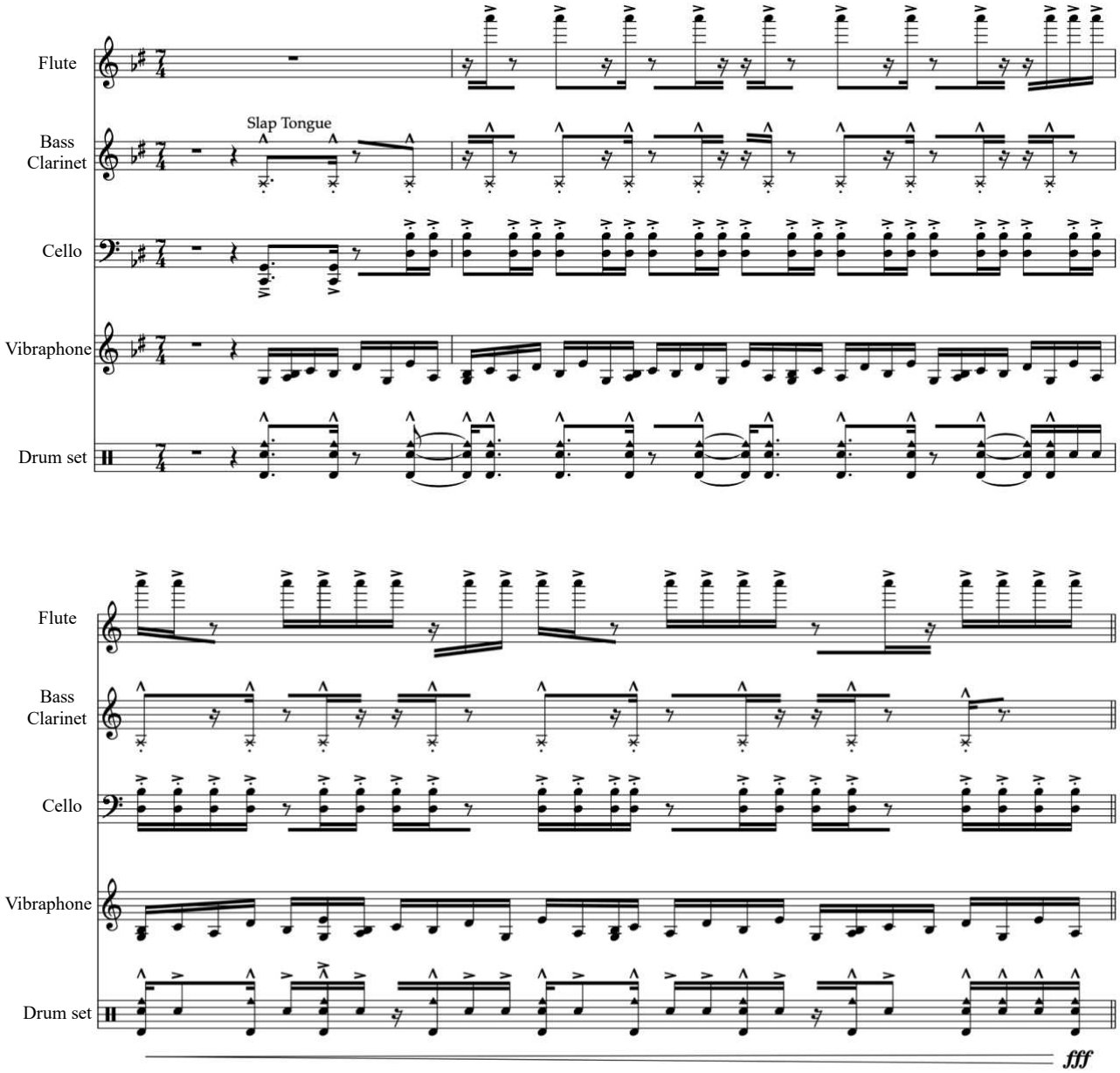


Figure 3.10. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, Polyrhythmic grouping Flute, Clarinet, in concert pitch, and Cello, mm. 7-10

Subsection 2 ends with a grand pause (m. 29) and a segment of non-musical cues (mm. 30-32). In order of their performance, non-musical cues include “Footsteps,” “Car Coor Slam,” and “Screeching Tire.” These non-musical cues serve the narrative aspect of this work as the

sonic representation of a criminal fleeing the crime scene. Instructions are given to the performers on how to create these sounds, though some experimentation by the performers should be done to find the optimal sound for the performance space.

Section 2: Emergency Room

Section 2, "Emergency Room" (mm. 33–64), comprises two subsections distinguished by a slight variance in the groove, the "Offset Funk." The tempo shifts to the slower ♩ = 94–96, which will remain for the rest of the work. Though slower in pulse, Section 2 is much more rhythmically complex; discretion is advised when attempting faster tempos.

Subsection 1 (mm. 33–43) establishes the groove in the vibraphone and reasserts the tonic (Ab) in the sustained piano. The vibraphone employs Akiho's prescribed mallet setup for the first time. Starting with an initial thin orchestration, the timbral differences created by the varying mallets should be clearly audible, allowing the groove to emerge noticeably. The texture expands to full tutti in m. 37. The cello and piano introduce the bassline, the primary melodic feature, while the violin and winds supply harmonic support. Using non-traditional harmony, the bassline and accompanying sonorities shift between tonic (Ab) and dominant (G). Additional weight should be added to each harmonic shift to emphasize the harmonic and rhythmic displacement. The drum set synthesizes the bassline and the "Offset Funk," serving as a rhythmic anchor between the two musical ideas. Precision from the drum set is essential, and the ensemble should align carefully with its pattern.

Subsection 2 (mm. 44–64) continues the "Offset Funk," though the drum pattern subtly shifts to a 7/4 metrical feel, creating dissonance against the notated 4/4 meter. The figure realigns and resolves the dissonance with the downbeat in mm. 51 and 58. A second tempo fugue begins

(m. 44) above the asymmetrical groove, with flute (perceived in 7/16 time) and cello (perceived in 6/16 time) in unison on E7. The piano enters (m. 47) on G7 in a perceived 6/16 time, opposed to the cello, and the bass clarinet joins (m. 54) on concert G2 in a perceived 7/16, countering the flute. Conceived as a musical representation of hospital machinery beeping, performers should strive for timbral similarity to manifest the compositional intent.[89] Conductors should identify rhythmic points and communicate them clearly. Isolating opposing rhythmic pairs, such as the flute and cello, or the clarinet and piano together, will strengthen metric cohesion within the tempo fugue.

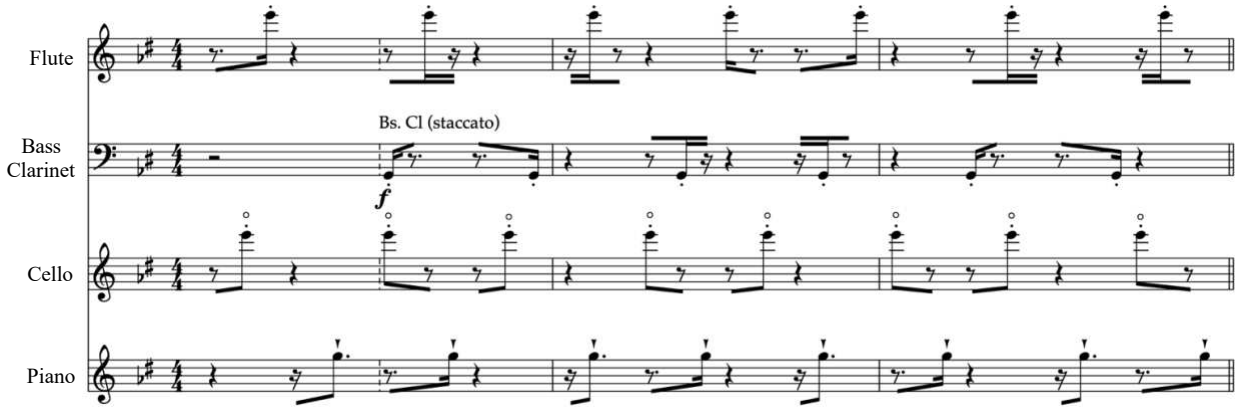


Figure 3.11. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, "Hospital Beeps" Flute, Bass Clarinet, in concert pitch, Cello, and Piano, mm. 54-56

The violin introduces the second iteration of the "ALONE" motif (m. 37) through rhythmic augmentation, expanding the motif into a two whole note variation. Matching the pedal tonality of the fugue, the motif appears in its E-centered variant, an augmented fifth from the established Ab pedal. As the principal melodic idea, it must project above the full tutti. After completing the motif, violin and vibraphone propel the transition into Section 3 with a

[89] Andy Akiho (composer) in conversation with the author, February 2026.

quickening sextuplet and sixteenth-note scalar passage (m. 64), recurring throughout the next section.

Section 3: Harlem Streets

Section 3, "Harlem Streets" (mm. 65–89), is the longest and most complex portion of the work. Returning to the Ab tonal center established in the introduction through violin pedaling, Section 3 utilizes subdominant (D#) and dominant (E) relationships to provide harmonic variety throughout. The "ALONE" motif is most prominent in this section, with four rhythmic permutations performed across the three separate subsections. Though each subsection is highly varied, the "7/8 Hip-Hop" groove is the link that unites them all.

Subsection 1 (mm. 65–78) establishes the groove in mm. 65–68, shared between the violin and drum set. Though notated in 4/4 time, it is felt in 7/8 time, creating grouped dissonance as this antimetrical layer collides with the 4/4 pulse of the vibraphone. A rhythmic hiccup, which utilizes the same violin sixteenth-sextuplet scalar pattern seen in m. 64, in the fourth measure of each phrase (m. 68) resets the groove. This tension continues until the resolution occurs with the shift to 7/4 (mm. 76–77). Vibraphone and violin outline a tonic–subdominant-dominant-subdominant-tonic progression before the groove repeats. This subsection contains one variant of the main motif: the "ALONE" hocket (mm. 69–75).[90] The six-note melody divides into two three-note groups: flute performs the first three notes, clarinet and cello the next three, while the piano's left-hand states the complete melody underneath. Heard in

[90] A hocket is a compositional technique that splits musical figures between various voices to change the timbre and texture throughout without varying the melodic or rhythmic content; Ernest H. Sanders, "Hocket," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001), accessed Feb. 1, 2026, https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.13115.

a perceived 5/8 pulse against the 7/8 groove and 4/4 meter, the hocket forms another antimetrical layer.

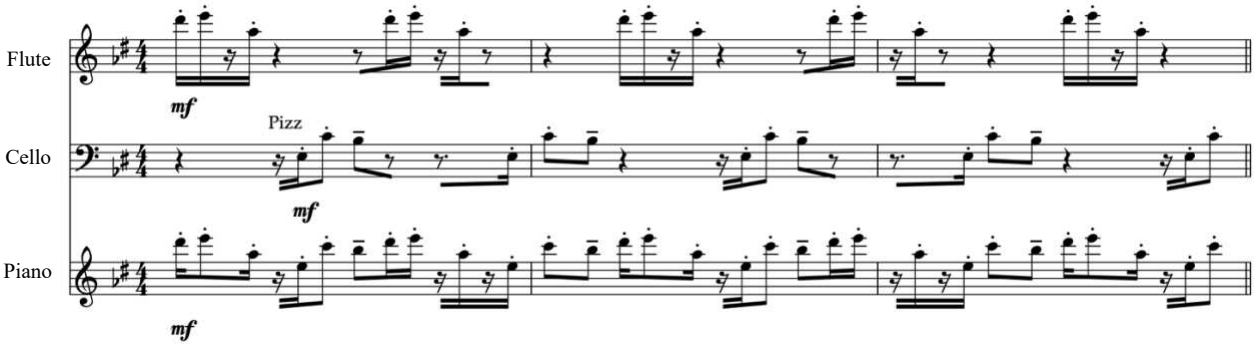


Figure 3.12. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, "ALONE" Hocket Flute, Cello, and Piano, mm. 69-71

Amid this triple-layered dissonance, the piano's right hand provides quarter-note cluster chords (m. 69), establishing pulse and functioning as a countdown: seven quarter notes and a quarter, with each repetition decreasing by one quarter note until m. 76, the resolution of the phrase.

As the "7/8 Hip-Hop" groove continues into 7/4, the former antimetrical layer becomes metrical. In Subsection 2 (mm. 78–89), rhythmic dissonance shifts to piano, winds, and strings through two tempo fugues and a bassline groove derived from each tonicization of the "ALONE" motif. The first appears in the flute's sixteenth note figures and piano sextuplet figure (mm. 78), recalling the Section 1 "ALONE" variant in piano. This fugue is repeated exactly as written two more times (m. 80 and 82). The second "ALONE" motivic variant is produced as a syncopated bassline in the cello and slap-tongued bass clarinet, first centered on Ab (m. 79), then E (m. 80), and finally C (m. 82).

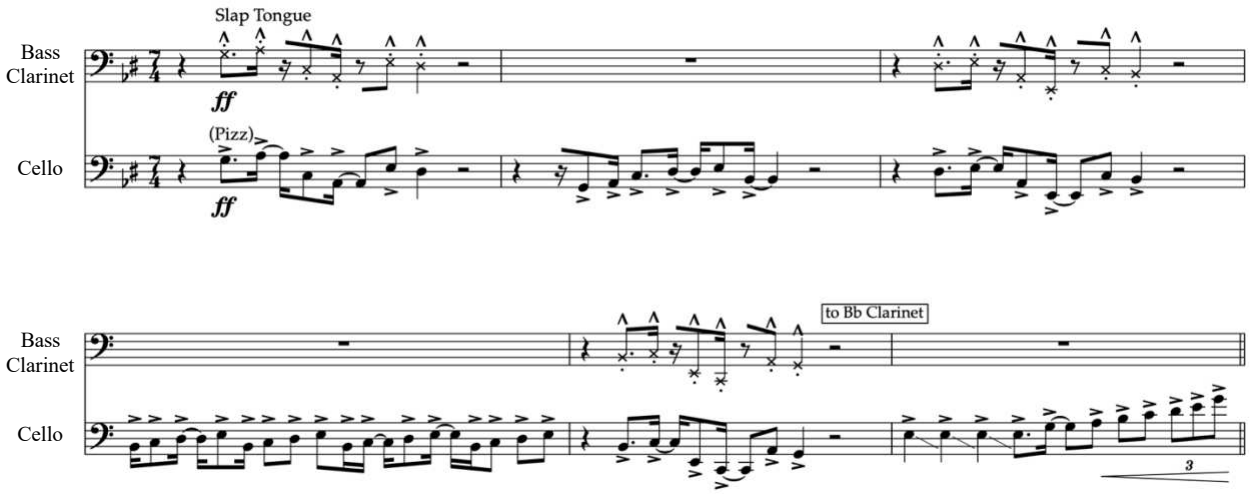


Figure 3.13. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, "ALONE" Bassline Bass Clarinet, in concert pitch, and Cello, mm. 78-83

After each performance of the bassline and the piano and flute tempo fugue, the orchestration thins to the "7/8 Hip-Hop" and solo cello (m. 79, 81, and 83). The drum set and violin must perform the groove at a dynamic that allows the solo cello to be heard properly.

The second tempo fugue of this section (mm. 84–89) mirrors the earlier fugue (mm. 7–15), now using pitches from the "ALONE" motif rather than the Ab augmented triad and utilizing the flute, Bb clarinet, and the right hand of the vibraphone. This iteration of tempo fugue begins with all instruments on the same beat, inverting the original version heard in Section 1. In addition to the different pulsations of the motif, each instrumentation performs a different harmonic variant of the melody: flute centered on Ab, clarinet on C, and vibraphone on E. Each version of this motif should be balanced so that the built augmented chord from the collective sounds of the instruments is heard. The cello, no longer featured as a soloist, and the left hand of the vibraphone join the groove (m. 84), adding rhythmic variety to the texture. Section 3 concludes with a final statement, and another iteration of the "ALONE" motif, in cello and piano left-hand quarter notes, culminating in tutti accented sixteenth-note attacks on beat seven of m. 89, resolving the accumulated rhythmic tension.

Section 4: Ambulance Ride

Section 4, "Ambulance Ride" (mm. 90-121), concludes the work with two final subsections. A novel element utilized in this final section of the composition is the snapped rubber bands of the prepared vibraphone. The "ALONE" motif is also used in two final permutations, and rhythmic dissonances continue throughout, retaining key elements of the composition till the end. Though elements of the pre-established "7/8 Hip-Hop" remain, a reimagined iteration of the "Syncopated March" serves the defining groove for this section. Harmonically, Section 4 primarily is situated around the note E, the functioning dominant.

Subsection 1 of Section 4 (mm. 90-99) is primarily transitional material. The primary groove element of subsection 1 is a continuation of the vibraphone's supportive role in the "7/8 Hip-Hop" (mm. 90-94). Quarter-note rubber band snaps (m. 92) are introduced in the vibraphone to add a new percussive texture to the orchestration. The drum set juxtaposes this groove, overlaying a 3-over-4 polyrhythm in the brake drum (mm. 91-94). The groove is interrupted in each measure of the first phrase by a group of four tutti accented sixteenth notes, a continuation from the conclusion of Section 3 (m. 89). These interruptions function as a countdown: the first group articulates on beat seven (m. 89), then beat six (m. 90), descending a beat per measure until beat one (m. 95), which marks the beginning of the next phrase. Because of their constant metric displacement, the conductor should cue each attack to maintain ensemble clarity. Embedded within this countdown is one of the final iterations of the "ALONE" motif, found in the bass clarinet and left-hand piano. As the remaining voices stay relatively static, the conductor should prioritize balance, bringing forward the bass clarinet and left-hand piano voice as they play each note of the E-oriented motif.

The motif appears again in the piano, flute, and violin during the spaces of the countdown gestures (mm. 91-94). This variant recalls the 5/8 hocket E-centered variant heard in Section 2, though each instrument plays the complete melody. As the vibraphone and drum set are the only supporting textures, these short melodic statements should project clearly. The flute, violin, and piano continue this iteration of the "ALONE" motif throughout the next phrase (mm. 95-99), now with added quintuplet scalar figures in the flute and violin part. As the phrase progresses, the motif evolves, and entrances become offset. The conductor should add weight to cues to aid in the accuracy of the syncopated entrances of these figures. The piano enters with a familiar figure in the right hand (m. 98) that is reminiscent of the Section 1 isorhythmic pattern, now paired with a bassline in the left. By accenting every eighth sixteenth note, the piano is outlining a 7/16 meter, creating a rhythmic dissonant layer that is contrasted against the metrical, but syncopated, bassline established in the same measure. A two-note cello solo (m. 98) is heard above this groove, utilizing the marked snap "Bartók" *pizzicato* (a performance technique that creates a snapping technique and a percussive sound in addition to the indicated pitch). Another brief, but virtuosic bass clarinet solo (m. 99) follows; adherence to the prescribed dynamics will aid in the air support to execute this solo.

Subsection 2 (mm. 100-121) reintroduces the "Syncopated March," now layered to distinguish it from its earlier appearance. These additions include a fully realized rubber band snap groove in the vibraphone, the continued antimetrical right-hand piano pattern from subsection 1 (mm. 98-99), and the syncopated bassline of the left-hand piano. After the establishment of this groove, the drum pattern will evolve to one that more closely matches the rhythms outlined by the vibraphone (mm. 102-107). The bassline texture is supported by a

pizzicato cello (m. 102), which will play this figure until the conclusion of the piece. Though not notated, cellists should consider utilizing a "Bartók *pizzicato*," seen earlier in the piece (m. 98).

The most prominent feature of this section is the ambulance siren sounds produced from the clarinet and flute (mm. 102-104). This addition of a diegetic sound links this section back to the narrative. Wind players should experiment with their combined timbre to match that of an actual ambulance to maximize the effect. With the addition of dynamics to simulate the Doppler Effect of a rushing ambulance, it is inferred that the sound is diegetic within the narrative.[91] This Doppler effect can be enhanced by flattening the pitch as the figure decrescendos to emulate the sliding pitch of a siren as it passes, though the intervallic relationship of the stacked minor second between the two instruments should be maintained as the pitch is lowered.

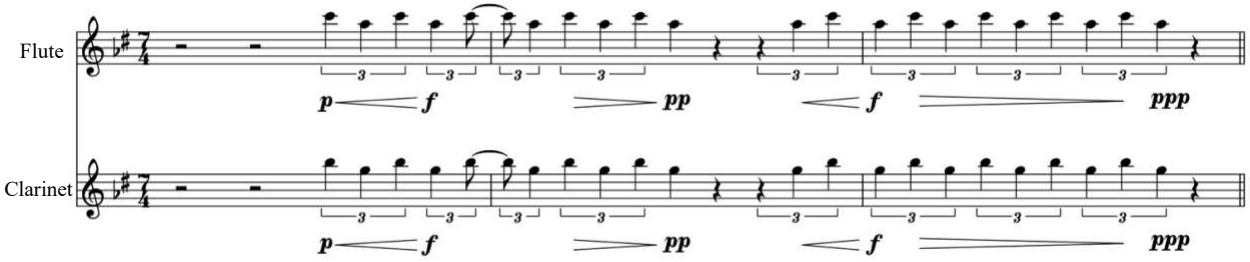


Figure 3.14. Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008, Ambulance sirens Flute and Clarinet, in concert pitch, mm. 102-105

The groove continues through this phrase (mm. 105-109), but adds another antimetrical layer in the *sul ponticello* violin (m. 106-107). Though metric, the accented pulse of the violin's sextuplet arpeggiation creates a grouped dissonance of three pulses that oppose the seven pulses felt in the meter, vibraphone, bass line, and drum set groove. Short-lived, this figure resolves to

[91] The Doppler Effect is the observed change in frequency of a wave, such as sound, in relation to movement to and away from the observer. The effect was first proposed by Austrian physicist Christian Doppler in his 1842 treatise on the phenomena, *Über das farbige Licht der Doppelsterne und einiger anderer Gestirne des Himmels*. Is it commonly observed in the changing pitch of passing cars by an observer. Christian Doppler, *Über das farbige Licht der Doppelsterne und einiger anderer Gestirne des Himmels* (Prague: The Royal Böhm Society of Sciences, 1903).

an E5 sustain, reinforcing the dominant pedal (mm. 108-109). The wind instruments add harmonic dissonance above this pedal in their final statement before the texture thins out in the closing phrase (mm. 110-121).

In the final measures, the cello's continued bassline emerges as the primary melodic device. The violin establishes a simple harmonic progression (mm. 112-117), emphasizing the subdominant (D#) and dominant (E) tonalities, reinforced by the alternating piano *pizzicato* notes (mm. 114-118). A final instance of rhythmic dissonance, the violin and piano shift the harmonic tonality in 4/4 and 3/4 over the written 7/4. The work concludes on a sustained E2 in the cello, a dominant within the composition's non-traditional tonality. In keeping with the symbolism of the work, this unresolved dominant reflects the non-linearity of the narrative: although the music concludes, the chronology of memory remains incomplete.

CONCLUSION

For both chamber and large ensembles, Andy Akiho is an extraordinarily innovative and compelling contemporary classical music composer. His compositional style resists classification: synthesizing elements of the visual art, film, popular music, Caribbean steel pan music, modern jazz, found sounds, the influence of his mentors, his synesthesia, and his Japanese heritage. Akiho's work resonates with audiences worldwide because many see a part of themselves through his musical expression. This earned him widespread recognition for inventiveness and quality, and for Akiho, authenticity and evolution remain central to his success:

> "I never want to write the same piece twice, and I always want to grow, I always want to be inspired by my environment […] I think the audience knows when you're really being honest with them, and you're also trying to grow, and you're trying to challenge them to grow too."[92]

to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem embodies this ethos. Written for winds in a Pierrot-inspired instrumentation, Akiho starts with a medium historically shaped by European modernism, and he reframes it with his own rhythmic and timbral sensibilities. The work integrates modern compositional techniques associated with figures such as György Ligeti and John Cage, along with metric displacement, grouped dissonance, and the timbral innovation of prepared instrumentation. It is apparent through a thorough theoretical analysis of the form, melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, and orchestration that this composition was made with intentionality and will withstand the test of time. Akiho's only implementation of programmatic material into music is a key aspect of *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* that separates it from many of Akiho's compositions. Through layered grooves, evolving motivic variations, and non-

[92] Lynch, *Andy Akiho Found (His) Sound.*

traditional tonal relationships, Akiho constructs a non-linear musical narrative that reflects the fragmentation of memory and the psychological imprint of trauma. The unique qualities that form *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* illustrate that he is a composer of high merit.

Despite his prominence, scholarly writings about Akiho's music are few. As a central figure in contemporary classical music, his works are performed with increasing frequency in both academic and professional settings. However, as his compositional output continues to expand, there is a clear need for further analytical and critical studies. His chamber works, including *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, warrant further analysis for both their technical innovation and their broader cultural appeal within the contemporary composition landscape.

Future research may explore several closely related topics, including the continued development of Akiho's compositional voice for winds beyond *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, the evolution and function of rhythm in his music, and the integration of visual and performing arts into his compositional and performance process. Additionally, further investigation into Akiho's self-described tonal "systems" and their relationship to his synesthetic perception would provide valuable insight into the theoretical foundations of his work.

As Akiho continues to evolve as a composer, his commitment to growth, authenticity, and artistic risk-taking suggests that his contributions to contemporary music will continue to expand. This author hopes that scholarly attention to Akiho's work will grow alongside his compositional output, particularly in relation to his writing for wind instruments. Through continued performance, analysis, and academic dialogue, Akiho's music will remain an important and influential presence within the modern-day musical landscape.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, Allison D., and Brian R. Horner, *Playing & Teaching the Saxophone: A Modern Approach*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023.

Andrews, Matthew Neil. "Andy Akiho: Systems Within Systems," *Oregon Arts Watch* (blog), Sep. 17, 2018, https://archive.orartswatch.org/andy-akiho-systems-within-systems/.

Akiho, Andy. "About Andy Akiho." Andy Akiho. Accessed July 10, 2025. https://andyakiho.com/pages/about#.

———. *Karakurenai | Crimson*. Harlem, NY: Aki Rhythm Press, 2007.

———. *NO one To kNOW one*. Harlem, NY: Aki Rhythm Press, 2010.

———. *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*. Harlem, NY: Aki Rhythm Press, 2008.

———. *Vick(i/y)*. Harlem, NY: Aki Rhythm Press, 2008.

———. *21*. Harlem, NY: Aki Rhythm Press, 2008.

Amico, Rose. "Princeton graduate student Andy Akiho's 'Oscillate' to be performed by New York Philharmonic." *The Times of Trenton* (blog). Dec. 12, 2012. https://www.nj.com/times-entertainment/2012/12/princeton_graduate_student_and.html.

Bang on a Can. "About – Bang on a Can," Bang on a Can: Performing arts group. Accessed Nov. 17, 2025, https://bangonacan.org/about_us/.

Battisti, Frank, and Robert Garofalo. *Guide to Score Study for the Wind Band Conductor*. Fort Lauderdale, FL: Meredith Music Publications, 1990.

Bent, Margaret. "Isorhythm." In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford University Press, 2001; online ed. https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.13950.

Boyden, David D., Robin Stowell, Mark Chambers, James Tyler, and Richard Partridge. "Scordatura." In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford University Press, 2001; online ed. https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.41698.

Clabough, Susannah Rae. "The Modern Snare: An Analysis of Repertoire for Snare Drum and Electronics by Underrepresented Composers." DMA diss., University of Memphis, 2024.

"Composers You Should Know: Andy Akiho." *Omaha Symphony* (blog), Feb. 23, 2023, https://www.omahasymphony.org/blog/composers-you-should-know-andy-akiho.

Cytowic, Richard E. *Synesthesia*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018.

Doppler, Christian. *Über das farbige Licht der Doppelsterne und einiger anderer Gestirne des Himmels*. Prague: The Royal Böhm Society of Sciences, 1903.

Dromey, Christopher. “Pierrot ensemble.” In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford University Press, 2014; online ed. https://doi-org./10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.2261027.

Dromey, Christopher, Christopher Wintle, ed. *The Pierrot Ensembles: Chronicle and Catalogue, 1912-2012*. London: Plumbago Books, 2013.

Dudley, Shannon. “Ray Holman and the Changing Role of the Steelband, 1957-72.” *Latin American Music Review* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2001):183-198

Ebert, Brian Thomas. “Integrated Exercises for Clarinet and Bass Clarinet.” DMA diss., University of Northern Colorado, 2012.

Flynn, Evan Norcross. “Liberation of the Senses: An Exploration of Sound-Color Synesthesia in the Music of Alexander Scriabin and Olivier Messiaen.” MM thesis, University of Kansas, 2014.

Grammy Award. “Artists - Andy Akiho,” Grammy Organization: Music and arts advocacy organization. Sep. 14, 2025. https://www.grammy.com/artists/Andy-Akiho/37874.

Green, Elizabeth A. H., and Mark Gibson. *The Modern Conductor*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004.

Harried, Piper. “Causing a Raucous: Letting Loose with Andy Akiho and *intO tHe WiLd*.” *University Wire* (blog). Mar. 6, 2025. https://www.proquest.com/docview/3181223776/citation/7C59E9FE1A604D79PQ/1.

Kaneko, Jun. “Biography.” Jun Kaneko: Visual artist. Accessed Oct. 5, 2025, https://junkaneko.com/biography/.

Krebs, Harald. *Fantasy Pieces: Metrical Dissonance in the Music of Robert Schumann*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Leinert, Keith Alan. “An Annotated Bibliography and Online Database of Original Published Works for Solo Steel Pan.” DMA diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2017.

Libowitz, Steven. “Setting a New Rhythm with Akiho.” *The Montecito Journal* (blog). July 1, 2025. https://www.montecitojournal.net/2025/07/01/setting-a-new-rhythm-with-akiho/.

Looseleaf, Victoria. “Music Is Intensely Visual for Composer Andy Akiho.” *San Francisco Classical Voice* (blog). Apr. 1, 2015. https://www.sfcv.org/articles/artist-spotlight/music-intensely-visual-composer-andy-akiho.

Lynch, Harry. *Andy Akiho Found (His) Sound*. PBS Video, produced by Harry Lynch. Arlington, VA: Public Broadcasting Service, 2023.

McGill, David. *Sound in Motion*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007.

Oteri, Frank J. "Andy Akiho: Inside The Instrument." *New Music USA* (blog). Jun. 1, 2018. https://newmusicusa.org/nmbx/andy-akiho-inside-the-instrument/.

Pratt, Michael Timothy. "Exploring the Modern Solo Snare Drum Tradition through Analyzing Five Snare Drum Solos." DMA diss., University of Arizona, 2019.

Pritchett, James, Laura Kuhn, and Charles Hiroshi Garrett. "Cage, John." In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford University Press, 2001; online ed. https://doi-org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2223954.

Ripin, Edwin M., Hugh Davies, and Thomas J. Kernan. "Prepared piano." In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford University Press, 2013; online ed. https://doi-org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2252176.

Sandbox Percussion. "About – Sandbox Percussion." Sandbox Percussion: Performing Ensemble, Dec. 20, 2026, https://sandboxpercussion.com/about/.

Sanders, Ernest H. "Hocket." In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford University Press, 2001; online ed. https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.13115.

Sandor, Ashley. "Extended Techniques for String Instruments as Applied to Selected Twentieth-Century Cello Repertoire." DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2004.

Straus, Joseph N. *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005.

Strauss, Elaine. "Andy Akiho on Steel Pan, Composing & Colors." *Princeton Info* (blog), Feb. 12, 2013, https://www.communitynews.org/princetoninfo/artsandentertainment/andy-akiho-on-steel-pan-composing-colors/article_41bcf0a1-5957-55e3-8317-0992ad7ee980.html.

"Sul ponticello." In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford University Press, 2001; online ed. https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.27102.

Svard, Lois. "Illusion in Selected Keyboard Works of György Ligeti." DMA diss., Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University, 1991.

van Der Kolk, B.A. and R. Fisler. "Dissociation and the fragmentary nature of traumatic memories: Overview and exploratory study." *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, no. 8 (1995): 505-525. https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.2490080402.

Wagar, Jeannine. *Conductors in Conversation: Fifteen Contemporary Conductors Discuss Their Lives and Profession*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1991.

Williams, Jessica Marie. "The Synesthesia Suite: The Color Pieces of Andy Akiho." DMA diss., University of Memphis, 2022.

Williamson, John E., Kenneth L. Neidig, ed. *Rehearsing the Band*. Chicago: Meredith Music Publications, 2008.

Woolfe, Zachary. "One Composer, Four Players, 'Seven Pillars.'" New York Times, Dec. 2, 2021, https://www.proquest.com/docview/2605437335/citation/57E96098FE0949F5PQ/24.

Yoho, Scott. "Meet Finale Composition Finalist Andy Akiho." *The Finale Blog* (blog), Sep. 20, 2011, https://www.finalemusic.com/blog/meet-finale-composition-contest-finalist-andy-akiho/.

APPENDIX A

PERMISSION OF USE FOR MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Dear Mr. Honnen,

In accordance with your request, I hereby grant permission for the physical or digital reproduction of excerpts less than 15 measures in length from the score of my works *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, *NO one To kNOW one, 21, Vick(i/y)*, and *Karakurenai | Crimson* as part of your graduate thesis entitled "Andy Akiho: A Conductor's Analysis of *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*. Copyright credits should be ascribed to my business entity, Aki Rhythm Press, and the years of copyright are 2008, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2011.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX B

ANDY AKIHO: LIST OF PUBLISHED WORKS

CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

Title	Date	Duration	Instrumentation
Portal	2023	8'	Flexible Instrumentation (1 or more performers)
Giant's Causeway	2022	3'	Vibraphone duet, Piano
Seven Pillars	2021	80'	Percussion Quartet
Aluminous	2019	10'	Solo vibraphone, String Quartet
Hammers	2019	2'	Toy Piano, Violin
Lost on Chiaroscuro Street	2017	20'	Clarinet Quartet
Prospects of a Misplaced Year	2017	35'	Piano Quintet
to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem	2016	7'	Percussion Ensemble
Deciduous	2014	15'	Violin, Steel Pan
Two Bridges	2014	15'	Harp duet
Revolve	2013	8'	String Quintet
Speaking Tree	2013	12'	Brass Quintet, String Quintet, Percussion
Mobile on a Stream Into the Sound	2012	19'	String Quartet
-intuition) (Expectation	2012	7'	Trumpet, Marimba
Erase	2011	11'	Flute, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Piano, Percussion
Five Movements for Piano Trio	2011	19'	Piano, Violin, Cello
Haiku 2	2011	4'	Flexible Instrumentation (4 performers)
In/Exchange	2011	11'	Solo Steel Pan, String Quartet
Six Haikus	2011	19'	Solo Baritone Voice, Trumpet, Trombone, Bass Clarinet
LIgNEouS	2010-2016	40'	Solo marimba, String Quartet
NO one To kNOW one	2010	7'	Soprano Voice, Flute, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet, Cello, Piano, Percussion, Vibraphone, Steel Pan
21	2009	7'	Flexible Instrumentation (2 performers)
Alloy	2009	10'	Solo Steel Pan, Metallic Drum set
Amalgamation	2009	8'	Saxophone Quartet, Electronics
I falleN TwO	2008	13'	Solo Steel Pan, String Quartet

the rAy's end	2008	5'	Trumpet, Violin, Steel Pan
to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem	2008	7'	Flute, Clarinet/Bass Clarinet, Violin, Cello, Piano, Vibraphone, Drum set
Karakurenai | Crimson	2007/2011	5'	Flexible Instrumentation (1 or more performers)
Aka | Red	2006	8'	Solo Steel Pan, Flexible Instrumentation
Hada Iro | Beige	2006	7'	Solo Steel Pan, Flexible Instrumentation
Momo Iro | Pink	2006	4'	Solo Steel Pan, Flexible Instrumentation
Muraski | Purple	2006	6'	Solo Steel Pan, Flexible Instrumentation
Daidai Iro | Orange	2005	3'	Solo Steel Pan, Flexible Instrumentation
Hip-Hopracy	2001	8'	Percussion Ensemble
Phatamachickenlick	1997	3'	Snare Drum duet

LARGE ENSEMBLE

Title	Date	Duration	Instrumentation
Copper Canvas	2025	10'	Large Orchestra
Nisei	2024	25'	Solo Cello, Large Orchestra
Sculptures	2023	37'	Orchestra, Sculptures (solo percussion)
Percussion Concerto	2019	30'	Solo Percussion, Large Orchestra
Cobalt Canvas	2018	13'	Large Orchestra
Ondine's Epilogue	2017	7'	Wind Ensemble
Beneath Lighted Coffers	2015	34'	Solo Steel Pan, Large Orchestra
Ricochet/Ping Pong Concerto	2015	38'	Solo Percussion, Large Orchestra
Tarnished Mirrors	2013	12'	Large Orchestra
Oscillate	2012	17'	Large Orchestra

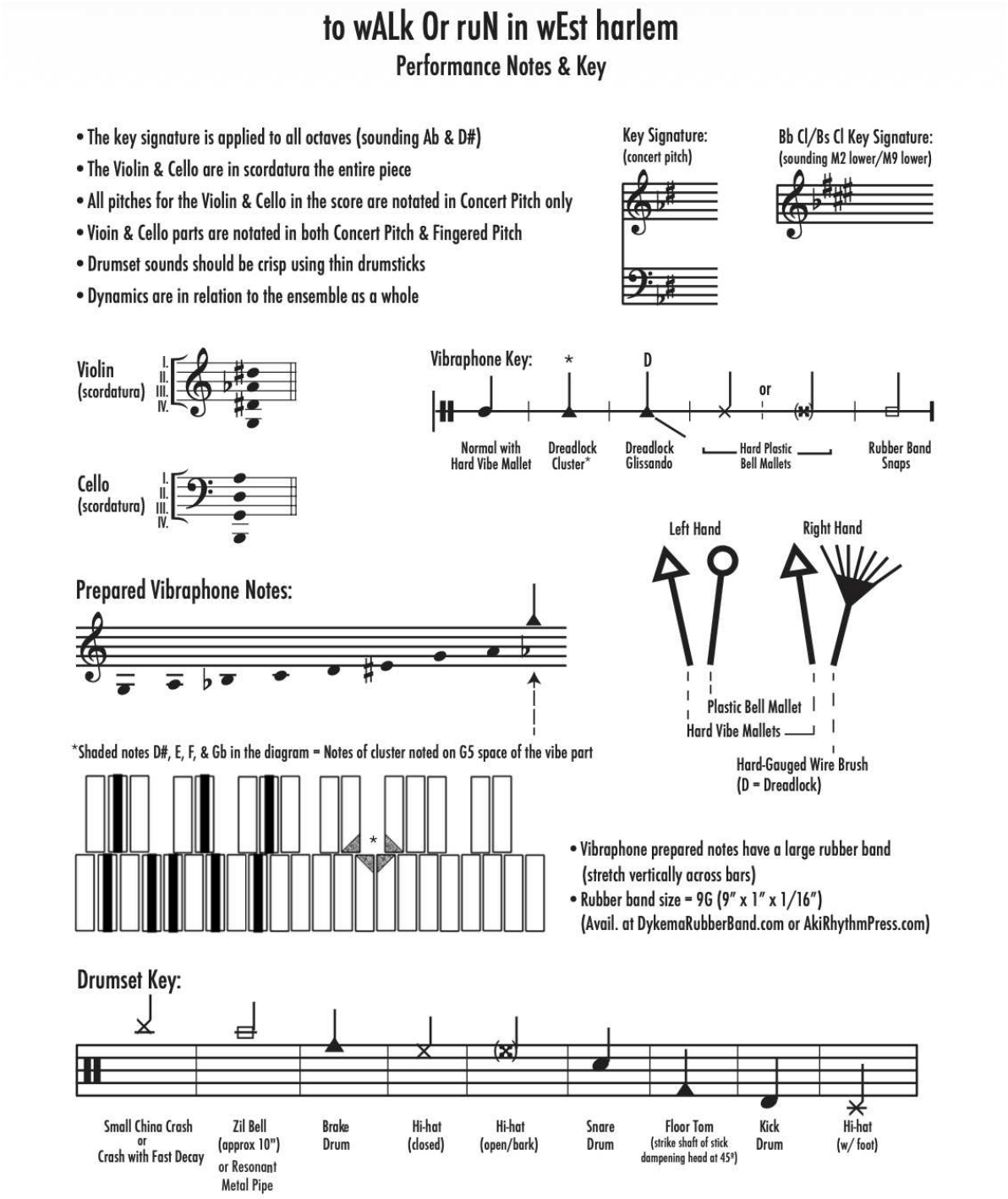
SOLO

Title	Date	Duration	Instrumentation
Longing	2024	7'	Steel Pan
Ceramic	2019	8'	Ceramic and Metal Bowls
Rosewood	2019	6'	Marimba
Umi	2018	8'	Snare Drum, Electronics
...or not at all	2013	5'	Glockenspiel
Response Piece #1: Transparency	2013	6'	Piano

Response Piece #2: Bagatelle	2013	3'	Piano
Three Shades, Foreshadows	2012	10'	Solo Cello, Electronics
Stop Speaking	2011	5'	Snare Drum, Electronics
Vick(i/y)	2008	15'	Prepared Piano
Omnipresent	2003	4'	Steel Pan
Macqueripe	2002	7'	Steel Pan

APPENDIX C

TO WALK OR RUN IN WEST HARLEM PERFORMANCE NOTES



Andy Akiho, *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, Aki Rhythm Press ©2008

APPENDIX D

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH THE COMPOSER

CH: OK, so first thing I want to say is thank you again for doing this. Thank you for writing your music. You know I did this as part of my chamber recital for my degree. I'm a conducting major here at CSU, and it was kind of a cat fight for all the percussionists who wanted to play it; they all seemed excited that I was doing it. They were all really trying to force their way into playing the vibraphone part or the drum set part, and I think that speaks to kind of how you're sort of viewed here and throughout the world. Your music is very exciting. A lot of people want to play it. Again, thank you for doing this, letting me play it, and then writing about the music that you do. It's really cool stuff.

AA: Thank you so much to me. I'm very grateful for that. I'm grateful that it's out there having a life. Thank you for programming it too.

CC: It was sort of a dream, you know, I heard this piece, you know, probably 10 years ago. I heard the percussion ensemble version and then looked it up later. I saw the chamber version, and you know it's just something that I thought, you know, I'm a trombone player. I'll never get to play it, but maybe I'll get to hear it, and I got to conduct it. It was, you know, really something special.

AA: I love writing for trombone. I just wrote a trombone solo in the timpani concerto, and I had a trombone solo and one of the movements, and a piece I have called *Sculptures* for orchestra. I love writing for it.

CH: Man, that means whenever you write a trombone solo, or any trombone stuff, I'll be excited to hear it or to play it. So, I think the first thing I want to start with is just sort of your bio, just kind of cover some of the holes that in my research I didn't find answers to, or something. I just kind of want clarification, so I think I want to be correct. You were born in 1979 in Colombia, is that correct?

AA: Yes, Columbia, South Carolina

CH: Wonderful, and then your mother worked for Estée Lauder, and your stepfather was a hearing aid repairman, is that right?

AA: Yes, yes

CH: I believe you went to the University of South Carolina, right? What year did you start? What year did you graduate?

AA: Yeah, I started in fall 1997 and graduated in fall 2001, and did it in the middle of that, or near the end of that. I did it for one year at the University of North Texas.

CH: So, when you were at North Texas, did you do a lot of bebop jazz sort of stuff? Were you doing a lot of drum set, or a lot of vibraphone or steel pan?

AA: That's when I really started homing in on transcribing and applying it to steel pan. The house I lived in was like a big jazz house. I was inspired by a lot of them to pursue jazz more with the steel pan, something I always wanted to do, but I never got to. Being there and being surrounded by all that talent and inspiration just got me motivated to start applying it with the steel pan. One of my roommates was a jazz major who was primarily a drum set player, but right when I got there, he had just made this. A huge move to really home in on the vibraphone, and I would hear him practicing these licks. I'd be like a [Thelonius] Monk lick, or [Charlie] Parker, or [John] Coltrane for like literally hours. Just one lick. I would just hear him in another room, and those kinds of moments just inspire me to really focus. I started doing a lot of transcriptions on the steel pan. That whole experience, being in North Texas, being in a steel band, doing all the ensembles I could be in as a percussionist. It's what I did in South Carolina, too, but it was nice to have a different experience. You know it was just a different vibe. I loved being in Carolina. But Texas, it was just different. You know, there were 180 percussion majors when I was at North Texas, so I met a lot of good friends. I was in the drum line with Paul Rennick. I met some good friends there. I'm still close to this day, you know, and I think that's what really got me into jazz. Being obsessed with and applying that to steel pan, and I fell in love with bebop the most. I think my very first transcription was on Sonny Rollins from *Saxophone Colossus*, it's like the most common Sonny tune, *St. Thomas*. That was my first solo. Bill Maley, he recommended it for me since it's Caribbean. So, I started with that. I don't know when I remember moving on to Parker and Cannonball [Adderly]. And a lot of Miles [Davis] to get that phrasing. I never got good at it, but I transcribed a lot, and I had to slow it way down cause my ears are horrible, but I just worked hard at it. I just learned a lot from the phrasing and the nuances from that. You know stuff you can't even write down when you transcribe. I learned a lot there, and I just kept applying it. I did a lot of drum set too. Never got really good, but I did a lot of transcriptions there and worked hard. Like did Roy Haynes. The stuff with him, Clifford Brown, did some of those. And Max Roach. Roy Haynes from "Out of the Afternoon," *Snap Crackle*. I think that was the name of the piece. I just worked on those kinds of phrases with a drum set. I learned a lot from that, too; that made it into my music somehow, even years later. I remember writing a piano solo called *Vick(i/y),* and there's this part where it just reminds me of the things I learned from Max Roach. That was a very inspiring year in my life. It's crazy because I'm going to be back there for the first time in March, late March, and do a show. It'll be nice to be back there.

CH: So, was that just a one year or a semester?

AA: Yeah, it was just one year. I think they might still have this barrier system, and I think I did almost all the barriers of four years in one year because I was just obsessed, and just I don't know if that was the best use of my time, but I just tried to maximize everything. I tried to learn as much as I could while I was there, just to get a different experience because I had a wonderful experience in South Carolina, but it was a little bit different. So, it was nice to get a different perspective on how new musicians get different vibes and then come back to South Carolina for one more semester. Have all that knowledge and apply it in South Carolina as well, and I think I grew a lot during those two years.

CH: Did you choose UNT because of the barrier system?

AA: I chose UNT, not really because of the barrier. I chose it to be surrounded by a million different musicians, and then I chose it because I knew a lot about it from South Carolina, from my professor Jim Hall. He was in the percussion department, went to UNT, and was in the 1 O'clock Band and all that. So, he really knew a lot of the faculty from South Carolina at the time. I think I just heard a lot about it, and I was like, "Oh, this is a magical place that I should go check out," and then it was a national student exchange program I found out about. I never really heard of it before, and I was like, "I have to do this." And then I got in and was able to do that for a year. A random situation, but it worked out great.

CH: Yeah, I mean, I think everyone kind of knows them as this legendary music school, but like I know their jazz program is pretty top-notch, like the stuff that Alan Baylock is doing nowadays. And even when he was a student.

AA: So yeah, that's my undergrad experience. I learned a lot in South Carolina, and I had a really good cohort for the four years I was there. I mean, those are some of my tightest musicians that I'm still working with. I have a lot of good experiences there that really got me off the right start

CH: I think after you graduated, you spent a couple of weeks down in Trinidad and Tobago.

AA: Yeah, it was at least a month, and I think it was about five or six weeks. Yeah, I went there right after I graduated, I think December 2001, and I was in Trinidad by January to do Panorama. My professors talked about how fun it was down there, and the pan scene, and I was really into steel pan, obviously. So, I went there and knocked on Ray Holman's door the first day I got there, and they took me to the Panyard, and I played with Star Lift for that year. Then, came back for the Solar Competition that same year, and then the next year came back again for the play with Phase Two.

CH: Were you living in South Carolina during all this?

AA: Yeah, I was living in South Carolina.

CH: Yeah, I read an interview where you said you found out you had synesthesia while down there, I think, while you were playing Steel Pan.

AA: I didn't know what that was, but yeah, sorry, yeah, that was that February-ish, in 2002, working on the piece Doctor Manette by Ray Holman. And we just kept playing this one lick over and over for like hours, this one lick. And I think it started on the D, yeah, and I just kept seeing orange every time I did it. So I don't know, it's not some magical phenomenon for me, it just became that. And then I started seeing other colors, I think E-flat, I started seeing that lime green, the E, the green. Oh, A was really vibrant red, and it just became an association too. And then it really helped me, because I never had really good ears, so it was a kinesthetic thing that really helped me, and it started in Trinidad. I was able to memorize all the panorama arrangement, I mean, I memorized that basically the first day, but really internalizing it was through the colors. And then also, when I started writing around that time, or at least composing

little Steel Pan solos and stuff like that, I would be out composing colors basically in my head, and improvising colors, and that's how it kind of took over.

CH: I think the secondary question I was going to ask is how, because you said you don't have good ears, and I think even in one of your interviews, you said you can't sing Mary Had a Little Lamb without going off pitch, but it seems like you've got this kinesthetic connection with colors, right? You've got synesthesia with colors. How does that relate to your ears? Do you feel like that synesthesia is helping you hear better? Are you seeing it? Does it feel different, or does it feel the same?

AA: It helps when I'm at my pan or at a keyboard or something, and I'm just improvising and feeling it. And I hear stuff; I just don't do it in a way that is easy to quantify. So, if I were to look at myself objectively from the outside, I'd be like, "dude, you should not be a musician." It would seem like I never had those skills. Even when I was a kid, I remember everybody around me would just pick up stuff on the radio and just play it on the piano. It was just so far from what I could hear or think of. I spent more time in ear training classes and did more homework, did more exercise, and did more things on my own with ear training than any other thing during all my college experiences. And it never clicked in the way I was supposed to with ear training classes. And I don't know, I have ears in different ways. I can hear stuff transcribed, especially rhythmic things, but for some reason, I don't hear all the harmonies and everything well. Even though I'm very attracted to certain harmonies, there are things that I'm like, "okay, I know this because I've heard it a million times," but it doesn't come naturally. And with synesthesia and kinesthetic aspects of that, it really helped me hone in on quantifying something that I could feel. And so then I could almost see the color combination better than trying to just hear it, because then it just feels so abstract when I'm just hearing. It's weird, things that probably make people cringe, I don't even notice a lot of times. But at the same time, I'm extremely harmonic, I'm extremely melodic when I'm writing. It's just that I don't know how to do the exercises that well or transcribe well.

CH: That's got to play a part in your compositional style, right?

AA: I think it does. It makes it frustrating for certain things that take way longer than it should. But I still have certain tastes, and I think that just comes, it's just innate. The energy of what I'm hearing or want to hear is a certain thing, for better or worse, but sometimes I can't get to it. I can't access it quickly enough because I don't have those extreme prodigy-like skills, you know what I mean? But luckily, I've learned later in life that that doesn't matter. You can be the most talented, best ears in the world, and that doesn't necessarily equate to great innovation or art. So luckily, when I realized that you didn't have to be born a Mozart to come up with ideas and to share your personality with the world and art with the world, it just gave me the freedom to be able to run with it. Like, oh, I don't have to be this genius to say what I want to say, because I've been hearing stuff my whole life, and ideas that I think are cool, but I never thought that I was allowed to do that. I know I'm going off on all these tangents, but that's where Julia Wolfe really came in. She was like, "No, it doesn't matter." It's basically, you know, just like, it can be you. And I was lucky to have her as my first official conversation teacher; you know what I mean?

CH: I think I've got a quote somewhere in my paper about this, like exactly what you just said, how it felt like she was, you know, championing you to be authentic. It seems like authenticity is a big part of your musical tastes and musical styles. You're always referencing popular artists. I think in an interview, you said you wanted to work with Kendrick Lamar, among other popular artists. Do you have any thoughts on that, the authenticity of your music?

AA: I idolize anybody who's gone on that path, whether it's like a movie star or like an actor or pop musician or classical. Anybody who just really says something new and original, but not for the sake of that, but really grounded and rooted in originality. And that perseverance, like an athlete, even, like Michael Jordan or, you know, Sterling Williams. Anybody, even on that level, or hip hop, or rock, or anything. Like, you know, all that, like a David Bowie, Kendrick, Miles. It doesn't matter what genre, Beethoven, you know, whatever. All of them have inspired me because their sheer force of like, just perseverance, like, originality, and stuff that we can relate to. Choreographers, everybody, like, it's just what inspires me. And that is the authenticity that we're talking about here. That it doesn't matter what your background is or any of that. It matters what you have to say, and being honest with you, not trying to be somebody else. That's what drives me crazy when I hear other musicians trying to be other musicians. They just can't be themselves. And that's what I'm always trying to teach. If there's anything I could ever teach in composition, that's it. That's the only lesson you need, really. And I've just been living by that, like, my whole life, kind of. Not just composition, anything.

CH: I think that's so appropriate to your music. You know, *harlem* was the closing piece for my chamber recital. And, you know, we've got to check boxes for that recital. Like, I had to do a piece from the 18th century and then a piece from the 19th century. And then I got to pick a couple of other pieces in. And I chose *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem* as my closer. And it was by far everyone's favorite. And I think it's complex in a lot of ways. But I think it's so authentically you. It's so singular in what it's saying. We hear your influences in the music. And it connects it with the audience in a profound way.

AA: Thanks. Just trying to, actually, I'm not even trying to do it. Because it's the only way I know how to do it. It's not like, oh, I'm going to be. I want to be authentic just so I can be different. It's like, I don't even know how to do it 1% the other way. Because then I'm completely a fraud. And I know it immediately. And I can't. It's like a joke. It's laughable. Even if I put one percent into trying to do something. You know, but obviously, I have a million influences. And they're all going to get in there. But I can't just, like, mimic. When I do, it is embarrassingly bad. And so, you know, like, certain people are good at even doing, like, impersonations. And it can recreate somebody's voice. And I'm the furthest from that. And sometimes, as I said, it makes the process excruciatingly painful and long. Because I don't have those tools that I can just access. You know, it would be like trying to dunk, and you don't know how to jump. You don't really know how to jump. But somehow, I'll make it in there.

CH: That's a great analogy.

AA: It's the first thing I can remember. But, you know, I don't have a proper formula. I even try to do that with my own work. And sometimes I fall back into patterns just because I'm running out of time. I'm like, oh, I know how I can orchestrate this quicker or whatever. But even when

I'm starting a piece, I always try to start it differently. That way, I don't accidentally come up with the same stuff. So, usually it's just trying to reinvent the wheel every time. I don't know if that's the right word. But, like, really try something new and take on a new adventure. Even if I know I could easily fail. But go for it. You know? At least the starting line.

CH: So *to wALk Or ruN in wEst harlem*, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it was your first time really writing for wind instruments.

AA: Is that correct? I think so. Damn. I haven't thought about it in a while. I can't think of one before. I know it's the first piece I wrote where I actually wasn't playing it.

CH: Right, yeah. I think I got an interview, saying that it was the first time you didn't write for yourself. Like, you were writing music, but it was the first time you weren't going to perform it. And I think it was one of the first times you wrote something not on the pan. I think you wrote it on a piano, right?

AA: I wrote a lot of it, like that piano lick. Yeah. It was way too hard to play. I wrote each hand, just like playing it out on this piano. But also, it was my first piano completely out of tune. It had three different pitches.

CH: Was it that red Schoenhut, 25-key piano?

AA: No, it was a Wurlitzer painted white that I found in Harlem and pushed up the hill and into my apartment. It's like this old piano. It's in the *Vick(i/y)* music video. I wrote *Vick(i/y)* about that. I wrote *harlem*. I wrote that lick, but also wrote a lot of it starting with the vibraphone.

CH: I think at the time, you were trying to get those Bartok pizzicatos on the rubber bands around this time.

AA: Right, and I'd already done that with, let me see, this piece. I'm trying to think. I'd messed around with that with pan first. I think *21*'s the first time I really used it. *21*, a cello and steelpan duet. They sent me this large rubber band, and I wanted to try it out on marimba and vibraphone, and I ended up doing that with the vibraphone on *harlem*. That was the first time I used rubber bands on a standard keyboard percussion instrument.

CH: I don't think I've ever seen that before. Are you the innovator of rubber bands on a vibraphone?

AA: I mean, definitely, but that's not like a... I mean, there's a... I've done a lot with different kinds of hammers, and it could be like... You could interpret it as a party tray, but I really tried... I just really love that sound, and I went with it. I've been using it ever since. I used it with *LIgNEouS*, and I just like it. I think it's a cool sound, and a nice forzando. I guess it'd be equivalent to a slapstick or something, but it's cool to be able to use it, not virtuosically, but really rapidly and in the moment. I love the other stuff, too. It's just a lot of fun. I also liked how it changed the timbre of the vibraphone when you even play it with mallets. It almost gave it this rattly... It made it warmer, but it also made it a little dirtier, and it made sense for the piece. Just

discovering all that, and then also discovering using the heavy wire brush, they're called dreadlocks, on the vibraphone and creating these clusters. It's really overtone-y vibraphone. So all of that, it was just fun improvising with that, and that's what started a lot of the vocabulary for Harlem was on the vibraphone, too.

CH: It's such a unique instrumentation. I think you were you given the instrumentation?

AA: I was assigned that, and it was basically the Pierrot Ensemble instrumentation, almost modified, and almost like a modified Bang on a Can All-Stars kind of...variations on that, but the same kind of thing, like a couple of each instrument family. I think there's flute, clarinet, there's violin, and cello, so you've got two of each. It's almost like eighth blackbird, Bang on a Can All-Stars, the Pierrot kind of... piano, percussion. Luckily, I had two percussionists, so I wanted to... I had David Kossin on mine for drum set, because it was for the Bang on a Can festival. I was there as a student, like a composition student, and I went the year before as a percussionist.

CH: I was going to ask, I'm glad you said Pierrot Ensemble, because I think it used to be labeled on your website as a Pierrot Ensemble, and then I was looking at it the other week, and that terminology was taken away. Would you still consider it a modified Pierrot Ensemble?

AA: Yeah, definitely. I just don't know. Ever since I've been out of school, I haven't really heard an ensemble be called that. I know that's a very academic term, so I don't really stick with that, because also, there are so many modified Pierrots, almost any combination of instruments that are six or a modified Pierrot. So, I don't want to confuse people, because Pierrot Ensemble, I mean, in a way, I know there is more to a Pierrot Ensemble, because there's voice. And there's no voice in Harlem, so I try to not confuse myself or others with that terminology.

CH: That's been a big question of mine. I asked my theory professor asked, “Can I call it this?” And he asked, “Does it match the exact instrumentation?”

AA: I don't really care what you call it, but that's the reason why I probably stopped saying that, because I don't want to confuse people.

CH: So, did you have this idea because it's based on, I believe, you got mugged and stabbed in Harlem when you were living there? How much of the instrumentation inspired you to write this piece, or did you have the idea for this piece, or did you come up with the melodic ideas and then tie it to a story? What was that process like?

AA: Let's see. Well, I didn't get mugged, so they didn't take money. It was like a gang initiation, I believe. Oh, okay. And this was late one night, walking home from, I lived on 133rd and Broadway, and Manhattan School was about 10 blocks south of that. And just walking home late one night, just unfortunate events. And that was in January 2008. You know, when I started writing the piece, I didn't think I was even starting it with the idea of making it about that. It just somehow naturally morphed into that narrative, because a lot of times what I'm writing is a zero narrative. And then this piece ended up becoming extremely narrative with that. And so a lot of the sound effects were inspired by that whole situation. I tried to make something good out of that unfortunate situation. My life was at so high speed at those months of my life, and I was so

launched into music and being back in school and everything. That was just another day. I remember I showed up a little bit late for rehearsal. I had a tiny bit of an excuse for that, but it was like nothing happened. Even though I had my face covered up or whatever, stitches and stuff. But it was like I didn't even have time to process that. So maybe I processed it subconsciously through the piece a little bit. But I don't want to get all dramatic about it. It wasn't that big of a deal in the whole scheme of things. I feel like even last week was more torturous than any of that, just for me, just from the pain of trying to finish a piece under a crazy deadline. Like, that hurts me more than getting stabbed. But, you know, so it sounds like it's more than it is. It could have gone really bad. Obviously, I got out of there in time, and a lot of that, luckily, kind of made it into the piece. So, for example, like when you hear the beeps between the flute and the overtone, the artificial harmonics, and the cello; that's like the emergency room beeps, right, because I remember being there. And I remember thinking, "Wow, this is really cool," even being in the emergency room, because I could hear all the other beeps of all the other machines going off. And I was like, dang, that would be cool to do something with this one day. I was just thinking, like, that sounds cool. And then, you know, just any of the other sounds, like the car trying to make the car screech sound, it's like me hopping in the cab and all that, trying to find these guys. Just stuff like that made it in there. It's kind of like this kind of like Picasso-ed piece of like, you know, Tarantino style, like it's not in order, but it's all these different, like, you know, out of sequence kind of memories of it kind of collide together. You know what I mean?

CH: Yeah. I mean, I did a little bit of a deep dive of like how trauma informs memory, and it seems to be like a consistent thing that when people experience a traumatic event of any kind, like the memory after the fact, when they're trying to tell it as a story, it's usually, you know, it's displaced or it's out of order, it's out of sequence. Like, did you know that beforehand? Is that how you remember it?

AA: I don't know. I just, I mean, I kind of remember a lot of the details of that night and even the details of me writing the piece, but just like all my compositions, I don't think there's any rhyme or reason or any sequence to how things are written. I mean, I write it out of order anyway, all the different parts. Usually. And that one, I remember doing that one too. I also remember writing it under very amazing circumstances. I was the healthiest I've been in my life. I wasn't struggling to write any of the music. I was in a good place. I was in a good relationship at that time. I was also helping train my friend because he got into the Navy band. We'd wake up, you know, I'd meet him, like, to go wake up and work out and go running and do pushups and stuff. And I'd go running for the next eight or ten hours. So, I was in a good place when I was writing that. It was just before; it was probably like May or June. It was just before the summer festival. I think I was even late as usual on the piece. But it wasn't traumatic. I was able to write under crazy pressure. It just flowed. So, it wasn't like I was conjuring up this horrible experience. It was just part of remembering, just telling a story. But I do remember being in a really good place writing that piece. All the music just flowed easily.

CH: You said *Pulp Fiction* was a big inspiration, or maybe not necessarily a big inspiration, but sort of that non-linear narrative.

AA: I think when I think back on it, it is. But I don't think that at the time when I was writing it, I didn't think, "Oh, I'm going to make this like *Pulp Fiction*." I think it was just like when I think

back, it was like, dude, it's probably. Because I do remember sneaking into a movie theater when I was a teenager, young, and going to see that and being kind of blown away by the originality of that. So, of course, any childhood thing that I remember really well is going to show up. You know what I mean? It's so crazy because that same theater I just saw in a recently saw on a Netflix special, the same theater that I saw that movie in, I'm like looking for a missing body in there because it's like this rundown theater in my neighborhood. I just think it's funny that all these life experiences have made it in there.

CH: You said this was during your time when you were at MSM. You were living in Harlem and going to school in Manhattan. Is that correct?

AA: Yes. I walked from school a lot. I was running late almost every day. I would stop a cab and be like, hey, can you give me $2? Take me down there because you're going that way anyway. Yeah. But I would walk home late at night a lot. Yeah, I lived on 133 right up the hill. Now, the whole area is different. Columbia [University] is taking over. But it was kind of rundown and dark at night. There was this church down. This is near 129th. I don't know the exact numbers right there because it gets a little funky after 125th. Between 125th and 133. But it was around 129th. Across the street was a gas station. But also, on the same side as the Manhattan School. And on the west side of that street, there was this old building, which was like a church. And that's where that piano was; it was the same corner that [the stabbing] happened. And then, you know, a couple of months later, is when I found that piano. It's the same place. And I saw it there for a couple of days, and I knocked on their door one day. I was like, “Hey, what are you guys doing with this thing?” Apparently, somebody donated it, and I wanted it. And then I took it right then and there. Luckily, it had these crappy wheels on it, and I rolled it up the hill. And this lady with her kid helped me roll it up the hill. And then luckily, my building had an elevator. So, I took it up to the sixth floor. Just how kind of small the world is. Like everything can happen so close to each other. That was all in the same block.

CH: That's incredible. Thinking theoretically, this thesis is a conductor's analysis. So, pretty much all I'm doing is a biography on you, a historical background on the piece, and then I'm doing a theoretical and rehearsal analysis of the piece. Just some theoretical stuff. The biggest thing is we talk about form whenever we're doing these. The way I look at it, To Walk or Run sort of has four separate sections. There is some interplay and some transitional stuff in between. But it feels to me that there are four distinct sections. And it seems like those sections are kind of divided by the drum groove or the baselines, or sort of the inherent rhythm that's found in each little section. I don't know if you agree with that or not, but what are your thoughts on that?

AA: Yeah, I can see how it comes to that. I don't think I was thinking that at all when writing it. But I can picture the sections you're probably talking about. Yeah, I would say like, if I can remember the letters well, like the top to like B-ish, or when the scene happens. Yeah. After that, right? And then it kind of morphs, like those two middle sections probably morph into each other a little bit around G. I know F's the really quiet part, right? And then. Yeah. Somewhere around G or H when it's kind of like the cello. Or the cello line is happening more. And then it was around I or J when everybody kind of stops, and you get that, you know, all that stuff. And then after that, yeah, I guess more coda out from there. And I guess you could; any of those could be divided by a letter or two from each other somewhere around there. But yeah, I can see it like

that. A lot of the more even micro than that is how things are divided up through the, you know, the polyrhythms that are happening between all the instruments, because there's a lot of threes, fours, fives, six, up to sevens going on all at the same time. And trying to do the least common denominator over that, just so they all end up meeting up again. Just having a little bit of form based from that as well, growing from that nugget instead of the other way around, the form and then doing it. The form kind of grew out of the actual cells of each individual kind of polyrhythm going on there.

CH: So, from my understanding, you didn't necessarily have form in mind when you were writing the piece?

AA: There was no form in mind. Because, as I said, I wrote it so out of order anyway, probably. I remember, like, I think a lot of it, it was like stream of consciousness on the material, but very limited on some of the rhythmic composites. Or the rhythmic grids of it were, by design, a little bit limited on purpose. That way, the creativity could come out of the other lines of it. And then also the pitch of the material. There are only six pitches. It's a hexatonic scale. I use that kind of stuff a lot because it, you can pull it in so many directions with that. And then you can also feel at home sometimes. And so that's kind of parallel to the narrative of the piece, too. Just being pulled in so many directions, not knowing where home is, but also you can make it around it, too. But sometimes I even have a little dissent there.

CH: You tonicize, I'm probably using tonicize loosely, A-flat. But towards the end, we're in E, which is kind of sort of functioning as a dominant, but it's all sort of ambiguous. How did you create that beginning piano melody, which is kind of the motif that functions in most of the melodic material? You said you wrote that on the piano. When you find that, were you like, "This is the piece. This is what's going to be the entire piece." Because, you know, you use that in different rhythmic permutations throughout the whole work. You shift it tonally just a little bit, but it's that piano part.

AA: Yeah, I wasn't necessarily trying to shift tonally. I just, as you were saying, that's how the combination of pitches ended up. I mean, I'm discovering that as I'm just loving how symmetrical it is on either side. You know, like, whole-tone scales or even octatonic. But for some reason, octatonic doesn't work well for me. It's not like I'm starting a piece and saying, "let me see what happens if I go octatonic." When I find myself accidentally getting the octatonic, something about it… I don't know. I feel like I've heard it too much or something. I don't know what it is. But when I found this [scale] and that motive, I think it was just like discovering, I don't know, I just remember it. It's so inspiring. There's so many things you can do with this Just these six notes. It's like how you can do a lot with pentatonic. But for some reason, the darker vibe of hexatonic is just something I'm attuned to more. And I use that a lot still. Or at least those combinations. Like I said, it's a tonic and maybe six notes on the scale. But I don't know the theory on it. With this particular hexatonic scale, I've been able to relate to it somehow. Yeah. With this and many other pieces, actually.

CH: So I'll try to wrap it up with some last-minute questions. I'm just looking at my list of which ones I really want to ask you. I've got so many. You wrote, I think it's *Ondine's Epilogue*. That's your only work for wind band. Do you have plans to write for wind bands in the future? Or is

that something you're just kind of waiting for, maybe a commission to come forward? Or what are your thoughts on that?

AA: If the right opportunity comes, there's no instrumentation I'm opposed. I was even thinking this timpani concerto could work well with wind ensemble. Maybe some kind of commission with that down the line. I think that could be cool. But I have a couple of other pieces that could be cool as wind ensemble pieces. It's just having the time to do it. But I also coming up with new ideas for that ensemble, which would be great as well.

CH: You said you just finished this timpani concerto. Do you have any other works coming out of the pipeline here in the next few months? And if not, what are you hoping to do next in your career?

AA: I just finished recently an opera as well, or a scene of an opera. I'd love to do a full opera. I'd love to do more collaborations. I'm very fortunate to be working on doing some ballets with Bobbi Jene Smith and Or Schraiber, and the Royal Danish Ballet. I'm about to do a big show for that. I'm really excited about those kinds of collaborations with multidisciplinary collaborations. I want to do a big major opera. I want to do all those kinds of things, even though those things are the hardest. I think it would be nice if I could just focus on that. What I'm really excited about right around the corner is that I'm doing a new album with Sandbox Percussion. It's a quintet album where I'm playing a lot of steel pan on it, too. But it's not like me plus Sandbox. It's really truly kind of like a quintet, a vibe like that. Not me trying to be a soloist over it. That doesn't really excite me as much as being part of their group for this album. I'm really excited about that too.

CH: Two really fast questions here at the end. You got this gig up in Portland, Composer-in-Residence. Are you still the composer-in-residence there?

AA: Yes, I believe so. I've gotten to know that symphony really well and all the musicians there. As far as the title goes, it's more of a title than a bunch of responsibilities. But I've gotten a lot out of being a part of that community. That's what matters more than any of that titling. Being in Portland, really getting to know the musicians of the symphony and the whole structure of the symphony. Everybody there. It's just been a great experience to really work closely with an ensemble like that. Recording albums together. They commissioned my percussion concerto. They've been co-commissioners on my cello concerto. We've got some stuff happening in the future. Some albums are going to come out. It's been a lot of fun getting to know them. When I'm writing for the orchestra, I'm writing for the musicians themselves, their personalities, more than just writing a general symphonic work. I'm really, truly writing for musicians, not the ensemble. The musicians are some of my best friends. I have really good friends in the orchestra. For example, the percussion section. We're really tight and they're a really tight percussion section. They hang out all the time. I hang out with them all the time. The timpanist is like a brother to me. They're like family to me. That's been the great thing about that experience.

CH: I don't have a really great last question, but I do have one that I really need the answer to. So USC, then to MSM, and then Yale, and then Princeton, right?

AA: Yes.

CH: At Princeton, that was a doctoral program in composition, correct?

AA: Yes.

CH: Did you? I don't want to offend…

AA: I haven't finished yet. I've got to write a dissertation. It's been -- I think I finished classes in 2013. And it's on the top of my list to get that thing done. I just haven't even started or thought of… when I do it, I will tackle it like full throttle and spend a couple weeks, when It's the only thing I do in my life. And I will get it done; it matters to me. I feel like the opportunity it gave me, being there and having that kind of inspiration there and knowledge and resources and just that experience, it wouldn't be right if I didn't finish, and I think I need to do it. I'll feel a lot better. I think it would be good for the family. It would be good for the community. It would be good for… I just hope I'm setting a positive example and feeling that sense of accomplishment of actually finishing, too.

APPENDIX E

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Cameron Honnen, a native of Grand Junction (Colorado), received a Master of Music in wind conducting from Colorado State University in May 2026. While earning his graduate degree, Mr. Honnen served as a graduate teaching assistant for Colorado State University's comprehensive band program. As part of his master's in music degree (conducting), Mr. Honnen was a guest conductor with the Wind Symphony, Symphonic Band, and Concert Band. His conducting teachers at CSU include Dr. Rebecca Phillips and Dr. Jayme Taylor. Other CSU GTA responsibilities included supporting the athletic bands, including the CSU Marching Band, Presidential Pep Band, and the Rampage Basketball Band, and managing the CSU Symphonic Band and Concert Band.

Mr. Honnen earned a Bachelor of Music Education degree from Colorado Mesa University (CMU) in 2017, graduating with honors. At CMU, he played bass trombone, tenor trombone, and euphonium in several ensembles, including the Wind Symphony, Jazz Ensemble, Symphony Orchestra, 12th Street Brass Quintet, and various jazz combos. He was also a founding member of the Maverick Stampede Marching Band and the Rowdy Brass Band, serving in leadership roles as visual captain, music captain, and drum major. In 2016, he received the Outstanding Leadership and Trailblazer awards. His conducting teachers at CMU include Dr. Calvin Hofer and Dr. Jonathan Hinkle

Upon graduation, Mr. Honnen taught for seven years in western Colorado, first as Director of Bands at West Middle School (Grand Junction) for four years and then as Director of Bands (Fruita 8/9 Junior High School) and Assistant Director of Bands at Fruita Monument High School for three years. His programs included multiple concert bands, jazz ensembles, chamber

groups, and marching bands. Under his leadership, groups consistently earned Superior ratings at festivals and twice received the "Exemplary Band" designation from the Colorado Bandmasters Association (CBA). In his first year of teaching, he was honored with the CBA Exceptional Young Educators Award and Scholarship.

A passionate marching band enthusiast, Mr. Honnen has been involved in the marching arts since the age of fifteen. He spent six years with the Troopers Drum & Bugle Corps, five as a euphonium player, section leader, and horn sergeant, and his final year as a drum major. In recognition of his leadership, he received the Jim Jones Leadership Award. Since 2017, Mr. Honnen has also taught and assisted with several high school marching bands and two world-class drum corps. His guidance helped the Fruita Monument High School Wildcat Band become a finalist for seven consecutive years, and his instruction contributed to the Troopers' strong competitive showings in 2024 and 2025. As an adjudicator, Cameron has judged marching band competitions in the Rocky Mountain region, including competitions in Colorado, Wyoming, and Idaho.

Mr. Honnen is an accomplished bass trombonist. He has studied with Dr. Sean Flanigan and Dr. Drew Leslie. He performed with the Grand Junction Symphony Orchestra, Western Slope Jazz Orchestra, and Clark Gault’s Swing City Express. He also played on national tours for Felix Cavaliere’s Rascals and the Canadian Brass. As a CSU student, Mr. Honnen has performed with the CSU Wind Symphony, Symphonic Band, Jazz Ensemble I, and the CSU Trombone Choir in their performance at the 2026 American Trombone Workshop.

Mr. Honnen is an active member of the National Association for Music Education, the National Band Association, Phi Beta Mu, and the Colorado Bandmasters Association.